

*Human Sexuality and the 'Same Sex Marriage'  
Debate*

*A report of the Sydney Diocesan Doctrine Commission*

*October 2014*

## *Preface*

The following pages represent the work of the Sydney Diocesan Doctrine Commission in response to a request from the Archbishop of Sydney in late 2012. The public and political debate about the nature of marriage and human sexuality has intensified in Australia over the past five years in the light of pressure for a redefinition of marriage to include the sexual union of two persons of the same sex. Christian men and women, seeking to be generous and loving towards their neighbours and faithful to teaching of the Bible as God's good word to us, have struggled to give a persuasive answer to the call for 'marriage equality'. Often it is assumed their response is simply an expression of social conservatism which has no reasoned basis apart from personal preference and a fear of difference. Yet a properly Christian response to the issue has much deeper roots than that.

The Christian approach to human sexuality arises from deeper and broader convictions about the nature of human life as God created it and as it is redeemed in Christ, convictions that have their ultimate grounding in the teaching of the Bible. Furthermore, since this is an issue that involves human beings, loved and cherished human beings, it cannot be addressed at purely an abstract or theoretical level. Profound questions are raised about how we treat the Bible, how we speak to each other, particularly those with whom we might disagree, and how we care for those who are struggling with their own frailty in a broken world. While this booklet does seek to do justice to these questions and provide help and encouragement to Christ's people as they seek to answer them in their own everyday situations, each of the contributors is acutely aware of how much more could be done and needs to be done.

We approached the subject by first setting ourselves the task of reading the most influential and substantial treatments of the issue from both sides of the debate. A great deal has been written on this subject and much more has appeared since we began. It was particularly important to each of us to read with generosity and sympathy the contributions of those, both inside and outside the circle of Christian faith and fellowship, who most seriously and strongly disagreed with us. Nothing is to be gained in this debate by creating straw men or women — on either side — or simply by repeating tribal shibboleths. Following this, we sought to isolate key areas which it would be helpful to address. We came up with five key questions: (1) How did we get to this point? (2) How can we begin to apply the Bible's teaching to today's context and questions? (3) What does the Bible actually say about marriage and human sexuality and so about homosexual practice? (4) How do we speak about the Bible's teaching in such a highly charged public debate? and (5) How do we care for those who are experiencing 'same-sex attraction'? This led to the allocating of particular chapters to different members of the committee, and then the hard work of drafting began.

We did not view this report as an opportunity to rehearse the detailed exegesis of key biblical passages which make clear God's assessment of homosexual behaviour. On this the Commission stands in very substantial agreement with the work done by Robert Gagnon, among others. We refer those interested in a careful examination of each of the relevant texts and the key terms used to Gagnon's *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001).

This booklet is the work of a committee. While we have done some editorial work in an attempt to strengthen the sense of a coherent and unfolding argument and to bring greater clarity, we have not attempted to flatten out stylistic differences or even slight

differences of emphasis or perspective. Yet we are united by our conviction that God is good and his word to us is life and health. We see no need for defensiveness and fear on the one hand or aggression or belligerence on the other. Our work together has led to even greater confidence that marriage, understood as the exclusive life-long sexual union of a man and woman, is not only unique, valuable and worth protecting at every level, but the fundamental element in a society in which both men and women are valued for who they are, as entirely equal yet also different — the necessary complements of one another.

The members of the Doctrine Commission who have contributed to this report are:

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## Chapter One

# Human Sexuality in Contemporary Context

### Where are we?

On Wednesday 2 April 2014, an historic decision was made by the High Court of Australia; a decision with “far-reaching implications for institutions and individuals across the country.”<sup>1</sup> The decision was to uphold the right of a particular transgender person to be registered with the NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages as neither a man nor a woman. Explaining the reasons for the decision, the panel of five judges declared that “not all human beings can be classified by sex as either male or female.” Furthermore, they determined, *The Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1995 (NSW)* “recognises that a person may be neither male nor female, and so permits the registration of a person’s sex as ‘non specific’.”<sup>2</sup>

The significance of this decision is that the highest court in Australia has now declared that ‘sex’ is not binary – not only ‘male’ or ‘female’. Those who wish to identify as transgender, gender-diverse or intersex people should be recognised by the law and in all basic legal documents. Whilst the decision is only binding on NSW, it will no doubt impact other jurisdictions where similar moves are already afoot. For example, in March, 2014, the ACT became the first Australian jurisdiction to make provision for people to be recognised as neither male nor female. It also removed the requirement of surgery for people who wish to change their sex registration.

