

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE: A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

(Part 1)

The Bible, the inspired Word of God, is to be the guide for our lives. Through the Holy Scriptures, we can find guidance for our relationship with God and our relationships with each other. This wisdom for living is conveyed to us through the account of God's creation, the life and teachings of Jesus, spiritual lessons from early Christians, and truths revealed in stories about people and events. Studying the Bible, we gain instruction for how best to live our personal lives, as well as live within our families, churches, communities, and the broader world.

God's Creation of Marriage

According to the Book of Genesis, God created humankind. "Male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27).¹ Being male and female made it possible for the first human pair to become husband and wife. Their resemblances to God enabled them to have a personal relationship with Him and with one another. God created Adam first, but God recognized that it was not good for the man to be alone. So, God provided Adam with a suitable companion in Eve, binding them together in a marital relationship (Genesis 2:19-24). God blessed Adam and Eve, and He told them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it" (1:28). From the very beginning, God's plan has been to populate the whole earth by those who know Him and serve Him.

The human race began with an individual man and his wife, Eve. They were created male and female by God, and sex belonged to their basic nature. The body was created first, and then God breathed into Adam, and he became a living soul. The biblical story of creation teaches that the bodies of Adam and Eve were not an accident, for God declared that all He had done was "very good" (Genesis 1:31).

¹ The New King James Version will be cited unless otherwise indicated.

Considering the biblical account of the origin and nature of the first couple, it is apparent that God's intention for marriage was for a man and woman to be united in a relationship that would establish the human race. Since God created man and woman as complements to each other, who in their good health would produce children, we can conclude that same-gender sexual relationships, including same-sex marriage, would not agree with God's intention for sexuality.

1. Biblical Prohibitions and God's Plan of Grace

The Bible gives a very direct and solemn answer as to what God thinks about homosexual practices. While the Bible does indicate God's will for marriage, it does not present a specific concise statement on sexuality. The biblical view must be pieced together from many parts of the Word of God. Before we examine the passages in the Bible about homosexuality, we should again consider briefly what God's will for marriage is, a definition of sin, and how God frees us from sin.

God's Will for Marriage

God's will for marriage is one man and one woman, married for life.

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh (Genesis 2:24).

A Definition of *Sin* and God's Forgiveness and Grace

According to the Bible, any actions that are apart from God's moral and ethical plan for us are considered to be sinful or wicked actions. Sinful actions lead us away from God and cause spiritual harm, and sometimes physical harm as well. Even though we may make choices that are not what God wants for us, He continues to love us and desire what is best for each of us.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve chose their own path to knowledge, rather than trusting God. As humans born after this first sin was committed, all of us have engaged in sinful actions and attitudes that do not perfectly agree with God's plans and

laws of love. However, through Jesus, God has made provision for us to find our way from any sin to a place of forgiveness and close relationship with Him.

All of us, regardless of our backgrounds, can come to God just as we are and receive His grace in the form of love, forgiveness, and acceptance—which He wants to give each of us. He has expressed His love to us in obvious ways through His Son Jesus, who is the Messiah/Deliverer/Savior. In a relationship with Jesus and our heavenly Father, we can receive forgiveness for sins and mistakes and receive a new life, which will last forever. This new life, if nurtured and developed, leads to our growing in our relationship with God and our understanding of His ways.

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:23-24).

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved (John 3:16-17).

The Importance of Our Sexual Choices.

Beginning in the Old Testament, the Bible indicates that sexual expression is important to God, that God does have a plan for how we go about our relationships with each other and how we express our sexuality. As in all circumstances of life, any departure from this plan is considered to be sin (that is, it is outside the perfect plan of God). The passages discussed below specifically address the seriousness of engaging in same-gender sexual relationships.

In studying verses in the Bible that state boundaries or restrictions that God gives us regarding our relationships with each other, it is important to keep in mind that in creating these standards, God is providing emotional and physical care for each of us. It is also important to remember that the Bible addresses all sins as being a serious matter, not just sexual sins. The biblical view is that since sin is something that diverts our attention away from God and His will for us, it will lead us down a spiritually dark and

dangerous path. God's will for us is to live in close relationship with Him in peace, so He offers each of us forgiveness, help, and healing for anything in our past or present, including our traumas and sins. The loving grace and care that God offers us includes freedom from both sexual and nonsexual sins.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30, NIV).

