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HOMOSEXUALITY, SCRIPTURE, AND THE CHURCH

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Homosexuality, Scripture, and the Church

Introduction

Homosexuality has become an extremely controversial topic in many countries around the world, impacting societies and several Christian communities. The basic question is, How should Christians relate to persons who practice homosexuality? Some denominations are in danger of splitting, or have already split, over this question.¹

I. Defining Homosexuality

Homosexuality has been understood to mean different things, but it is usually described as “sexual desire directed toward members of one’s own sex.”² It can also designate a “person, male or female, who experiences in adult life a steady and nearly exclusive erotic attraction to members of the same sex, and who is indifferent to sexual relations with the opposite sex.”³ Such a definition fits the “constitutional homosexuals,” or “inverts,” whose homosexuality is said to be permanent. There are also cases of teenagers whose sexual identity has not yet fully developed or adults who are bored with heterosexuality and are willing to experiment with members of the same sex. They are called “contingent homosexuals.” “Situational homosexuals” are those who, lacking heterosexual encounters, “resort to homosexual outlets.”⁴

Normally, “inverts” claim that their homosexuality is preordained, natural, and irreversible.⁵ The distinction between homosexual orientation

¹ See Andreas J. Köstenberger, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 202; and Craig L. Nesson, *Many Members, One Body: Committed Same-Gender Relationships and the Mission of the Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).

² R. E. O. White, “Homosexuality,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 528.

³ E. A. Malloy, *Homosexuality and the Christian Way of Life* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1981), 11.

⁴ Ronald M. Springett, *Homosexuality in History and the Scriptures* (Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference, 1988), 2.

⁵ See Jack Rogers, *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church* (Louisville:

and homosexual acts is usually rejected by the homosexual community⁶ Yet homosexual orientation is recognized by the church and requires a life of celibacy, while homosexual practice is rejected. Homosexual acts can find expression in pederasty, the involvement with children of the same sex; rape and violence; prostitution and promiscuity, to name a few, or in a life committed to one partner of the same sex. The latter is claimed to be in harmony with Scripture.

II. The Seventh-day Adventist Church's Statements on Homosexuality

Within Christianity three major positions are held with regard to homosexuality: (1) only marital heterosexuality is acceptable for Christians; (2) homosexuality, also called covenant homosexuality, is acceptable for Christians, if the two partners have equal status, are consenting adults, and if the relationship is permanent and monogamous; and (3) casual adult homosexuality, i.e., homosexuality in any form is acceptable for any member of society.⁷ The Seventh-day Adventist Church has chosen the first option and has officially stated:

The Seventh-day Adventist Church recognizes that every human being is valuable in the sight of God, and we seek to minister to all men and women in the spirit of Jesus. We also believe that by God's grace and through the encouragement of the community of faith, an individual may live in harmony with the principles of God's Word.

Seventh-day Adventists believe that sexual intimacy belongs only within the marital relationship of a man and a woman. This was the design established by God at creation. The Scriptures declare: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother

Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 79; Aubyn Fulton, "Response; Science and Sexual Orientation," in *Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives*, edited by David Ferguson, Fritz Guy, and David R. Larson (Roseville: Adventist Forum, 2008), part 2 – 47.

⁶ Springett, 4.

⁷ Cf. William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 28.

and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (Gen 2:24, NIV). Throughout Scripture this heterosexual pattern is affirmed. The Bible makes no accommodation for homosexual activity or relationships. Sexual acts outside the circle of a heterosexual marriage are forbidden (Lev 20:7-21; Rom 1:24-27; 1 Cor 6:9-11). Jesus Christ reaffirmed the divine creation intent: “‘Haven’t you read,’ he replied, ‘that at the beginning the Creator “made them male and female,” and said, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?” So they are no longer two, but one’” (Matt 19:46, NIV). For these reasons Adventists are opposed to homosexual practices and relationships.

Seventh-day Adventists endeavor to follow the instruction and example of Jesus. He affirmed the dignity of all human beings and reached out compassionately to persons and families suffering the consequences of sin. He offered caring ministry and words of solace to struggling people, while differentiating His love for sinners from His clear teaching about sinful practices.⁸

Another official statement, voted on March 9, 2004, reaffirms Christian marriage in the context of the debate over same sex unions.⁹

Seventh-day Adventist Response to Same Sex Unions—A Reaffirmation of Christian Marriage. Over the past several decades the Seventh-day Adventist Church has felt it necessary to clearly state in various ways its position in regards to marriage, the family, and human sexuality. These subjects are at the heart of many pressing issues facing society. That which for centuries has been considered to be basic Christian morality in the marriage setting is now increasingly called into question, not only in secular

⁸ “Seventh-day Adventist Position Statement on Homosexuality,” http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/main_stat46.html. This statement was voted during the Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee, October 3, 1999 in Silver Spring, Maryland.

⁹ “Seventh-day Adventist Response to Same-Sex Unions – A Reaffirmation of Christian Marriage,” http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/main_stat53.html. This document was voted by the General Conference Administrative Committee, March 9, 2004.

society but within Christian churches themselves.

The institutions of family and marriage are under attack and facing growing centrifugal forces that are tearing them apart. An increasing number of nations are now debating the topic of “same sex unions,” thus making it a world issue. The public discussion has engendered strong emotions. In light of these developments, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is clearly restating its position.

We reaffirm, without hesitation, our longstanding position. As expressed in the Church’s Fundamental Beliefs, “marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship.”¹⁰ Though “sin has perverted God’s ideals for marriage and family,” “the family tie is the closest, the most tender and sacred of any human relationship,” and thus “families need to experience renewal and reformation in their relationships” (An Affirmation of Family, 1990).¹¹ God instituted “marriage, a covenant based union of two genders physically, emotionally, and spiritually, spoken of in Scripture as “one flesh.” “The monogamous union in marriage of a man and a woman is . . . the only morally appropriate locus of genital or related intimate sexual expression.” “Any lowering of this high view is to that extent a lowering of the heavenly ideal” (An Affirmation of Marriage, 1996).¹²

Homosexuality is a manifestation of the disorder and brokenness in human inclinations and relations caused by sin coming into the world. While everyone is subject to fallen human nature, “we also believe that by God’s grace and through the encouragement of the community of faith, an individual may live in harmony with the principles of God’s Word” (Seventh-day Adventist Position Statement on Homosexuality, 1999).¹³

¹⁰ Seventh-day Adventists Believe—A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines, Doctrine 22 on “Marriage and the Family.”

¹¹ Public Statement, An Affirmation of Family, released July 5, 1990, at the General Conference Session, Indianapolis, Indiana.

¹² Statement voted by the General Conference Administrative Committee on April 23, 1996.

¹³ Statement voted by the Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee, October 3, 1999.

We hold that all people, no matter what their sexual orientation, are children of God. We do not condone singling out any group for scorn and derision, let alone abuse. However, it is very clear that God's Word does not countenance a homosexual lifestyle; neither has the Christian Church throughout her 2000 year history. Seventh-day Adventists believe that the biblical teaching is still valid today, because it is anchored in the very nature of humanity and God's plan at creation for marriage.

This more recent document reaffirms the earlier ones.¹⁴ Based on Scripture, the Seventh-day Adventist Church opposes any homosexual activity and does not accept homosexual partnerships, even when supported through legislation. The challenge the church faces is whether or not its interpretation of the biblical texts dealing with homosexuality can be maintained. Today these texts are being interpreted in different ways. Why is this so?

III. The Problem of the Diversity of Interpretations

Interpreting the Bible depends to some extent on certain presuppositions. The way people view Scripture, culture, science, tradition, and human nature influences their approach to the Bible.

1. Various Presuppositions

The prevalent view among thinkers in Western societies is that there is no absolute truth, that there is no divine revelation, and that revisions and reformulation of older beliefs are necessary in order for them to fit prevalent culture.¹⁵ The Bible is considered to be culturally conditioned, that is, it has spoken only to certain situations in the past but must be reinterpreted today.¹⁶ It is held that "our modern world view includes

¹⁴ Doctrine 22 has become number 23 after a new fundamental belief was added in 2005. See *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 17th edition (Silver Spring: Secretariat of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), 17.