Such developments are part of a much broader, indeed international, ‘gender agenda’, which includes the affirmation and legalisation of same-sex marriages (increasingly referred to as ‘marriage equality’); a move that necessarily involves the redefinition of marriage. The language of ‘equality’ is a powerful factor in the push for the legalization of same-sex marriages; for, according to *The Australian Human Rights Commission*, “the fundamental human rights principle of equality means that civil marriage should be available, without discrimination, to all couples, regardless of sex, sexual orientation or gender identity.”<sup>3</sup> Not surprisingly, countries that wish to be seen as defenders of human rights have done a remarkable ‘about face’ on this issue.

For instance, on 13 March 2014, less than 50 years after homosexual acts were decriminalized in England, same-sex marriage legislation came into force in England and Wales with the first same-sex marriages taking place on 29 March, 2014. Similar events

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Bibby and Dan Harrison, “Neither Man Nor Woman: Norrie wins gender appeal”, *SMH*, April 2, 2014. Found online at: <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/neither-man-nor-woman-norrie-wins-gender-appeal-20140402-35xgt.html>. Accessed 1 July, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. See also the summary of the decision of the High Court of Australia in “NSW REGISTRAR OF BIRTHS, DEATHS AND MARRIAGES v NORRIE” [2014] HCA 11. Found online at: <http://www.hcourt.gov.au/assets/publications/judgment-summaries/2014/hca-11-2014-04-02.pdf>. Accessed 1 July, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Equality”. Found online at: <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/lesbian-gay-bisexual-trans-and-intersex-equality-0>. Accessed 1 July, 2014.

have taken place in Scotland, with similar legislation being passed on 12 March 2014, although in this case only some 34 years after sodomy laws were repealed. Things are a little messier in the United States, where same-sex marriage is currently legal in 32 states (plus the District of Columbia) and also in 10 Native American tribal jurisdictions. Moreover, a number of states, whilst not legalising same-sex marriage, nonetheless recognize same-sex marriages performed in other jurisdictions.

In Australia, despite an attempt by the ACT Government to legalise same-sex marriage on 7 December 2013 (which the High Court ruled to be invalid the following week), as things stand, long-term, same-sex relationships are treated as *de facto* unions under Australian federal law. The reason same-sex couples are prevented from marrying is due to a ban on same-sex marriage contained within the federal Marriage Act (1961), which was amended in 2004 to make clear that same-sex marriages solemnised in other countries are not to be recognised as marriage in Australia.

However, the push continues. In light of developments in the UK, the Australian Attorney-General, George Brandis, has confirmed that the federal government will not exercise its power to veto same-sex marriages, which can now be performed in UK consulates in Australia. Furthermore, on 28 March 2014, Greens Senator, Sarah Hanson-Young, announced a bill to lift the ban on legally recognising overseas same-sex marriages in Australian law, as well as an inquiry into the impact of marriage equality in other countries.

Whilst the current Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, indicated that his government would not support same-sex marriage, Liberal Democratic Senator, David Leyonhjelm, announced his intention to introduce a new ‘marriage equality’ bill, as soon as the Coalition agrees to a conscience vote. The bill is aimed at deregulating the federal Marriage Act by deleting the words “between a man and a woman”. If passed, it will allow religious and civil marriage celebrants to officiate in same-sex marriage ceremonies if they wish to do so. But it does not address the issue of those celebrants who don’t wish to do so. Will they find themselves exposed to anti-discrimination legislation if they refuse to marry same-sex couples? The experience of other countries would suggest that this is likely.