Old Testament Passages About Homosexual Relationships.

The first mention of homosexuality in the Bible is in the Book of Genesis in the Old Testament, in the story about Lot and the city of Sodom (Genesis 13:1-18; 18:16-33; 19:1-29). Because evil practices had become so common in that city, angels were sent there by God to destroy it. One aspect of the people's sins was their departures from God's plan for relationships. These departures from God's ways included their same-gender sexual expression and their lack of respect for each other.

But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the LORD (Genesis 13:13).

And they called to Lot and said to him, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them carnally”(Genesis 19:5).

The men of Sodom were said to be “exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord.” This included their practice of having sex with men. When the angels, who were in the form of men, arrived at Lot's home, both the younger and older men who were living in Sodom attempted to assault them. The Bible states that these men wanted to “know them” (19:5). As the Hebrew word “*know*” (*yada*) indicates, they intended to have homosexual relations with the two guests.

Although that area of the country was prosperous and offered material and cultural advantages, the wickedness of the people had brought about violence, death, and tragedy. Jude, in his letter in the New Testament, identifies the chief sin of Sodom and Gomorrah as “sexual immorality”(Jude 1:7), referring to their homosexual activity. The people of Sodom through their wickedness, which included the men's actions against the two

strangers, brought divine judgment on the entire community. God's judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah became a symbol of the eternal consequences that occur when we choose not to be in relationship with God and follow His ways.

Another scripture passage from the Old Testament that addresses homosexuality is:

“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination [*detestable sin*, NLT]” (Leviticus 18:22—Explanation in brackets was added).

This prohibition is against same-sex intercourse. Sexual intercourse is appropriate within the male-female relationship, assuming it is in the context of marriage. Homosexuality is completely at odds with the ideal.

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh (Genesis 2:24).

God's grace. The good news is that if we have been living a life similar to that of the men of Sodom or to Lot and his family, who had become disrespectful and abusive toward each other (19:8; 30-38), we can turn to God for His help. God will love us. He will help us find a new way of living through a relationship with Jesus, the teachings of the Bible, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the community of faith.

New Testament Instruction Regarding Sexual Relationships

The cardinal principle that our sexuality is to be expressed within male-female marriage is supported by the New Testament as well. The apostle Paul addresses the topic of homosexuality in his letter to the Romans:

For the wrath [*holy displeasure*] of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness [*that which is not in agreement with God's ways*] and unrighteousness [*actions which according to God's law are not right or ethical*] of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness . . . (Romans 1:18—Explanation in brackets was added).

(1) God's natural order in His creation. God has set up a natural order for the world and our lives. Any actions that we take apart from God's ways and this order will be harmful to us (“*the penalty*” of our “*error*,” Romans 1:27) and can lead us into a state of being apart from the light and abundant life that God has for us.

For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature [*contrary to God's natural order*]. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due (Romans 1:26-27—Explanation in brackets was added).

...who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them (Romans 1:32).

In Romans 1:26-27, Paul identifies husband-wife relations as “natural” and homosexual relations as unnatural and “shameful.” Homosexual relations, the practice of men engaging in sexual relations with men, and women with women, are not only wrong just because they are immoral (contrary to God’s law), but also because they are contrary to God’s design for the sexes, and therefore “against nature” (1:26). The primary purpose of sexual intercourse is the uniting of a man and a woman in a way that produces children. According to chapter 1 of Romans, God gave the people choices. He allowed them to pursue their desires (even though those desires contradicted His original plan for His creation), and He allowed them to experience the natural outcomes of their decisions.