¹⁵ See Sheila Greeve Davaney, *Historicism: The Once and Future Challenge for Theology*, Guides to Theological Inquiry (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 160-164. Walter Wink, "Homosexuality and the Bible," in *Homosexuality and Christian Faith: Questions of Conscience for the Churches*, edited by Walter Wink (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 47, holds: "Where the Bible mentions homosexual behavior at all, it clearly condemns it. I freely grant that. The issue is precisely whether that biblical judgment is correct." Cf. Daniel A. Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality* (New Mexico: Alamo Square Press, 2000), 131.

¹⁶ Cf. Wink, "Homosexuality and the Bible," 35, 42; Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 69, 70; Webb, 161.

advances and discoveries unknown to ancient peoples, making biblical pronouncements on homosexuality incomplete and even erroneous.”¹⁷ Therefore one’s understanding of the Greco-Roman culture determines how New Testament texts must be interpreted.¹⁸ It is said that “the Bible opposes prostitution and idolatry in conjunction with homosexuality not homosexuality, as such.”¹⁹ It is also suggested that Scripture does not address monogamous, permanent same sex relationships,²⁰ because it allegedly is not aware of innate or inverted homosexuality,²¹ and that it refers only to exploitive homosexuality, such as pederasty,²² rape, perversion, promiscuity, or excess of passion.²³

Some choose the “christological principle” and reject biblical statements that appear to contradict it.²⁴ They mean that because Jesus would have accepted practicing homosexuals, we should do the same, independent of any biblical statements to the contrary²⁵ this would, then, mean that the church, moved by the Spirit, would be free to accept or reject biblical laws²⁶ and that the authority of Scripture would be seriously restricted.²⁷ Others go a step further, claiming to follow the Spirit indi-

¹⁷ James B. DeYoung, *Homosexuality: Contemporary Claims Examined in the Light of the Bible and Other Ancient Literature and Law* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2000), 11. See also Springett, 49-51; Marion L. Soards, *Scripture and Homosexuality: Biblical Authority and the Church Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 55.

¹⁸ Cf. Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1983), 16, 127, 128.

¹⁹ Springett, 51, although this is not his own position. Gary Chartier, “Love, Subsidiarity, Equality, and Inclusiveness,” in *Christianity and Homosexuality*, part 5 – 58.

²⁰ See Springett, 50; Vincent J. Genovesi, *In Pursuit of Love: Catholic Morality and Human Sexuality*, second edition (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996), 277, 296; Ellen F. Davis, “Reasoning with Scripture,” *Anglican Theological Review* 90/3 (2008): 518; Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 89.

²¹ Cf. Scroggs, 28.

²² See Scroggs, 84.

²³ Cf. David E. Fredrickson, “Natural and Unnatural Use in Romans 1:24-27: Paul and the Philosophic Critique of Eros,” in *Homosexuality, Science, and the ‘Plain Sense’ of Scripture*, edited by David L. Balch (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 197-222.

²⁴ Cf. Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 15, 53-55, 66. See also Wink, “Homosexuality and the Bible,” 47, 48. William Sloane Coffin, “Liberty to the Captives and Good Tidings to the Afflicted,” in *Homosexuality and Christian Faith*, 107, points out: “not everything biblical is Christlike.”

²⁵ Cf. Nancy Duff, “Christian Vocation, Freedom of God, and Homosexuality,” in *Homosexuality, Science, 261-277*.

²⁶ Cf. Soards, 17; Wink, “Homosexuality and the Bible,” 42-44.

²⁷ Richard Treloar, “‘Come Out and Stay Out!’ Hermeneutics, Homosexuality, and Schism in Anglicanism,” *Anglican Theological Review* 90/1 (2008): 54, 55. On page 58 he writes: “Anglicans can resist the Bible’s ‘plain teaching’ in this matter, as we patently already do with regard to much else . . . ‘with Scripture. . . at times we must read ‘against’ Scripture.” “The Bible . . . is not directly equivalent to God’s word . . .” (61).

vidually, even if their conclusions contradict the Scripture.²⁸

Some pit the law against the gospel.²⁹ It is said that the concept of love overrides narrow interpretations of biblical texts. Some regard their personal experience as normative and use it to reject or accept specific biblical statements.³⁰ Others give priority to science, humanities, and reason rather than to the Scripture³¹ or suggest that we have to use, as final authorities, Scripture plus science/reason (e.g., biology, sociology, and psychology),³² tradition,³³ and experience in order to make informed decisions.³⁴ Furthermore, it is assumed that the human sexual drive must be lived out and cannot be fully controlled.³⁵ Consequently, proponents of such a view have no problem with premarital sexual relations,³⁶ divorce and remarriage,³⁷ adultery, and sometimes even polygamy and incest.³⁸

Representatives of an evolutionary reading of Scripture not only

²⁸ Cf. James A. Forbes Jr., "More Light from the Spirit on Sexuality," in *Homosexuality and Christian Faith*, 6-8. Ken Sehested, "Biblical Fidelity and Sexual Orientation: Why the First Matters, Why the Second Doesn't," in *ibid.*, 59; Richard Rohr, "Where the Gospel Leads Us," in *ibid.*, 85-88.

²⁹ Soards, 17, states, "Grace, not law, governs Christian life."

³⁰ Cf. Paul Wennes Egerton, "One Family's Story," in *Homosexuality and Christian Faith*, 23-30; Phyllis A. Bird, "The Bible in Christian Ethical Deliberation Concerning Homosexuality: Old Testament Contributions," in *Homosexuality, Science*, 143; John B. Cobb Jr., "Being Christian about Homosexuality," in *Homosexuality and Christian Faith*, 91-93; René D. Drumm, "Interaction and Angst: The Social Experiences of Gay and Lesbian Seventh-day Adventists," in *Christianity and Homosexuality*, part 3 - 20.

³¹ Bird, 168; Wink, "Homosexuality and the Bible," 46; Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 35, 36.

³² Cf. Ben Kemena, "Biological Determinants of Homosexual Orientation," in *Christianity and Homosexuality*, part 2 - 16-19; Harry C. Wang, "Psychiatry, Antihomosexual Bias, and Challenges for Gay and Lesbian Youth," in *ibid.*, part 2 - 40; Fulton, part 2 - 48, 49; Sherwood O. Cole, "Biology, Homosexuality, and the Biblical Doctrine of Sin," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157 (July-September 2000): 348-361. This view would be opposed to the *sola scriptura* principle and is rejected by Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse, "The Use, Misuse, and Abuse of Science in the Ecclesiastical Homosexuality Debates," in *Homosexuality, Science*, 120; and Christopher Seitz, "Sexuality and Scripture's Plain Sense: The Christian Community and the Law of God," in *ibid.*, 177-196.

³³ Paul G. Crowley, "Homosexuality and the Counsel of the Cross: A Clarification," *Theological Studies* 69 (2008): 637.

³⁴ Cf. Dan O. Via and Robert A. J. Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 29. Via states: "I have tried to show that if we look at a number of biblical themes in the light of contemporary knowledge and experience, we can justifiably override the unconditional biblical condemnations of homosexual practice" (38). See, Soards, 55, 64.

³⁵ Springett, 25, stresses "that human beings can control and are, therefore, responsible for their sexual expression." They have a choice. Cf. Cole, 360.

³⁶ See Larson, "Christian Sexual Norms Today," in *Christianity and Homosexuality*, part 5 - 13, states: "The guideline of 'nothing before' and 'everything after' is neither realistic nor wise. . . . We should not ask whether to allow loving heterosexual and homosexual unions to exist; they already do. . . . We should do everything we can to sustain them and to support people who are in them. . . . We should also find ways to honor them in appropriate Christian ceremonies."

³⁷ Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 43, 44.