### **How did we get here?**

What can account for the seismic social shift, in the Western world at least, in personal and political attitudes towards Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered and Intersex (LGBTI) people in general and same-sex marriage in particular? How is it that in less than twenty years since homosexuality was decriminalised in the last Australian state (Tasmania), it has now become not merely tolerated in Australian society, but fashionable, even promoted for its goodness? For millennia monogamous life-long marriage between a man and a woman has been recognized and celebrated as the stable basis for building society and raising children, and in the West in particular this has been sustained by the influence of biblical teaching on the subject. How do we explain the fact that, as one journalist has puts it, “in a decade, gay marriage has gone from joke to dogma”?<sup>4</sup> In short, how did we get here?

#### *Eroding the foundations*

The story has been told many times and from many angles – historical and

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<sup>4</sup> Christopher Caldwell, “Gay Rites,” *Claremont Review of Books*, XIII:1 (Winter 2012/13), p. 26.

sociological, political and legal, medical and psychological, philosophical and theological. As one might expect, there is a complex range of reasons for this remarkable transformation of communal attitudes and broad societal acceptance, if not enthusiastic promotion, of that which was once obliquely referred to as “the love that dare not speak its name.”<sup>5</sup>

Ultimately this confusion can be traced back to original decision to pursue autonomy rather than God’s good will for our lives. However, its modern philosophical roots lie in the Enlightenment period of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the birth of the conviction that personal, individual choice (and not unthinking acceptance of biblical or traditional values) is the true basis for morality. Philosophically, the view of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) that all knowledge is a mixture of what is given to us in sense experience and what is contributed by the human mind, also opened the door to the possibility that “something previously thought to be ontological (like gender), was actually merely linguistic or a category of thought.”<sup>6</sup> On the literary front, with texts like *Justine* and *Juliette*, the Marquis de Sade (1740-1814) pioneered a new standard for any and all subsequent attempts at sexual emancipation. In fact, according to one social historian, “[i]f anyone can make the claim that he fired the first shot in the sexual revolution, it is the Marquis de Sade.”<sup>7</sup>

In the realm of psychology, the impact of the founding father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), is immense. Particularly noteworthy, for our purposes, is his theory that homosexual desire underlies all heterosexual desire.<sup>8</sup> When this claim is combined with Freud’s view that belief in God and transcendent morality can be set aside as an illusion based on an infantile need for a powerful protector and ethical absolutes, and his idea that sexual repression is likely to cause neurotic illness, then a number of conclusions seem unavoidable – even if it was left to Freud’s later disciples, rather than Freud himself, to draw them. First, for the sake of their own psychological wellbeing, it is essential that those who experience homosexual desires act on them. Second, homosexuals are actually more authentic and free than heterosexuals, for only homosexuals have come to grips who they really are and what they really desire.<sup>9</sup>

In the field of cultural anthropology, the influence of Margaret Mead (1901-1978) and, in particular, her *Coming of Age in Samoa*, has also been profound. Since its publication in 1928, this work has become an anthropological classic and remains a basic text for all students of anthropology. Mead, who was both an advocate and practitioner of ‘free love’, claimed to find in Samoa a culture that substantiated her personal ideology. The lesson she sought to bring home to western culture was that nurture (and not nature) is what determines the restrictions and taboos of our sexual ethics. If, however, we allowed nature to guide us, then we would be much less inhibited in our sexual practices

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<sup>5</sup> The phrase comes from the poem “Two Loves” by Lord Alfred Douglas, published in 1894. It is generally understood as a euphemism for homosexuality and was famously used in this way when Oscar Wilde was tried for ‘gross indecency’ – a term meaning homosexual acts not amounting to sodomy.

<sup>6</sup> P. Sanlon, *Plastic People: How Queer Theory is Changing Us*. London: The Latimer Trust, 2010, pp. 25-26.

<sup>7</sup> E. Michael Jones, *Libido Dominandi: Sexual Liberation and Political Control*. South Bend: St Augustine’s Press, 2000, p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, S. Freud, “The Ego and the Id,” in *The Pelican Freud Library*. London Penguin, 1923.