The divide that sin creates within our relationship with God leads us away from His light toward a state of spiritual death and darkness. But there is hope—we can accept God’s grace and take the new path of light and life that He offers us through Jesus. It is very important that whenever we consider anyone’s wrongdoing, we recognize that *every one of us* has sinned, and therefore are “deserving of death,” (the gravest penalty) (Romans 1:32)—but, if we come to God through His Son Jesus, our loving Heavenly Father will forgive us and will declare us *righteous*. The following passage is God’s promise to all of us regardless of our wrongdoing or mistakes:

This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (Romans 3:22-26 NIV).

(2) God’s displeasure with actions that alienate us from Him. Chapter 1 of Romans clearly indicates that homosexual practices are not moral (are not in agreement with God’s plan for living). The verses in this chapter provide a scriptural basis for our not engaging in or approving of same sex-marriage.

God’s allowing, without intervention, the pagan society of Paul’s day to continue in their lifestyle of sexual immorality and perversion, was a clear sign of divine judgment. God’s wrath (*His holy displeasure*) was revealed “against all ungodliness and unrighteousness” (1:18).

According to Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, individuals who do not really care about God’s ways and choose harmful practices over having a relationship with God, will not be part of God’s kingdom.

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 homosexuals nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers [*abusers*], nor extortioners [*those who cheat people*] will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10—Explanation in brackets was added).

In verse 9, the word *arsenokoitai* (“*sodomites*” in the NKJV) refers to males who lie or bed with males, have sex with males. Immediately preceding the word *arsenokoitai* is the word *malakoi* (*catamites*, “*male prostitutes*” in the MEV). This term can indicate young men who are kept for homosexual relations with a man, or male prostitutes. Literally meaning “*soft*,” *malakoi* most likely is referring to those who submit themselves to homosexual acts.

Paul mentions several life practices, for which, if a person chooses any of these rather than choosing God and His ways, they will not inherit God’s kingdom. This includes those who embrace a homosexual lifestyle without repentance and living a chaste life. Therefore, even members of the Christian community who practice such a lifestyle forfeit their salvation and relinquish their eternal inheritance. We must not deny that those who have same-sex attraction but remain chaste do honor God in their choice to remain celibate.

God's grace. Let us remember that whenever we find ourselves drawn to any of the actions Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians chapter 6, we can come to God and pray, and He will help us.

Prayers:

Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (Psalm 139:23-24).

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.
For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen
(Matthew 6:9-13).

God's response to us:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (2 Corinthians 5:17).

(3) Different times and cultures. The Scriptures are the bedrock for our beliefs and practices. Regardless of the time or the culture, they consistently disapprove of homosexual acts or attempted homosexual behavior. In the Bible, the various passages that refer to homosexuality do so within different times in history and within different cultures. All of them censure it, including Judges 19, 1 Kings 14, 2 Kings 23, and Ezekiel 16, as well as the passages discussed above. Though the times and cultures differ; nevertheless, God is unrelenting in His disapproval of homosexuality.

The case for not accepting homosexuality and same sex-marriage as being virtuous options has strong support in the Bible. The repeated inclusion of homosexuality in lists of vices is impressive and shows what God thinks of this sin (Leviticus 18:6-23; 20:10-21; Romans 1:24-32; 13:13-14; 1 Corinthians 5:9-11; 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-20; Colossians 3:5-9; 1 Timothy 1:9-10; 1 Peter 4:3; Revelation 22:15). The disapproval of same-sex relationships establishes the fact that such a practice is immoral and contrary to God's will.

2. Same-Sex Marriage and the Family

A look at the history of civilization discloses that the family has always been the foundation of society. In the Garden of Eden, God designed the family to be led by one man and one woman and to include their children and dependents. Therefore, from the beginning, family structure has mattered. The goal of society should be to maintain the natural family structure, which at its foundation are a male and a female. As Genesis 2:24 states, a man leaves his parents and becomes united to his wife. In addition to this passage, there are other passages in the Bible that give clear instructions regarding marriage and the family, such as: 1 Corinthians 7:2-16 and Ephesians 5:22-33; 6:1-4. Considering the teaching of Scripture, from the very start, marriage has been strictly between a man and woman and is primarily for the purpose of building a family and providing a stable home and life for the family, thereby providing a healthy and stable society.