³⁸ See Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 82; Treloar, 51, refers to Regina Schwartz as saying that there is "a virulent biblical abhorrence to incest, which resonates with what she describes as the general biblical hysteria about, and its explicit horror of, homosexuality" (Regina Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997], 107).

deny direct Creation by God and the order of Creation, but also the Fall. They claim that God has “created” homosexuals, and, as such, homosexuality is a gift of God, not a consequence of the fallenness of humanity.³⁹

2. Seventh-day Adventist Presuppositions

Officially, Seventh-day Adventists believe that the Bible was given by divine inspiration, that it is the infallible revelation of God’s will. It is “the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God’s acts in history”⁴⁰ (Isa 8:20; 66:2; *sola scriptura*). Although written by human beings, it not only is the word of humans, but also the Word of God. Principles of interpretation have to be derived from Scripture and should not be forced upon it. Deductions from the fields of philosophy, psychology, and sociology that contradict Scripture are to be rejected. In addition, tradition and natural sciences should not be allowed to determine matters of faith. Scripture is its own interpreter. There is agreement, harmony, and clarity in Scripture. Clear texts shed light on difficult texts. The Holy Spirit is needed in the process of interpretation, but He does not override previous revelations.

3. Summary

The real issue in the homosexuality debate is the nature, authority, and interpretation of Scripture.⁴¹ It is clear that “the decision one makes about the validity of homosexual behavior . . . is effectively a decision on the authority of the Bible in the life of the church.”⁴² Awareness of our own presuppositions helps us to be consistent and to avoid pitfalls in our interpretation of biblical texts.

³⁹ See Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 81.

⁴⁰ *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 17th edition (Silver Spring: Secretariat of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), 9.

⁴¹ Cf. Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 1-65; Helminiak, 29-41; Soards, 1-14; Via and Gagnon, 2; Wink, “Homosexuality and the Bible,” 33; Cf. James R. White and Jeffrey D. Niell, *The Same Sex Controversy* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2002), 15; and Jack Rogers, “Presbyterian Guidelines for Biblical Interpretation: Their Origin and Application to Homosexuality,” *Biblical Theological Bulletin* 37/4 (2007): 179.

⁴² Soards, 73.

IV. Homosexuality in Scripture

1. Homosexuality in the Old Testament

Israel was surrounded by nations for which sexuality and fertility cults played an important role. Homosexuality was practiced among the Egyptians, the Babylonians, Assyrians, the Hittites, and the Canaanites.⁴³ Sacred prostitution, homosexuality between consenting partners, transvestite behavior, and bestiality can be found among Israel's neighbors. Yet, the Old Testament opposes all these practices, challenges the other gods, and rejects homosexuality.⁴⁴ It contains texts with direct as well as indirect references to homosexuality.⁴⁵ Among the direct references, two passages occur in legal material, whereas the other references are found in historical narratives.

a. Old Testament Narratives

(1) *Genesis 1–2*⁴⁶

Although the Creation account (Gen 12) does not talk about homosexuality, it sets the stage for all subsequent sexual relations.⁴⁷ God created the first man and the first woman, Adam and Eve, and joined them in marriage. With this institution of marriage, God clearly established the divine plan for sexual relations among humans. Authors supporting homosexual partnerships suggest that the male female combination was chosen only because procreation was divinely commanded (Gen 1:28); it was necessary in the beginning. But since the situation has changed and overpopulation is rampant, it is claimed that homosexual partnerships are even more in tune with the needs of the world today than heterosexual relationships.⁴⁸ Therefore, supposedly, Genesis 1 and 2 cannot be used to proscribe only one form of human sexuality.

⁴³ See, e.g., Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 134–142; Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 44–56; Springett, 33–48; Donald J. Wold, *Out of Order: Homosexuality in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books Publishing Company, 1998), 43–61.

⁴⁴ Cf. Webb, 81.

⁴⁵ Cf. Springett, 69–88.

⁴⁶ We will be using the New American Standard Bible.

⁴⁷ Webb comments: "Obviously, this pattern does not sit well with homosexual relationships, whether the covenant or casual type" (131).

⁴⁸ Wink, "Homosexuality and the Bible," 4.

The problem with this argument is that it restricts heterosexual relationships to the function of procreation. This restriction is not what Genesis 1 and 2 portray.⁴⁹ The Creation account is interested in the concept of complementation. When Adam notices his lack of a companion, God creates for him the woman “suitable to him.” They complement each other. This complementation is holistic, because God is holistic. Its expression is found particularly in heterosexual marriage.

(2) *Genesis 19 and Judges 19*

Whereas narratives that deal with homosexuality, such as the Sodom narrative (Gen 19:410) and the outrage in Gibeah (Judg 19:22-25), are sometimes interpreted in such a way as to avoid homosexual connotations, homosexuality is read into other passages, such as the stories of Ham’s sin,⁵⁰ the friendship of David and Jonathan, and the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship between Ruth and Naomi. It has been suggested that the story dealing with Sodom is about a lack of hospitality⁵¹ rather than homosexuality and that the term “to know” means “to get acquainted” rather than “to have coitus with” (Gen 19:5).⁵²

Although homosexuality was one of the sins of the inhabitants of Sodom, it was not the only one, and the city was destroyed because of its many grievous sins. Christian homosexuals today argue that the problem with Sodom was not homosexuality, per se, but a violent type of gang rape, which has nothing to do with covenant homosexuality. This argument is also applied to what happened in Gibeah.⁵³ Yet, “the authors of Jude and 2 Peter undoubtedly understood a key offense of Sodom to be men desiring to have sex with males.”⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Springett, 53.

⁵⁰ For a discussion of this incident, reported in Genesis 9:20-25, see Davidson, 142-145. Wold, 65-76.

⁵¹ See Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 67; Helminiak, 43-50.

⁵² The NASB translation “to have relations with them” (cf. Gen 4:1, 17, 25) seems to be the meaning required by the passage, especially by verse 8, based on the context dealing with various sexual problems and the intertextual connections with Judges 19 and Ezekiel 16 (see, Wold, 89).

⁵³ For a more detailed discussion of both passages, see Davidson, 145-149, 161, 162; White and Niell, 40-51, Köstenberger, 204-208. Davidson concludes his passage on Sodom by saying, “That the opprobrium attached to the Sodomites’ intended activity involved not only rape but the inherent degradation of same-sex intercourse is confirmed by the intertextual linkages between Ezekiel and the sexual ‘abominations’ mentioned in Levitical legislation” (149).

⁵⁴ Via and Gagnon, 59.

(3) *Alleged Homosexual Relationships*

To interpret David's relation to Jonathan or Ruth's relation to her mother-in-law as a beautiful expression of homosexuality is farfetched.⁵⁵ Men embracing and kissing each other and holding hands is common today even in the Near East. This custom has nothing to do with homosexuality.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Fritz Guy not only speculates about physical intimacy between David and Jonathan but also about the Roman military officer who asked Jesus to heal his boy, suggesting that this boy was a valuable slave and sexual partner of the officer. He also suggests that the Ethiopian eunuch was a potential homosexual.⁵⁷ He adds, "These possible instances are, of course, highly conjectural. . . . None of the stories contains an explicit recognition, much less an endorsement, of same sex love."⁵⁸ But then his speculation becomes almost certitude: "Given what we know about human nature and same sex love, statistically it is highly probable that *some* of the figures in the scriptural narratives were participants in same-sex erotic relationships."⁵⁹ Such an approach has nothing to do with sound biblical interpretation.⁶⁰

b. The Mosaic Laws

(1) *Leviticus 18 and 20*

Leviticus contains two texts that are clearly dealing with homosexuality. Leviticus 18:22 reads: "You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination." Leviticus 20:13 goes further by warning against the consequences of homosexual activities: "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 blood guiltiness is upon them."

It has been suggested that "the Old Testament limits the prohibitions against same-gender sexual behavior in Leviticus 18 and 20 to the

⁵⁵ See Davidson, 164-167.

⁵⁶ See also Springett, 73; Webb, 102.

⁵⁷ Fritz Guy, "Same-sex Love: Theological Considerations" in *Christianity and Homosexuality*, part 4 - 52, 53.