<sup>9</sup> This is the view of the American philosopher and gender theorist, Judith Butler. See, for example, J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990. This, however, was not Freud’s own view. As he revealed in a famous letter (dated April 9, 1935) to a woman who had written to him about her son’s homosexuality, Freud believed homosexuality was “produced by a certain arrest of sexual development.” Both the handwritten original and also a transcript of the letter can be viewed online at: <http://www.lettersofnote.com/2009/10/homosexuality-is-nothing-to-be-ashamed.html>. Accessed 2 July, 2014.

and much less concerned about issues like monogamy and fidelity.<sup>10</sup> The fact that Mead's research has since been exposed as remarkably unscientific, if not almost entirely false, did not lessen its impact on the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>11</sup>

The 1948 publication of *The Kinsey Report* (which, amongst other things, claimed that 37% of males had experienced homosexual orgasm post-puberty, and that, roughly, 10% of the population were predominately homosexual), also proved to be a, if not *the*, major watershed in the overthrow of conventional sexual mores.<sup>12</sup> In fact, homosexual activists regard Kinsey as the man who effectively made the modern gay movement possible. What we now know, however, is that not only were Kinsey's figures deliberately distorted,<sup>13</sup> but that Kinsey himself was a homosexual with a compulsive interest in extreme forms of sexuality.<sup>14</sup> In other words, he was hardly engaged in unbiased research and had deep, personal reasons for seeking to prove that there was no such thing as sexual deviancy. Despite this, *The Kinsey Report* remains a central plank in the rise of sexual, and especially, homosexual 'liberation'.

### *The revolution begins*

The 1960s saw human sexuality become a political issue like never before, emerging as a kind of hub around which various student protests and other counter cultural movements and events organized themselves. At the heart of the 'sexual revolution' was "the conviction that the erotic should be celebrated as a normal part of life and not repressed by family, industrialized sexual morality, religion and the state."<sup>15</sup>

Whilst by no means the sole cause, the sexual revolution was effectively kick-started by the advent of the contraceptive pill, in late 1961. It was also aided by advances in modern medicine that made it possible to treat more effectively the rising number of sexually transmitted diseases. These developments led to a loosening of the connection between (heterosexual) intercourse and conception, and (despite the later emergence of AIDS in the early 1980s) to a greater level of sexual experimentation (both heterosexual and homosexual), without the fear of pregnancy or other unwelcome (or, at least, untreatable) consequences.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> M. Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization*. New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1928, pp. 104-108.

<sup>11</sup> D. Freeman, *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth*. London: Pelikan 1986.

<sup>12</sup> To be more precise, what Kinsey found was that 10% of his sample had been "more or less exclusively" homosexual for at least three years between the ages of 16 and 55.

<sup>13</sup> This was due to the fact that Kinsey did his research on jail inmates, male prostitutes, frequenters of 'gay bars' and amongst representatives of gay affirming organisations. Consequently, his figures are now largely discredited. Most recent studies indicate that roughly 2% of males (and possibly less) are homosexually active in any given year, with the female rates at about half that of males.

<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, at the time he wrote his report, Kinsey was "conducting (and participating in) sexual experiments in his attic, filming members of his staff having sex with each other, and with his wife, and also filming exhibitions of gay sex, especially of the sado-masochistic variety" (T. Payne & P.D. Jensen, *Pure Sex*. Sydney: Matthias Media, 1998, p. 56).

<sup>15</sup> M. Isserman & M. Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*. Oxford: OUP, 2012, pp. 151-152.

<sup>16</sup> It needs to be said that a number of STDs remain either incurable (e.g., genital herpes) or fatal (e.g., AIDS). In fact, although precise figures are hard to ascertain, since the onset of the AIDS pandemic, roughly 40 million people have died from AIDS related illnesses. It also needs to be noted that the origin and spread of AIDS is generally attributed to the promiscuity of homosexual men, so much so that the syndrome was initially called the 'gay disease', for the simple reason that the overwhelming majority of patients were gay men. The fact remains that AIDS is fifty times more prevalent among men who have sex with men and the risk of transmission through anal intercourse is especially high.