A family headed by a biological mother and father or an adoptive mother and father are the best for the well-being of the children, the parents, and society as a whole. This understanding of marriage is universal. Not only Scripture, but also the presence of this family structure in almost every human civilization refutes same-sex marriage. The giving of support to homosexual marriage reflects a misunderstanding of marriage and fails to realize what a redefinition of marriage will do to society. Marriage is not merely a social institution; it is also a God-ordained institution and is not to be modified as society changes. To put it precisely, marriage is the name given to a lifelong, sexually exclusive relationship between one man and one woman.

3. Marriage, Homosexuality, and the Church

Jesus' Teachings About Marriage.

Marriage is a divine gift, not something we invent, but something that has been given to us in creation. As Jesus taught, marriage is more than a human agreement; it is a relationship in which God changes the status of a man and woman from being single to their becoming "one flesh," as shown in creation (Matthew 19:4-6; cf. Genesis 2:21-24). From the moment a man and woman are married, they are united in a mysterious way

that belongs to no other human relationship. More, however, is involved in marriage than the sexual union of husband and wife. They are to leave their father and mother and establish a new family. Their primary human loyalty is to one another, and their permanent union is consecrated by sexual intercourse.

In the Old Testament, people (both Jews and Gentiles) had departed from God's original design for marriage and had engaged in polygamy—men marrying more than one wife. Jesus, however, in His teaching reemphasized God's original plan of marriage of one man devoted to one woman:

And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:4-6).

Patterned after the teachings of Jesus and what we learn from His parents' relationship, marriage between a woman and a man should be a union in which both husband and wife love and respect each other. Husbands and wives should love each other and their children like Jesus has loved the church.

The Apostle Paul's Teachings About Marriage

Like Jesus, the apostle Paul allows for no compromise of monogamous marriage between a woman and man. Sex has no acceptable context except in the marriage between a husband and wife. Marriage is the divinely appointed relationship for conjugal relations (1 Corinthians 7:2-5, 32-34). The flesh-union of husband and wife is compatible with the spiritual union of believers with the Lord (1 Corinthians 6:17), and their union reflects Christ's relation to the church (Ephesians 5:31-32; 2 Corinthians 11:2).

Christ's spiritual union with believers has great significance in our understanding the union of a woman and a man in marriage. Therefore, husband and wife are "one flesh," but this does not erode the gender distinction of the sexual natures of female and male. When Galatians 3:28 says, "there is neither male nor female," clearly, Paul is not denying the physical distinction between man and woman, nor is he indicating acceptance of same-sex marriage or homosexual relations. Rather, he is stating that

women and men are equally loved and valued by God. The apostle Paul is teaching that within marriage there is both unity and diversity, not sameness. Consistently, the Bible teaches a high view of marriage and maintains the purity of sex in context of a man and woman's marriage (Hebrews 13:4).

The Church of God's Teachings About Marriage and Same-Sex Relationships.

As believers, we need to recognize and resist efforts to push the church away from its position on sexual morality. The Church of God, with International Offices in Cleveland, Tennessee, recognized the dangerous trends in American society toward normalizing homosexual relationships, and as a result, it has issued a resolution, stating:

1. The Church of God rejects the cultural, political, and theological pressures to change the definition of marriage as being between one man and one woman. We affirm this definition based on God's Word and the truth that Christian marriage between a man and woman reflects the theological truth of Christ's love for His Church.
2. Church of God ministers, whether an ordained minister or ordained bishop, shall only perform or participate in marriage ceremonies or marriage blessings between one man and one woman, as marriage is defined in the Bible. This policy also is applicable to Church of God ministers who serve in capacities outside the scope of normal pastoring, such as military, hospital, and corporate chaplains.
3. Local Church of God churches and the local Church of God ministers who serve them shall only hold, provide facilities for, conduct, or preside over weddings, wedding receptions, and anniversaries (and other gatherings related to weddings, receptions, and anniversaries) that celebrate a marriage or blessing between one man and one woman, as marriage is defined in the Bible.
4. Local Church of God ministers shall maintain a Christlike attitude of love, mercy, and grace, when counseling or otherwise dealing with individuals in same-gender relationships. A Christlike spirit will maintain the truth of God's Word, the policies of the church, and avoid inappropriate remarks or attitudes that do not reflect the Holy Spirit.
5. Church of God ministers shall seek to find godly counselors to whom they can refer individuals in same-gender relationships for additional ministry and guidance.
6. Failure of Church of God ministers to adhere to these Biblically based guidelines will result in forfeiture of ministerial credentials

(Church of God 75th General Assembly Minutes, 2014, pp. 108-109).