⁵⁸ Guy, part 4 - 54.

⁵⁹ Guy, part 4 - 54.

⁶⁰ Davidson, 165, speaks about speculation.

ritual or cult of Israel. . . . These passages have no impact on the New Testament/Christian moral code.”⁶¹ It has been argued that

our challenge is not to maintain culturally conditioned law, but rather, with Jesus, to love God and love our neighbor (Matt. 22:36-40). When these texts in Leviticus are taken out of their historical and cultural context and applied to faithful, God-worshiping Christians who are homosexual, it does violence to them.⁶²

It has been proposed that the context deals with purity and holiness and that those cultic concerns are, supposedly, irrelevant to the New Testament church.⁶³ Furthermore, homogeneity is forbidden because it is considered “unclean” and “not because it is wrong in itself. The Christian Scriptures insist that cleanness and uncleanness do not matter.”⁶⁴

It is true that in the immediate or larger context we find terms referring to purity, holiness, and idolatry. Still, the question must be asked whether or not these references limit the warning against homosexuality to specific situations only. This restriction is clearly not the case. First, these two texts describe and condemn male homosexual activity. No exceptions are mentioned. Obviously they are opposed to any homosexual activity.⁶⁵ However, it is very likely that they included lesbianism. It has been pointed out that

The Mosaic legislation in general is considered from a man’s (male’s) perspective. Even the Decalogue is addressed in the masculine singular, but this certainly does not mean that it applies only to the male gender. The masculine singular is the Hebrew way to express gender inclusive ideas. . . .⁶⁶

⁶¹ DeYoung, 10.

⁶² Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 69. In the context of Leviticus 18 and 20 and the discussion on homosexuality, Helminiak, 66, 67, calls people to break away from conventions and taboos because they are “unreasonable and oppressive” (67).

⁶³ See Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 69.

⁶⁴ Helminiak, 72.

⁶⁵ Cf. Springett, 63.

⁶⁶ Davidson, 150.

Second, although these passages are found in the context of holiness and purity, they have a moral quality as indicated in their usage in the New Testament. Kaiser states: “. . . there is a category of temporary ceremonial laws, but I do not agree that homosexuality is among them. Nothing in its proscription points to or anticipates Christ.”⁶⁷ Roy Gane shows that there is a difference between ritual impurity, which can be removed by ritual purification, and moral impurity, which is not remediable. He concludes by stating that

the impurity of homosexual practice was not ceremonial, but moral. . . . This is confirmed by the fact that in Acts 15, which releases Gentile Christians from circumcision, the ‘Holiness Code’ prohibitions against meat offered to idols, sexual immorality . . . , and meat from which the blood is not drained at the time of slaughter . . . remain in force for Gentiles.⁶⁸

It is clear that “any attempt to draw hard distinctions between sin and impurity is doomed to failure. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of the Holiness Code is that it incorporates ethics under the rubric of purity; that is, sin and impurity merge” (Lev 18:24-30; Eze 18:22, 26).⁶⁹

Third, the passages deal with more than exploitive situations. The two persons involved in these acts of immorality are men. Both of them were to be punished because both of them are responsible for their acts by mutual consent.⁷⁰ It was an abomination.⁷¹ Fourth, these laws extend beyond the Israelite community and were also applicable to the stranger (Lev 18:26).⁷² The lists of Leviticus 18 and 20, together with other vices and virtues, “reflect transcultural values.”⁷³ They are also based on the

⁶⁷ Quoted in Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2000), 247. Similarly Webb, 177.

⁶⁸ Roy E. Gane, “Same-sex Love in the Body of Christ?” in *Christianity and Homosexuality*, part 4 – 67, 68.

⁶⁹ Via and Gagnon, 66. Wold, 119, adds: “The sex crimes of Leviticus 18, with the possible exception of Molech worship, were not cultic in nature . . . the term *tô-ê-bâ* [abomination] shows no distinction between intrinsic wrong and ritual impurity as suggested by Boswell.”

⁷⁰ See Davidson, 149.

⁷¹ The Greek term *bdelygma* is discussed by Wold, 118.

⁷² See Davidson, 154, 155; White and Niell, 68.

⁷³ Webb, 196. See also pages 192-196.

Creation order and, therefore, are not limited to the people of Israel.⁷⁴

Fifth, the text itself provides the reason for the prohibition: “lying with a male as though lying with a woman.” The reason appears to be that “male-male intercourse puts a male in the category of female so far as sexual intercourse is concerned. Because sexual intercourse is about sexual completion, it requires complementary sexual others.”⁷⁵ Interestingly, “in the entire Pentateuch, the only forbidden sexual act to which the word *tôēbâ* [“abomination”] is specifically attached is homosexual intercourse.”⁷⁶

Sixth, W. Webb provides a reason for the inclusion of child sacrifice in the list of seventeen sexualintercourse prohibitions mentioned in Leviticus 18. The first fifteen prohibitions preceding child sacrifice could result in offspring; the next two, homosexuality and bestiality, do not. The chapter is concerned with appropriate sexual boundaries between male and female. “Such a structural perspective speaks against any type of homosexuality today.”⁷⁷

Seventh, the context of the law against homosexual activity in Leviticus 18 and 20 includes Leviticus 19 in which we find the commandment to love one’s neighbor as oneself (19:18). This commandment is not abolished, although others in the immediate context are or may be (Lev 19:21-25,27). Love is stressed again and again in the New Testament. Therefore, when a decision has to be made as to whether or not a specific regulation is still normative for Christians, it has to be made on an individual basis and by consulting the New Testament. Eighth, in Romans 1:26, 27 and 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10, Paul alludes to Leviticus 18 and 20 and makes his own statement about homosexuality. The law was still valid in Paul’s time, and Paul did not indicate that it was to be abolished. Ninth, a specific case of fornication, namely incest, is related in 1 Corinthians 5. The act of having sexual intimacy with one’s stepmother is called *porneia* (“sexual immorality”). This act is clearly spelled out in Leviticus 18:8. So, Paul considered Lev 18 or at least parts of it as still valid for Christians. This validation should also apply to the case of incest and

⁷⁴ See Wold, 130.

⁷⁵ Via and Gagnon, 64, 65.

⁷⁶ Davidson, 151.

⁷⁷ Webb, 200. See also pages 197-200.

bestiality, as well as child sacrifice. In addition, the term *porneia* clearly stands for incestuous relations and may include all unlawful sexual activities spelled out in Leviticus 18.⁷⁸ As incest is still to be shunned, so is homosexuality.

Tenth, the issue of fornication was discussed and decided upon at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25). As a result, Gentile Christians were ordered to abstain from fornication. Obviously, the Jerusalem Council did not discuss the validity of the Decalogue. They dealt with *porneia*, whereas the Ten Commandments use the verb *moicheuō* (LXX; “adultery”). The other three items from which the Gentile Christians had to abstain were things polluted by idols, what is strangled, and blood. All four restrictions remind us of similar prohibitions for Israelites and strangers in Leviticus 17:8-15 and 18:24-27.⁷⁹ It seems quite certain that the delegates to this Council and especially James had in mind Leviticus 18.⁸⁰ *Porneia* was referring to a broad range of sexual deviations, including incest, prostitution, and homosexuality.

(2) *Deuteronomy 23*

None of the daughters of Israel shall be a cult prostitute, nor shall any of the sons of Israel be a cult prostitute. You shall not bring the hire of a harlot or the wages of a dog into the house of the LORD your God for any votive offering, for both of these are an abomination to the LORD your God. (Deut 23:17, 18).

Springett suggests that homosexuality may have been prohibited in this passage through the terms translated “cult prostitute” and “dog.”⁸¹

⁷⁸ Oftentimes, the New Testament, when it alludes to or quotes an Old Testament text, not only refers to the specific text but also to the entire context. When, e.g., in Revelation 12:5 the male child is mentioned, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, the reference is not just Psalm 2:9 but the entire second Psalm. This principle may apply to 1 Corinthians 5:1 and its Old Testament source, Leviticus 18.