In regard to homosexuality, more specifically, the major events that inspired and ignited the development of the 'gay rights movement' mostly took place between 1966 and 1970. Among the numerous landmark moments and publications of this period were the following:

1966

- On 18 February, the National Planning Conference of Homophile Organizations, which later in the year became NACHO (North American Conference of Homophile Organizations), was established.
- On 21 April, the Mattachine Society (one of the earliest homosexual organisations in the U.S.) staged a 'Sip-In' at *Julius Bar* in New York City, challenging a New York State Liquor Authority legislation that prohibited serving alcohol to gay people.
- In August, the first recorded transgender riot took place after police were called to Compton's Cafeteria in San Francisco to contain boisterous transgender patrons. The clash with authorities that ensued that evening led to a major demonstration at the site on the following day.

1967

- On New Year's Day, 12 plainclothes police officers raided *The Black Cat Tavern* in Los Angeles and beat and arrested a number of employees and patrons.
- A series of protests began on 5 January, in response to the New Year's Day events. These were organized by P.R.I.D.E. (Personal Rights in Defense and Education). It was this connection that led to the term 'Pride' becoming associated with LGBTI rights.
- In England and Wales, The Sexual Offences Act decriminalised private homosexual acts between men over 21 years of age.
- The publication by Wainwright Churchill of *Homosexual Behavior Among Males* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1967) gave credence to the view that homosexuality was a fact of life (i.e., that it was natural). It also introduced the term 'homoerotophobia', a likely precursor to the term 'homophobia'.

1969

- On 27 June, the Stonewall riots took place in New York City's Greenwich Village, when the NYPD raided the *Stonewall Bar* with the aim of arresting patrons engaged in homosexual activity. The significance of this particular raid was that, for the first time, the gay community retaliated, and a mini-riot took place. Not surprisingly, Stonewall (as it is now called) became a symbol for gay pride and gay militancy in the decades ahead.

1970

- On 17 March, the film version of the 'off Broadway' play, *The Boys in the Band*, premiered. This was the first major Hollywood motion picture to revolve around gay characters and to look at gay life.
- On 27 June, to celebrate the first anniversary of Stonewall, a handful of people marched through San Francisco and finally held a rally at City Hall. In Los Angeles a similar march down Hollywood Boulevard drew about 1,000 people. In New York, however, about 15,000 people participated in a "Christopher Street Liberation Day" march and a 'gay-in' in Central Park.
- On 24 August, *The New York Times* ran a front page story titled, "Homosexuals in Revolt". It reported "a new mood now taking hold among the nation's homosexuals. In growing numbers they are publicly identifying themselves as homosexuals, taking a measure of pride in that identity and seeking militantly to end what they see as society's persecution of them."

• In *A Gay Manifesto*, Carl Wittman provided a clear statement of the goal of the Gay Liberation movement: to free gays from oppression and also to free straight society from its own repressed homosexuality. Of particular note was Wittman's use of the concept of 'orientation', his rejection of a genetic basis for homosexuality, his view that exclusive heterosexuality is "a disease", and his four-fold "Outline of Imperatives for Gay Liberation" which read as follows:

1. Free ourselves: come out everywhere; initiate self defense and political activity; initiate counter community institutions.
2. Turn other gay people on: talk all the time; understand, forgive, accept.
3. Free the homosexual in everyone: we'll be getting a good bit of sh\*t from [sic] threatened latents: be gentle, and keep talking & acting free.
4. We've been playing an act for a long time, so we're consummate actors. Now we can begin to be, and it'll be a good show!<sup>17</sup>

### *The Australian story*

All of these events and developments prompted Australian activists to seize the moment and take a variety of initiatives. Before the end of 1969, an Australian arm of the lesbian group, The Daughters Of Bilitis, was founded in Melbourne. In 1970, the Campaign Against Moral Persecution (CAMP) was established in Sydney. In 1971, Society Five (a homosexual rights organization) was formed in Melbourne.

One event of particular significance was a debate held at Melbourne University over the legal status of homosexuality. The team arguing for the decriminalization of homosexual acts (which included the future politician, Gareth Evans) won the debate by 281 votes to 98. This not only made national headlines, being covered by *The Australian* newspaper, but also sparked a wider community discussion. In the days that followed, a range of public figures expressed their support for decriminalization, including the Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne.