The Christian Church’s Response to Cultural Shifts Regarding the Definition of “Marriage.”

As same-sex marriage has gained support in the general society, the issue has become divisive in a number of churches and denominations. Like our society, the church in general has not been able to ignore the efforts of gay-activists to normalize and legalize homosexuality. Many Christians and churches have felt the need to explore what the Scriptures teach in this area. They want to respond well to societal shifts, their family members’ or friends’ struggles or choices, and their denomination’s or other denominations’ approval of homosexual unions. People are asking: *What should they believe?* and *How can they show others that they love and care for them while still remaining true to their own beliefs?*

The church must be decisive and diligent in its support of loving, respectful marriage between one man and one woman. Part of this diligence should be providing instruction, support, and mentoring in the areas of marriage, family, and relationships. The Christian church also must remain steadfast in not endorsing or approving gay lifestyles or same-sex marriages—while at the same time treating every person making such choices with love and respect, just as Jesus treated people when He lived on earth.

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8)

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering [*patience*], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22-23—Explanation in brackets was added).

Conclusion

Marriage is a spiritual, social, and intimate relationship between a man and a woman. This relationship is consistent with God’s creating humankind as man and woman and shows respect for both genders. As noted, Paul has stated that marriage is a profound mystery with deep, spiritual significance (Ephesians 5:21-33). It implements the biblical requirement of purity, including a man and woman living together as husband and wife in a mutual and intimate relationship (Genesis 2:24). All Christians, whether

male or female and regardless of their sexual past, are called to be chaste, refraining from sex outside of marriage (1 Corinthians 6:9-20). A chaste lifestyle is possible through the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, followers of Jesus Christ can live according to God's moral imperatives taught in the Bible, and they can remain faithful to God, no matter how challenging the circumstances may be. We can live in hope as we receive God's love and forgiveness and focus on His promise that one day we will be free from temptations and be with our Lord forever in all His glory.

—French Arrington, Ph.D.

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE: A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

(Part 2)

This study is a continuation of *Same-Sex Marriage: A Biblical Perspective*. As we have observed in the first study, several passages in the Bible refer to homosexuality, all of which indicate that engaging in homosexual behavior is a sinful practice (not in agreement with God's plan for sexual expression). The Bible also disallows homosexuality's extension into same-sex marriage.

God's Word defines *marriage* as being between a man and a woman (Genesis 2:24), and as being instituted by God Himself. God ordained marriage to provide stability for individuals, families, and society. Homosexual marriage is, therefore, contrary to the role that God intended for marriage to have. The biblical model is a monogamous and sacred union between one man and one woman. Only marriage between a man and a woman can be right and honorable. Since same-sex marriage was not God's design for the family or society, it is out of step with the truth and righteousness of His Word.

1. Spiritual Conflict in This World

Christians and the Cultural Debate

There is intense debate in our society over homosexuality and same sex-marriage. This debate has captured much attention in the church, media, and world. People vary greatly in their opinions about the matter. Many have come to accept homosexual behavior and homosexual marriage as viable options. Such approval can be due to a number of factors:

- Compassion for those who have homosexual feelings.

- Compassion for those who suffer because they feel that they and their personal needs are not valued by the culture or the church.
- The understanding that all people are in need of love and acceptance.
- Concern for family members and friends.
- One's own personal experience, including thoughts, questions, and feelings about sexuality.
- One's simply being influenced by the values of the culture.