⁷⁹ Cf. C.K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, vol. II, (London: T & T Clark International, 2006), 734; Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 506, 507; I. Howard Marshall, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 253.

⁸⁰ This, is, e.g., supported by the margin of Nestle-Aland’s Greek New Testament, as well as their list of Old Testament quotations and allusions. When discussing the Jerusalem council in Acts 15, Bruce refers back to Lev 18. F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1966), 315.

⁸¹ Cf., Springett, 63-65.

The term “dog” may, in contrast to the cult prostitute, describe non-cultic male prostitution. Davidson points out: it “is found in the section of Deuteronomy that elaborates upon the seventh commandment; this indicates that any homosexual activity is a violation of the Decalogue.”⁸²

c. Summary

The Old Testament contains clear texts, especially in the legal material, rejecting any form of homosexual activity. These texts were referred to in the New Testament and considered binding. However, one should be careful not to read wishful thinking into Old Testament narratives and misuse texts that do not deal with homosexual activities in order to support a homosexual agenda. It is important to notice that “all the references to homosexual acts in the Old Testament are negative—whether in narrative (Gen 9:20-27; 19; Judg 19) or law (Lev 18; 20)—and carry heavy sanctions.”⁸³

2. Homosexuality in the New Testament

The New Testament contains three explicit texts dealing with the issue of homosexuality. Before approaching them, we will examine Jesus’ position.

a. Jesus and Homosexuality

Although Jesus did not make a direct statement about homosexuality, His position on the issue is recognizable.⁸⁴ First, according to the Sermon on the Mount Jesus did not abolish the law but pointed out its real intent. In Matthew 23:23, He talked about the “weightier provisions of the law” but supported the law of tithing. R. Gagnon comments on Mark 7:1519: “If Jesus did not abrogate even such things as food laws and meticulous tithing, then it is impossible that he would have overturned a proscription of sexual immorality as serious as that of male-male intercourse.”⁸⁵

⁸² Davidson, 160.

⁸³ Wold, 162.

⁸⁴ Gagnon has devoted a number of pages to Jesus and the issue of sexuality. Cf. Via and Gagnon, 68-74 Wold, 161-175, devotes an entire chapter to “Christ and the Homosexual.”

⁸⁵ Via and Gagnon, 69.

Second, Jesus was not supportive of sexual activities other than the marriage relation between one man and one woman. Although He mingled with sinners and cared for them, He did not condone their behavior (see Luke 7:36-50; John 4; 8:3-11). In the Sermon on the Mount, He spent two antitheses dealing with sexual issues (Matt 5:27-32). In Matt 19:18 and Mark 10:19, Jesus again confirmed the seventh commandment.⁸⁶ Third, during a discussion with the Pharisees on the question of divorce, Jesus referred back to the creation account and quoted Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 (Matt 19:4, 5; Mark 10:6, 8). Two human beings, male and female, become one flesh in marriage. By stressing that only male and female become one, Jesus rejected polygamy as well as homosexuality. Obviously, for Jesus the Creation account was not only descriptive but prescriptive. In Matthew 19:12, He mentioned three groups of eunuchs: (1) those who are eunuchs from birth,⁸⁷ (2) those who have been made eunuchs by men, and (3) those who for the sake of the kingdom of heaven made themselves eunuchs. The last group probably does not refer to literal eunuchs but to people such as John the Baptist who remained unmarried for the sake of their ministry. This would imply that humans have the ability to postpone sexual intercourse indefinitely, which is true for persons with heterosexual as well as those with homosexual inclinations. According to Matthew 19:1-12, Jesus allowed for two alternatives only, namely being married to a person of the opposite sex or staying single.

Fourth, in Mark 7:21-23, Jesus mentioned among the evils that come out of the heart three sexual transgressions, namely *porneia* (“fornication”), *moicheia* (“adultery”), and *aselgeia* (“sensuality,” “licentiousness”).⁸⁸ As mentioned above, *porneia* has a wide range of meanings, including homosexuality. “No first-century Jew would have spoken of *porneiai* (sexual immoralities) without having in mind the list of forbidden sexual offenses in Leviticus 18 and 20, particularly incest, adultery, same-sex intercourse, and bestiality.”⁸⁹ Jesus also mentioned Sodom (Matt 10:15;

⁸⁶ Via and Gagnon, 71.

⁸⁷ Some scholars attempt to read into this phrase the issue of homosexuality. Cf. Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 78, 79.

⁸⁸ Wold, 167-170, shows that *aselgeia* may include homosexuality.

⁸⁹ Via and Gagnon, 73.

Luke 10:12).⁹⁰ He was concerned with keeping the commandments, that is to say exhibiting a Christian lifestyle, which includes proper sexual relationships. Homosexuality is implicitly addressed and rejected.⁹¹

b. Paul and Homosexuality

The three major Pauline texts dealing with homosexuality are Romans 1:26, 27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; and 1 Timothy 1:10.

(1) Romans 1:26, 27

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.

Whereas a number of Christians hold that these verses describe homosexuality, which they reject in all its forms, others argue that the text is dealing with homosexuality but then suggest that the issue is idolatry or pederasty. Paul, they believe, was not dealing with sexual orientation as we know it today, because he did not know about inverted homosexuals.⁹² Furthermore, it is argued that the phrase “against nature” means, “It is ‘against nature’ for homosexuals to practice heterosexuality or for heterosexuals to practice homosexuality.”⁹³ Therefore, the issue to be studied is whether or not homosexuality in Romans 1 includes all forms of it and has a universal scope.

First, the larger context is universal in nature. Romans 1 shows that

⁹⁰ However, his use of the term “dogs” in Matt 7:6, although reminding us of the dogs of Deuteronomy 23:17, 18, that is homosexuals, does not seem to refer to homosexuals in this context.

⁹¹ Soards, 29.

⁹² Cf. Everett R. Kalin, “Romans 1:26-27 and Homosexuality,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 30 (2003): 423-432. Scroggs, 121, 122, is opposed by Wold, 185, 186, Springett, 121, 122, and Soards, 48. Rogers, 76, opts for the idolatry position. Wink, “Homosexuality and the Bible,” 36, claims that “Paul was unaware of the distinction between sexual orientation . . . and sexual behavior.” Cf. John R. Jones, “In Christ There Is Neither . . . : Toward the Unity of the Body of Christ,” in *Christianity and Homosexuality*, part 4 - 23.

⁹³ DeYoung, 10. Cf. Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 74.

all Gentiles are sinners (Rom 1:21-32), Romans 2 points out that the Jews are also sinners, and Romans 3 concludes that all people are sinners and all are dependent on God's grace. In Romans 5, Paul elaborates on the fact that all of us have been slaves to sin but in Jesus we are free from it. The Fall is clearly referred to in Romans 5:12-19. The topics of Creation, Fall, and salvation are universal in nature and are of relevance to humans at all times.⁹⁴ Therefore, the list of vices, including homosexuality, is not limited to a special period of time but is still applicable today.⁹⁵

Second, Paul's background for the discussion of idolatry and homosexuality is Creation (Rom 1:20).⁹⁶ Evidently, Paul's argument is that God can be known through His created works. But although the Gentiles "knew God, they did not honor him as God" (Rom 1:21). God was replaced by gods that were nothing more than images of humans or animals (Rom 1:23). The list of animals, the mention of humans, and the concept of "likeness/image" suggest that Romans 1:23 echoes Genesis 1:24-26. In addition, Romans 1:25 points out that the Gentiles worshiped created things instead of the Creator. Furthermore, Romans 1:26, 27 seems to echo Genesis 1:27 by the use of the terms "male" (*arsēn*) and "female" (*thēlu*), instead of "man" and "woman."⁹⁷ Since Creation is so clearly referred to in the preceding verses, homosexuality must be understood in the context of Creation. "Idolatry and same-sex intercourse together

⁹⁴ Cf. Springett, 124.

⁹⁵ See White and Niell, 134.