The first Australian state to decriminalise homosexual acts was South Australia in 1975. The instigator was the, then, Premier, Don Dunstan. The ACT and Victoria followed suit, in 1976 and 1980 respectively. New South Wales, however, resisted adopting similar legislation. Nevertheless, further pressure was brought to bear in 1978 when Sydney's gay and lesbian community decided to hold a parade (which organizers dubbed 'Mardi Gras') in order to mark the ninth anniversary of the Stonewall riots in New York. Although the march was intended to be peaceful, a combination of strong police action and fervent resistance led to clashes and multiple arrests. Although most charges were eventually dropped, *The Sydney Morning Herald* followed up by publishing the names and occupations of all those arrested. This not only led to many people being 'outed' and exposed to their friends, families and employers, but a number lost their jobs as a consequence.

Such actions both increased public sympathy and galvanised public support for the homosexual community. Nevertheless, it was not until 1984 that the NSW Government decriminalised homosexual acts. This was the same year the Australian Medical Association removed homosexuality from its list of disorders. What is interesting is that this was two years after the AIDS virus reached Australia. What this reveals is that, unlike some countries, Australian attitudes to homosexual activity were not greatly affected by

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<sup>17</sup> C. Wittman, "Refugees from Amerika: A Gay Manifesto". Found online at: <http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/wittmanmanifesto.html>. Accessed 1 July, 2014.

the arrival of AIDS. If anything, they were helped by it.<sup>18</sup>

Over the past 30 years, the Australian states have all followed each other in passing pieces of anti-discrimination legislation to protect homosexuals in the workplace, and most have taken steps to grant gay parents various rights and some level of recognition. Whilst the LGBTI community has not yet achieved all of its aims, with the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras now celebrating its 36<sup>th</sup> year, and the festival growing in ever increasing popularity, it is not surprising that Australia has been referred to as one of the most ‘gay friendly’ countries in the world. Correspondingly, recent polls report that 79% of Australians believe homosexuality should be accepted by society and a majority claim to be in favour of ‘same sex marriage’.<sup>19</sup>

### **The secrets of success**

Despite the way that the history is sometimes portrayed, it would be naïve and inaccurate to see the developments outlined in the previous pages as the natural and inevitable outworking of moral and social forces. Certainly there has been a steady progression, but the speed and magnitude of the change in public attitudes suggests that we are dealing with something very different from a consensus born of the gradual grind of reasoned public debate and normal democratic processes.

So to return to our opening question: How is it that a lifestyle that was once thought to be either a sickness (at best) or sinfulness (at worst), should now be regarded not just as an acceptable option, but as a positive good? The answer has to do with the combination of persistent political activism, a public propaganda campaign, sustained ideological subversion and an educational agenda aimed at winning the next generation through the public schools system.

#### *Political activism*

At its inception, the gay rights movement was, in many ways, both a legitimate and necessary response to a range of social problems and genuine injustices (including acts of violence) experienced by homosexual people. Over the past four decades, however, the movement has become a highly-organized, well-funded and extremely powerful political force. It has shown itself to be remarkably adept at changing public opinion, manipulating legislative and judicial processes, and coercing organizations and committees into bringing their policies and practices into line with their agenda.

The about face of American Psychological Association (APA), in regard to its categorisation of homosexuality, is a significant case in point. In 1952, when the first edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-I) was

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<sup>18</sup> Part of the explanation for this is that AIDS was (and remains) relatively contained in Australia, at least in comparison to other parts of the world. This was largely due to swift government initiatives, a blunt but effective advertising and education campaign, and the receptivity of Australia’s gay community. Consequently, Australia’s HIV-positive population is about 14 per 100,000 people (compared to 167 in the U.S.) and it is largely confined to gay men (78% of cases). Nevertheless, this is hardly a cause for rejoicing. Indeed, since the arrival of the virus in 1982, approximately 32,000 people have been diagnosed with HIV, 11,000 diagnosed with AIDS, and 7,000 have died from AIDS.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Pew Research Global Attitudes Project, “The Global Divide on Homosexuality: Greater Acceptance in More Secular and Affluent Countries.” Found online at: <http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/06/04/the-global-divide-on-homosexuality> and House of Representatives Committee, “Inquiry into the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2012 and the Marriage Amendment Bill 2012”. Found online at: [http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/House\\_of\\_Representatives\\_Committees?url=spla/bill%20marriage/report.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House_of_Representatives_Committees?url=spla/bill%20marriage/report.htm). Accessed 1 July, 2014.