All these concerns and the people who deal with them are very important. We Christians need to learn more about how to express our compassion in ways that will truly help others, while remaining true to our own beliefs. This compassion and our beliefs, however, should not exclude the truth of God's Word. Any compromise of God's plan and the gospel (the message of Jesus' forgiveness and grace) is not truly helpful. The gospel message calls all people, including homosexuals, to repentance and to the acceptance of Jesus Christ who died to give each of us deliverance from the power of sin. As Proverbs 14:12 states, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."

As spiritual concerns and conflict surrounding matters of sexuality have intensified, there is an increased need for Christians to pray, to learn about, and to address issues surrounding sexuality and societal definitions of marriage. One of these issues has been the laws regarding homosexuals serving in the military. Another issue is the matter of how society benefits from the marriage and family structure. Traditionally, many benefits have accrued to society from the institution of marriage between one woman and one man. It is important to consider what impact changes in the definition of marriage and family will have on society.

It is also important for Christians to remember that our primary conflict is not with people, but with the evil one's attempt to destroy the lives of people. Some in the church may use the phrase *spiritual warfare* to refer to speaking out about sin. This type of "warfare" is not like human warfare; rather it always respects all people, for each of us is

made in the image of God. *Spiritual warfare* simply means taking a stand for good, as it is defined in God's Word. God's goodness always requires that when we teach or stand for His truths recorded in the Bible, that we do so with love.

The Role of the Bible in the Debate

As the debate has continued, some gay marriage proponents have recognized that their views are out of step with the Bible and have resorted to attacking the Bible or reinterpreting particular passages. Often, they argue that the Bible is wrong about homosexuality or that people misquote or misinterpret the Bible to support their own preferences for heterosexuality. The Bible is straightforward and clearly teaches that same-sex marriage is wrong. The truths of the Bible do not rest on our emotions or preferences. Paul himself urges his readers to "test all things" (1 Thessalonians 5:21), "rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15 ESV). God expects us to bring our lives into conformity to the divinely inspired Word.

Relying on God for Wisdom, Help, and Strength

The issues surrounding homosexuality remind us that the Christian life involves the Evil One (Satan) who desires to tempt each one of us into making decisions that are not God's will for us and our lives. In our loving service of others, we want to help each other stand firm against any evil spiritual forces seeking to destroy our lives. This care of others, standing up for what is right and good, and opposing evil is spiritual warfare. In all areas of life, in order to address evil and help others, we must rely on wisdom and strength from the Lord. We accomplish this through:

- *Prayer.* First, we are to pray to God about our own spiritual condition and about the spiritual condition of the world (Ephesians 6:18; Romans 8:26; Philippians 4:6; 1 Timothy 2:1-2). We are to turn to God and ask Him to help us in our own temptations and to forgive us for our wrongdoings (Matthew 26:41; Romans 12:2; 1 John 1:9).
- *The armor of love and truth.* We are to put on "the whole armor of God," which consists of the truths of God's Word; faith in God; the gospel—good news of God's saving love through Jesus; and the Holy Spirit's fruit of love, joy, peace, patience,

kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Ephesians 6:10-16; Galatians 5:22-23).

- *Faithfulness.* We are to remain faithful to God’s plans for us, which are recorded in His Word. This means standing firm in our own lives, the church, and society regarding spiritual matters that are not aligned with God’s Word—such as, opposing legalization and normalization of same-sex marriage (Ephesians 6:18-19; 1 Corinthians 15:58).

The spiritual forces of evil are exceedingly powerful, but the devil and his allies are no match for the Lord, who “having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it” (Colossians 2:15; cf. Ephesians 1:19-22). As Paul reminds us, we cannot rely on mere human resources; but we must “put on the whole armor of God” (Ephesians 6:10-16). In order to stand firm for the truth of the gospel and not give into fear, prayer is our main armament for spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:18-20). Through prayer, we receive wisdom and guidance.

2. Repentance, Forgiveness, and Restoration

As Christians, we are to share the love of God with those in need, but we are not to condone or ignore sin. Through Jesus Christ, God’s forgiveness of sins is available to all, including to those who pursue a gay lifestyle. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Paul gives a list of unrighteous people in the church of Corinth, who would not inherit the kingdom of God if they were to die in their condition of disregarding God. Among those whom Paul includes are homosexuals (*arsenokoitai*), passive partners (*malakoi*) in homosexual activity, and other sexually immoral people. While Paul strongly disapproves of the ten vices in the list, he does not end the discussion on a negative note. He reminds the Corinthian church that they had been blessed with a new life through their relationship with Jesus.