⁹⁶ Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 76, argues that Paul's condemnation of homosexual behavior does not apply to contemporary homosexual Christians because they are not idolaters. But even if idolatry should be the overarching theme of Romans 1, the statements on homosexuality have to be taken seriously and cannot be discarded. Furthermore, it would be wrong to contend that "idolatry . . . is the necessary prerequisite for homosexuality," according to Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, 285. Some advocates of a homosexual lifestyle deny that the Fall occurred or that the Fall is related to homosexuality. Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 77, points to homosexual animals, an apparent genetic influence on sexual orientation, and biological differences between homosexual and heterosexual people, concluding that "This data suggests that homosexuality is indeed part of God's created order" (81). However, Genesis 2:20 indicates that the cattle, the birds, and the beast of the fields had "helpers," while Adam did not have "a helper suitable to him." For Adam this "suitable helper" was Eve, the missing female partner. Similarly, the Flood story mentions pairs of male and female animals only (Gen 7:2). Genesis does not indicate that God created homosexual beings. D. Martin, "Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18-32," *Biblical Interpretation* 3 (1995):338, complains: "Modern scholars read the Fall into Romans 1 because it renders the text more serviceable for heterosexist purposes." Although the Fall is not directly mentioned in Rom 1, Creation is, and the Fall's mention in Romans 5 reveals that it forms part of the background of Paul's theology, even in Romans 1.

⁹⁷ See Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 37.

constitute an assault on the work of the Creator in nature.”⁹⁸

Third, obviously the ancients knew about inverted homo-sexuality. If the number of invert homosexuals among the general population amounts to somewhere between three to ten percent⁹⁹ and “has remained relatively constant for hundreds, even thousands of years,”¹⁰⁰ as it is claimed, it would be quite strange, if loving and caring homosexual relationships were formed only in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and that the ancients were completely ignorant of them.¹⁰¹ References to homosexuality have been found not only in sources dating back to centuries before Christ but also in Greco-Roman society and in the writings of the church fathers.¹⁰²

It is hardly possible that Paul, who was an educated man and who even quoted Greek authors (e.g., Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12), would not have known innate homosexuality.¹⁰³ To suggest that Paul was referring only to violent or exploitative homosexuality or pederasty but not to permanent, caring one partner same gender relationships because they supposedly were not known at that time, cannot be demonstrated.¹⁰⁴ Fourth, for Paul the law of Moses is still applicable.¹⁰⁵ The mention of adult-adult

⁹⁸ Via and Gagnon, 78.

⁹⁹ See Kemena, part 2 - 10, and Fulton, part 2 - 48.

¹⁰⁰ Mitchell F. Henson, “Ministering to Gays within the Church Community,” in *Christianity and Homosexuality*, part 5 - 27.

¹⁰¹ Cf. White and Niell, 128, 129.

¹⁰² Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 76, argues that Paul’s condemnation of homosexual behavior does not apply to contemporary homosexual Christians because they are not idolaters. But even if idolatry should be the overarching theme of Romans 1, the statements on homosexuality have to be taken seriously and cannot be discarded. Furthermore, it would be wrong to contend that “idolatry . . . is the necessary prerequisite for homosexuality,” according to Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, 285. Some advocates of a homosexual lifestyle deny that the Fall occurred or that the Fall is related to homosexuality. Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 77, points to homosexual animals, an apparent genetic influence on sexual orientation, and biological differences between homosexual and heterosexual people, concluding that “This data suggests that homosexuality is indeed part of God’s created order” (81). However, Genesis 2:20 indicates that the cattle, the birds, and the beast of the fields had “helpers,” while Adam did not have “a helper suitable to him.” For Adam this “suitable helper” was Eve, the missing female partner. Similarly, the Flood story mentions pairs of male and female animals only (Gen 7:2). Genesis does not indicate that God created homosexual beings. D. Martin, “Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18-32,” *Biblical Interpretation* 3 (1995):338, complains: “Modern scholars read the Fall into Romans 1 because it renders the text more serviceable for heterosexist purposes.” Although the Fall is not directly mentioned in Rom 1, Creation is, and the Fall’s mention in Romans 5 reveals that it forms part of the background of Paul’s theology, even in Romans 1.

¹⁰³ See Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 452; White and Niell, 99, 128, 129.

¹⁰⁴ See Via and Gagnon, 81.

¹⁰⁵ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1988), 76.

homosexual intercourse in Romans 1:27 is dependent on Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.¹⁰⁶ Leviticus 18 and 20 are in view in Acts 15 and are declared binding for gentile Christians. Paul refers to Leviticus 18:8 when he sharply criticizes incest in the church of Corinth (1Cor 5), indicating that for him Lev 18 and 20 are still valid. Paul goes even a step further by including female same gender activity (Rom 1:26), which was not directly spelled out, though included among male homosexuality in the Old Testament.

Fifth, dealing with the suggestion that Romans 1 “identifies a temporary Jewish purity rule rather than a universal moral principle,” De Young remarks: “God cannot consign the Gentiles to punishment for breaking a Jewish purity law.”¹⁰⁷ Because divine judgment (Rom 1:27) is associated with the breaking of the laws of Leviticus 18 and 20, they must have a moral quality and be universal in nature and cannot be merely culturally and nationally determined and abolished by Jesus.¹⁰⁸ A distinction is sometimes made between a level of “moral evil” and a level of “ceremonial impurity” in Romans 1, assigning verses 24- 27—the passage dealing with homosexuality—to the ceremonial level. It is held that the three terms “unrighteousness” (*adikia*), “evil” (*ponēria*), and “godlessness”/“wickedness” (*asebeia*) in Romans 1:18, 29 have a moral quality, while the word “uncleanness”/“impurity” (*akatharsia*) in Romans 1:24 is ceremonial in nature. Supposedly, homosexuality belongs to the level of ceremonial impurity, not to the level of sin.¹⁰⁹ However, already in the Old Testament, impurity had at times a moral quality.¹¹⁰ A closer look at the New Testament reveals that *akatharsia* (“impurity”) is found next to terms such as “lawlessness” (*anomia*; Rom 6:19), “licentiousness” (*aselgeia*; Eph 4:19), and “fornication” (*porneia*; Eph 5:3). According to 2 Corinthians 12:24 people should have repented of their “uncleanness” (*akatharsia*). These terms describe the fleshly nature corrupted by sin (Gal 5:19, 20).¹¹¹ Thus, for Paul “uncleanness” (*akatharsia*) has a moral

¹⁰⁶ These chapters are also found in a kind of universal context. See Leviticus 18:24-30; 20: 2, 23.

¹⁰⁷ DeYoung, 159.

¹⁰⁸ J. R. Jones, part 4 - 4-7, argues for a cultural and national limitation of the laws in Leviticus 18 and 20.

¹⁰⁹ J. R. Jones part 4 - 13-22.

¹¹⁰ See discussion above and Gane, 4 - 66-68.

¹¹¹ A similar list occurs in Col 3:5 and includes *akatharsia*.

dimension. Christians are called to stay away from it, because a lifestyle of “uncleanness” (*akatharsia*) excludes people from the kingdom of God (see Gal 5:21; 1 Thess 4:7).¹¹²

Sixth, the argument that the phrase “the natural intercourse” and its opposite “against/contrary to nature” (*para phusin*) in Romans 1:26, 27 are describing what comes natural to an individual is unsubstantiated. Nowhere is the term “nature” (*phusis*) used in such a sense.¹¹³ In Romans 11:24 the phrase “by nature” (*kata phusin*) means to exist in harmony with the created order. On the other hand, “against nature” (*para phusin*) refers to what is in contrast to the order intended by the Creator.¹¹⁴ This corresponds with Romans 1, where Creation is clearly the background for the discussion of idolatry, homosexuality, and other vices. Behavior described as being “against nature” implies a negative moral judgment: “homosexual practice is a violation of the natural order (as determined by God).”¹¹⁵ Obviously, this practice includes all forms of homosexuality.¹¹⁶ Any attempt to explain what is natural on “conventional grounds,” namely as understood in the Greco-Roman world of the first century A.D.,¹¹⁷ does not fit Paul’s argument. He argues biblically rather than from a cultural perspective.¹¹⁸ We can suggest that “Paul in effect argues that even pagans who have no access to the book of Leviticus should know that same-sex eroticism is ‘contrary to nature’ because the primary

¹¹² White and Niell, 120, add: “the fact that a ‘penalty’ or ‘punishment’ is attached to the ‘error’ of performing these ‘shameful deeds’ reinforces the understanding that these are sinful deeds.”