A New Life Through Jesus

Before the conversion of the Corinthian believers, they had engaged in the activities listed in verses 9-10, but now they had been delivered from them by the power of the gospel. The Corinthians had practiced one or more of these vices, but through the gospel, their former lives had been radically changed to a new existence. Reminding them that they were entirely different from what they had been before, Paul says: “But (*alla*) you were washed, but (*alla*) you were sanctified, but (*alla*) you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:11b). The strong Greek conjunction *alla* (but) introduces each statement, showing the radical change that occurred in the Corinthian converts.

When the Corinthians came to faith in Jesus Christ and repented of their sins, there were three acts of divine work that brought about a drastic change in their lives—they “*were washed*” [cleansed], “*were sanctified*” [made holy], and “*where justified*” [declared to be free of guilt and in right standing with God]. Now on the basis of the saving work of Christ and by the Holy Spirit, the Corinthian believers were cleansed of sin, dedicated to God, and put in a right relationship with God. This threefold work of God had effectively changed their lives so that they could live in a way that was pleasing to God.

Some of the Corinthian believers to whom Paul was writing were former homosexuals. Their conversion to Jesus had specifically delivered them from the guilt and control that their past homosexual sins had over their lives. There is no doubt that the gospel still has the power to do the same today.

Living in the New Life Christ Has Given

Several other Scriptures give us the assurance that salvation offered by Christ is sufficient to deliver people from a homosexual lifestyle and to enable them to live a moral, chaste life.

In 1 Corinthians 10:7-10, Paul selects five sins of Israel and one of them is “sexual immorality,” which glances back at the lists of vices in 5:9-11 and 6:8-10. Going on, Paul tells the Corinthian believers, “God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with every temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13). So regardless of the temptation—

same-sex attraction or whatever allurements—God does not allow believers to be tempted beyond their ability to resist. Believers can depend on God, for He is reliable and faithful.

However, God should not be put to the test (v. 9) by our edging as close as we can get to sin. Take, for example, those who are tempted to commit sexual sins. If they rely on their own resources, they will not be able to resist the temptation. We all must rely on God to resist our own temptations. When we rely on God and His power, we can have absolute confidence that God will provide a way of escape. God always provides a moral solution.

Often, part of God's solution to our struggles is help from others. As Christians, we are not to travel our spiritual path alone. We all need the fellowship of others, including wise teachers, pastors and counselors, friends who are dedicated to God, more mature followers of Christ who can serve as mentors to us, and people who are knowledgeable, compassionate, and wise about our particular challenges. Sometimes it takes great courage for us to seek help and to accept the wisdom and love God has for us. The Holy Spirit will give us the strength and wisdom to pursue the help we need. We never have to disobey God's moral laws, for He is faithful to make available an option compatible with His will.

3. The Church and Compassion

Compassion in Sharing the Truths of the Bible

Since God created marriage as a union between one man and one woman (and He always wants the best for us), we can conclude that the most compassionate action is to support God's definition of marriage. —We are to be opposed to gay lifestyles because the Bible requires us to do so. We must not elevate our emotions or human reason above God's wisdom recorded in the Scriptures.

The shifts that are occurring in society have strong influence on us. There are those who feel that because of social pressure and other factors that homosexuality and same-sex marriage should be accepted as normal. Their argument is that tolerance must be

absolute among God's people, and that if the church is to attract people and minister to them, it cannot afford to be less tolerant than the culture. These kinds of arguments are emotional appeals that come from people who want to do what is loving and compassionate. However, our love and compassion for others must rely on how God shows His love and compassion, which sometimes involves boundaries around certain areas of our lives. God's boundaries are good, for they are meant to protect and guard each of us from harm.

Believers are always to love homosexuals and to have compassion on them (just like we are to love and have compassion on all people), but the teaching of the Scripture must not be compromised. We need to discern that Satan has misled and ensnared people who advocate or practice homosexuality and same-sex marriage. The Bible calls Satan a *deceiver* and *the father of lies* (Revelation 12:9; John 8:44). His intent is to destroy the truth and people. We must avoid harsh judgment of those who are caught in the web of spiritual darkness of homosexuality and same-sex marriage, for we all need God's grace, forgiveness, and restoration. Let us take time to truly care, listen to others' concerns, and pray that they will be delivered by God's grace. Let us ask God to help us in loving each other and communicating the truths of God's Word.

Compassion in the Worship and Teaching of the Church

In our worship gatherings, God must be given room to break in and to minister to the needs of the hearts of men and women. When this occurs, real change and transformation are possible. The preaching and teaching of the church must, in content and tone, welcome those who need God's forgiveness and a fresh, new start in life.

In the church's teachings, homosexuality must be called a sin, and not be condoned by the church. Denunciation of homosexual relations should be done in a loving way, which avoids moral snobbery. The church should not treat homosexuals as if their sins are the worst of all sins, but rather, treat all people with dignity and respect. The apostle Paul takes the right approach in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 where he lists homosexuality along with many other different kinds of sins.

Compassion in the Fellowship of the Church

The preaching of the pastor should set the tone, but small group support, counseling, and friendships can assist in breaking the power of dominating sexual sins. Often, those who have been delivered by grace can be helpful to those who struggle with same-sex attractions. The basic requirement to minister to individuals who struggle with homosexual temptations is to be a church that is living out the gospel.

Prayer is vital to the ministry of deliverance, that is, ministry to people who wish to be liberated from habits or lifestyles that have control over them. No sin is too difficult that Almighty God cannot set people free from its bondage. The impact of the prayers of compassionate Christian brothers and sisters can exceed our wildest thoughts and expectations. Indeed, God does answer prayer. Our love and God's power can work together to deliver men and women from same-sex attractions and out of same-sex marriages.

Believers, therefore, have a pressing responsibility to minister the compassion, truth, and power of Christ to all sinners. Those trapped in same-sex sin need Christian sisters and brothers to come alongside them and minister to their needs. Pray for wisdom and discernment as you seek to help individuals to work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12-13). What is needed within the church is compassionate pastoral care with wise discernment.

Some proponents of same-sex marriage have accused Bible-believing Christians of being guilty of hate. Christians are not to oppose homosexuality because they dislike or hate homosexuals, but because the Bible teaches that the homosexual lifestyle and same-sex marriage are sinful and not how God wants us to live. As Jesus did, we are to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) and to stand firm in the truth "with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15 NIV). Christians who are following God's Word and are living in God's law of love will love all people.

Conclusion

God created humankind male and female, and these complementary sexual beings were designed to become one flesh. Marriage between a man and woman is crucial to the stability of our nation and its moral posture. Indeed, marriage of a man and woman is a larger issue than a husband and wife and their welfare. Their personal relationship is connected to children, family, and society. The future state of human life and society depend on heterosexual marriage that is built on the love of God and His ways.

The church's vocation is to love God and love others, and to teach and stand up for the righteousness and truth of Jesus Christ expressed in the Bible. The Scriptures give the church a mandate to protect the institution of marriage, but society also should protect this fundamental institution that fosters and nurtures human life. Homosexuality and same-sex marriage devalue and undermine the biblical institution of marriage and cannot be good moral choices and values for the continuance of the human race. Same-sex marriage does away with the institution that we have to perpetuate the human family as God has designed it to be. In the eyes of God, the institution of marriage is very holy, very sacred, and very special.

We must hold to the power of the gospel to transform and to change lives and lifestyles. It is the only hope for this confused world, which is in real need of salvation, healing, and renewal. In summary, homosexuality must be viewed as all other sins are—when we turn our hearts to God, God's grace is sufficient.

What is the Christian Response? The Christian response is to speak love to sinners—that is what the Bible teaches us, but it also teaches us not to tolerate homosexual relationships within the body of Christ. God expects us to reflect the basic Christian message of His love for all people.

—French L. Arrington, Ph.D.

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