¹¹³ In the letter to the Romans the noun is found seven times (Rom 1:26; 2:14, 27; 11:21, 24, 24, 24), and the phrase *para phusin* (“against nature”), twice (Rom 1:26; 11:24).

¹¹⁴ See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 286; Wold, 182. Cf. DeYoung, 156, 157; and Köstenberger, 48.

¹¹⁵ Dunn, 74. Cf. Via and Gagnon, 79, 80.

¹¹⁶ Springett, 130, 131, declares: “If homosexual acts could gain divine approval in any sense, surely Paul would have indicated how and drawn the distinction. . . . An interpretation of his words that allows homosexual activity would have to allow also any sin in the list of vices which follows.”

¹¹⁷ Cf. J. R. Jones, part 4 - 17. Lewis B. Smedes, “Exploring the Morality of Homosexuality,” in *Homosexuality and Christian Faith*, 80, 81, first seems to argue for a cultural understanding of “unnatural,” but then admits being a traditionalist: “I do believe that having babies is the teleological bent of sexuality. And my traditionalism leads me to suppose that homosexuality is a product of nature sometimes gone awry. But this, in turn, leads me to assume that God wants gay people to make the best life they can within the limits of what errant nature gives them. . . . Would not God also see same-sex partnerships as a morally worthy improvisation on the ‘unnatural?’” (81).

¹¹⁸ The same applies to the effort to explain “unnatural” as unexpected or unusual but not immoral behavior. See John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 112.

sex organs fit male to female, not female to female or male to male.”¹¹⁹

Seventh, the fact that Paul adds lesbianism to male homo-sexuality supports the previous point. “Lesbian intercourse in antiquity normally did not conform to the male pederast model or entail cultic associations or prostitution.”¹²⁰ It was not exploitative. Therefore, non-exploitative but caring homosexual partnerships are included in the sins mentioned in Romans 1. However, there are those who hold that Romans 1:26 does not talk about lesbianism. They claim that Romans 1:26 may describe any sexual deviation, but not lesbianism.¹²¹ In answer we should observe that verse 26 is linked to verse 27 by the term “likewise. The case is very clear.”¹²² Male homosexuals are mentioned in verse 27 and lesbians in verse 26. In order to avoid this conclusion, the term “likewise” has to be reinterpreted.¹²³ But even Helminiak concedes that his interpretation may not be correct.¹²⁴

Eight, that Paul was not so much concerned with coercion in a homosexual relationship can be derived from Romans 1:27: “men . . . 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.” Obviously in such a homoerotic union, both partners lust for each other. Both of them consent to the homosexual relationship, both are responsible for their actions, and both of them receive the penalty. It would be unfair for God to punish a boy who has been forced to play the female in a homosexual relationship.¹²⁵ However, if Paul is even opposed to a relationship of consenting adults, it can safely be assumed that he would be opposed to all other homosexual relationships.¹²⁶ Homosexuality in Romans 1 is not limited to a certain time, culture, or to certain

¹¹⁹ Gagnon, 254. Cf. Gane, part 4 - 65.

¹²⁰ Via and Gagnon, 80.

¹²¹ Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 75.

¹²² Cf. White and Niell, 117.

¹²³ See Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual*, 297-299, versus James E. Miller, “The Practices of Romans 1:26: Homosexual or Heterosexual?” *Novum Testamentum* 37 (1995): 1-11.

¹²⁴ Helminiak, 90, states: “But even if this interpretation is wrong, even if verse 26 is a reference to lesbian sex, the general conclusion argued below must still apply: Romans may refer to same-sex acts, but it intends no ethical condemnation of them.”

¹²⁵ Cf. Via and Gagnon., 80, 81; DeYoung, 158

¹²⁶ Köstenberger, 217, argues, “There was a clear and ambiguous Greek word for pederasty, the term *paidērasḗs*. We have every reason to believe that if Paul had wished to condemn, not homosexuality at large, but only pederasty, he would have used the appropriate Greek term for this practice.”

homosexual forms only. Paul understands it as sinful behavior.

(2) 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10

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, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.

It is claimed that in this text Paul does not refer to monogamous homosexual relationships of mutual respect but condemns pederasty, homosexual prostitution, and exploitive and dehumanizing forms of homosexuality.¹²⁷ If this were true, not all male-male intercourse would be prohibited.¹²⁸ This, does not seem to be the case. First, the immediate context of 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 reaches from 1 Corinthians 5 to 1 Corinthians 7 and deals with the issue of human sexuality. In chapter 5, Paul mentions a case of incest. He accepts Leviticus 18 as binding and urges the Corinthian church to disfellowship the church member involved in an incestuous relationship with his stepmother. Toward the end of chapter 5, Paul presents a short list of four different categories of people involved in vices (v. 10), the first one being fornicators. This list is enlarged in the next verse (1 Cor 5:11) by two additional groups of people. In 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 Paul expands his list to ten groups of people.¹²⁹ The unrighteous of verse 9, who will not inherit the kingdom of God, are the same as the subsequent ten groups of evildoers. These groups can be divided in two major parts.

The first five groups of people are idolaters and sexual offenders, discussed in 1 Corinthians 57. The problem with the next five groups is, to some extent, addressed in 1 Corinthians 11. The first part, probably two groups, describes persons involved in heterosexual misconduct, while the next two describe people engaged in homosexual misconduct. “Adulter-

¹²⁷ Cf. the examples listed by Köstenberger, 216.

¹²⁸ Cf. DeYoung, 10, 11.

¹²⁹ In all these lists *porneia* is mentioned first.

ers” applies to married people, while “fornicators” may refer here to singles involved in sexual misbehavior. The rest of chapter 6 warns against a relationship with a prostitute. In 1 Corinthians 6:16, another Creation text is quoted, namely Genesis 2:24. Chapter 7 goes on to describe heterosexual marriage, singleness, and divorce.¹³⁰ In order to avoid *porneia*, “each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband” (1 Cor 7:2). There is no room for homosexuality. If people “do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion” (1 Cor 7:9). Paul clearly is referring to heterosexual marriage.

First Corinthians 6:9, 10 is part of this larger context, which is based on Leviticus 18, the creation account, and Jesus’ exposition of it. Although the Corinthian church, with its problems pertaining to sexuality, is addressed, the issue is broader. The interconnectedness of 1 Corinthians 57, as well as its Old Testament background, implies a universal dimension, again not limited to a particular time, culture, or to certain forms of homosexuality. The entire passage is prescriptive and not just descriptive.¹³¹ The practice of homosexuality excludes people from the kingdom of God, as does any of the other vices mentioned by Paul.

Second, the two terms dealing with homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9 are *malakos* and *arsenokoites*.¹³² *Malakos* has been rendered “effeminate,” “those who make women of themselves,” “boy/male prostitutes,” “[pervert] homosexuals,” and “catamites.” The term normally means “soft” or “luxurious” and appears four times in the New Testament (Matt 11:8 – twice; Luke 7:25; 1 Cor 6:9). The meaning of this word must be determined by its context. In later Christian literature, the term describes an unworthy person and could have been easily seen as effeminate (1 Cor 6 Polycarp).¹³³ Obviously, “none of this, of course, negates the possibility

¹³⁰ Cf. Thiselton, 447, 451; Via and Gagnon, 84-87.

¹³¹ Therefore, Thiselton, 447, suggests that 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 is “an even more important and foundational passage than Romans 1.”

¹³² They have been hotly debated. E.g., David F. Wright, “Homosexuals or Prostitutes: The Meaning of ARSENOKOITAI (1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10),” *Vigiliae Christianae*, 38/2 (1984): 125-153 has shown that John Boswell’s claim in Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality, that arsenokoitai means male prostitutes, not male homosexuals, is groundless. William L. Petersen, “Can ARSENOKOITAI Be Translated by ‘Homosexuals’ (1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10),” *Vigiliae Christianae*, 40/2 (1986):187-191, has responded to Wright. Basically, he holds that the modern concept of homosexuality does not correspond with the one prevalent in the antiquity.

¹³³ J. R. Jones, part 4 - 9.

that the term *malakos* included male homosexual behavior.”¹³⁴ The majority of the interpreters agree that in 1 Corinthians 6:9 the term *malakoi* refers to homosexuals, especially partners who play the female role in a homosexual relationship.¹³⁵ In verse 9, *malakoi* is surrounded by other terms referring to sexual behavior, which makes it clear that this word has also a sexual meaning. To restrict it to children and pederasty is quite speculative.¹³⁶ The term *arsenokoitēs* (“male homosexual”) helps to define *malakos*. *Arsenokoitēs* is a unique term employed only by Paul in the New Testament.¹³⁷ It clearly goes back to Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 (LXX), in which the two terms *arsēn* and *koitē* are used together as is also the case in Paul.¹³⁸ The image is that of a man lying with a man in bed and, therefore, designates homosexual intercourse. The *arsenokoitai* in 1 Corinthians 6:9 may be the active partners in any kind of homosexual relationships.¹³⁹

Third, the severe penalty for being a *malakos* or an *arsenokoites*, namely exclusion from the kingdom of God, indicates that the two terms refer to adult males who of their own free will, whether by innate orientation or not, have homosexual intercourse with each other.¹⁴⁰ The background of the Creation narrative and Leviticus 18 and 20 in 1 Corinthians 6, as well as the other reasons mentioned above, suggest that, in 1 Corinthians 6:9, homosexuality includes all forms of homosexual activity and transcends application to the Corinthian church only.¹⁴¹

(3) 1 Timothy 1:8-10

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

¹³⁴ J. R. Jones, part 4 - 10.

¹³⁵ Cf. Fitzmyer, 287, Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 93; and Springett, 134.

¹³⁶ Cf. Thiselton, 449.

¹³⁷ In his book, DeYoung devotes an entire chapter to the discussion of the term (175-214).

¹³⁸ Cf. Köstenberger, 216.

¹³⁹ Cf. Thiselton, 448-450; Via and Gagnon, 83. Springett, 136, suggests: “If Paul was condemning only a crude form of homosexual activity here, by implication allowing other types, he surely would have been more explicit.” See also David E. Malick, “The Condemnation of Homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (1993): 492. On the other hand, J. R. Jones, part 4 -12, proposes that *arsenokotoi* “almost certainly” has to do with homosexuality, however, “of an exploitive sort.”

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Via and Gagnon, 82; deYoung, 192.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Thiselton, 452.

unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching.

The term *arsenokoitēs* (“male homosexual”) is also found in 1 Timothy 1:10, in which the background is Leviticus 18 and 20. This time, however, the term seems to have a broader meaning than in 1 Corinthians 6, because the *malakoi* (“homosexuals”) are not mentioned. A distinction between passive and active partners is not made. Probably, the *arsenokoitai* are all those who are involved in any type of homosexual activity.¹⁴²

The contribution of 1 Timothy to our discussion is that homosexuality is set in the context of the law, and this law is still binding. “Homosexuals” are part of one of the longest vice lists in the New Testament, consisting of fourteen vices. Of these fourteen vices, eight are forming four pairs of two, whereas the remaining six describe individual categories of sinners.¹⁴³ At least the last half of the list of vices corresponds clearly with the Ten Commandments: “those who kill their fathers or mothers”—fifth commandment; “murderers”—sixth commandment; “immoral men and homosexuals”—seventh commandment; “kidnappers”—eighth commandment; and “liars and perjurers”—ninth commandment.¹⁴⁴ The phrase “whatever else is contrary to sound teaching” may relate to those commandments that are not directly referred to. Understood in this way, homosexuality is also a violation of the seventh commandment.¹⁴⁵

The study of the Pauline passages dealing with homosexuality shows that homosexuality is not limited to violent and promiscuous activity; nor is it restricted to pederasty. All homosexual activity is against the Creation order and against divine law and is, therefore, a sin that needs

¹⁴² Cf. Via and Gagnon, 87.

¹⁴³ Cf. Raymond F. Collins, *I & II Timothy and Titus* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 31.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Via and Gagnon, 87.

¹⁴⁵ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 464, states: “This commandment [the seventh commandment] does not explicitly condemn premarital sex, postmarital sex (as by a widow or widower), cohabitation without formal marriage, bestiality, or incest, all of which are dealt with elsewhere in various ways; but by implication it certainly does condemn all those practices.”

to be repented of, forgiven, and given up. Both Old and New Testaments address our present situation.

c. Other New Testament Texts on Homosexuality

There are a number of other texts that seem to address homosexual activity. For our discussion they are less important than the previous texts. Second Peter 2:6-10 goes back to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and their sins. Lot is mentioned as one who was emotionally and spiritually tormented by the lifestyle of the inhabitants of Sodom. The passage also mentions licentiousness, lawlessness, and corrupt desires, obviously encompassing all sexual sins, including homosexuality.¹⁴⁶ In Jude 7, 8 the Sodom episode is mentioned again. The inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah “indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh. . . . Yet in the same way these men [the heretics of Jude’s time], also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties.” Again, more than homosexuality seems to be included.¹⁴⁷

In Revelation 22:14, 15, “dogs” are mentioned among those who will not enter the gates of the New Jerusalem. “Dogs” may refer to Gentiles (Matt 15:26), Judaizers (Phil 3:2), heretics (2 Pet 2:22), or male prostitutes (Deut 23:18).¹⁴⁸ Aune suggests: “It may be that ... ‘dog’ . . . is used more specifically here for male homosexuals, pederasts, or sodomites since the term on the parallel vice list in 21:8 . . . is . . . ‘those who are polluted.’”¹⁴⁹

Although it is true that there are just a few references to homosexuality in the Scriptures that does not mean that they are unimportant or that they do not pertain to contemporary Christian homosexuals.¹⁵⁰ Doctrines are not determined by the number of direct biblical references to them. For instance, footwashing and the Millennium are explicitly mentioned only once in the Scripture. The fact that they are mentioned only once does not mean that we should reject both of them. The refer-

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Springett, 142-144.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Springett, 144-148.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 1,223; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 408; and Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids Baker Book House, 2002), 701; Springett, 148-150.

¹⁴⁹ Aune, 1,222, 1,223.

¹⁵⁰ Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 86.

ences to homosexuality in Scripture clearly reveal God's will to us.

3. Summary

The situation in both Old and New Testaments is comparable. The Old Testament contains texts that are clearly dealing with homosexuality; so does the New Testament. The biblical texts are not limited to a particular time and culture but address homosexual activity at all times. They spell out that homosexual behavior is a sin that needs to be repented of and forgiven. After the presentation of a list of vices (1 Cor 6:9, 10), Paul comments that some members of the Corinthian church had been involved in these sinful activities, including homosexuality, but they gave up this lifestyle and now live a different life (1 Cor 6:11). God is willing to forgive and bring about healing. Thus, this investigation confirms the statements of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Conclusion

Seventh-day Adventists see themselves as a redemptive community reaching out to those who are battling sin. They respect all people, whether heterosexuals or homosexuals, and acknowledge that all human beings are creatures of the heavenly Father whom He loves and whom they should also love. Each person is extremely valuable in God's sight. Therefore, Seventh-day Adventists are opposed to hating, scorning, or abusing homosexuals. They distinguish between homosexual behavior and homosexual orientation. Although they do not condone the sin of homosexual activity, they treat each individual with respect and compassion, knowing that all people are sinners and are dependent on God's grace yet are also called to serve Christ and separate themselves from sin. While upholding the biblical witness, they support those who are struggling and searching for healing.



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