published, homosexuality was unquestioningly regarded as a mental illness. By 1974, it was no longer viewed even as a ‘disorder’, but simply as a ‘condition’ (in the same category as having red hair or being left handed). The reason for the change was not the discovery of some new piece of scientific evidence, or even the result of an intradisciplinary debate about whether homosexuality should be categorized as (say) ‘a damaging behaviour pattern’, rather than an ‘illness’.<sup>20</sup> It was simply the result of three years of intense pressuring and disruptive lobbying by militant homosexual activist groups.<sup>21</sup>

Realizing that if homosexuality was ever to be normalized, it had to be removed from the list of psychological disorder, activists targeted members of the psychiatric community and, through a series of calculating political maneuvers, neutralized objectors and effectively co-opted the leadership of the APA.<sup>22</sup> In fact, at a crucial point in the unfolding of events, a letter was sent to over 30,000 members of the APA strongly urging them to vote for the nomenclature change. Although the letter was signed by a number of influential psychiatrists, and purported that the reasons were data based, it was The National Gay Task Force that “orchestrated the process of obtaining signed copies of the letter, purchased the necessary address labels from the American Psychiatric Association, and underwrote the full cost of the mailing.”<sup>23</sup>

As a consequence of the letter, two-thirds of those who voted supported the change and “de-classification was accomplished without the general membership ever knowing the machinations behind the scenes.”<sup>24</sup> It is now clear, however, that only one-third of the membership actually voted (and far from all psychiatrists belonged to the APA to start with). Furthermore, in 1977 a survey in the journal *Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality* revealed that 69% of psychiatrists strongly disagreed with the change. But by this time the boat had well and truly sailed, as the following entry in the seventh printing of DSM-II (1974) reveals:

### **302.0 Sexual Orientation Disturbance [Homosexuality]**

This is for individuals whose sexual interests are directed primarily toward people of the same-sex and who are either disturbed by, in conflict with, or wish to change their sexual orientation. This diagnostic category is distinguished from homosexuality, which by itself does not constitute a psychiatric disorder. Homosexuality per se is one form of sexual behavior, and with other forms of sexual behavior which are not by themselves psychiatric disorders, are not listed in this nomenclature.

The import of the wording here is highly significant. Only those who are ‘disturbed’ by their homosexual orientation should be considered as having a psychiatric disorder. Moreover, the disorder lies solely in the fact that they are needlessly concerned about

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<sup>20</sup> This, for example, is the categorisation argued for by Dr. Jeffrey Satinover in his *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), pp. 31-40.

<sup>21</sup> Psychiatrist and gay rights activist, Ronald Bayer, records that the protests started in 1970 at an APA convention in San Francisco. Here speakers were interrupted and shouted down, and psychiatrists who viewed homosexuality as a mental disorder were publicly ridiculed. The demonstrations were even more ugly at the 1971 conference. At one point, gay rights activist, Frank Kameny, grabbed the microphone and yelled, “Psychiatry is the enemy incarnate. Psychiatry has waged a relentless war of extermination against us. You may take this as a declaration of war against you.” See R. Bayer, *Homosexuality and American Psychiatry: The Politics of Diagnosis*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981, pp. 81ff.

<sup>22</sup> Charles W. Socarides, “How America Went Gay”. This article first appeared in *America*, November 18, 1995. Found online at: <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-chat/1859401/posts>. Accessed 7 July, 2014.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p. 145.

<sup>24</sup> Paul. E. Rondeau, “Selling Homosexuality to America” in *Regent University Law Review*, Vol. 14:443 (2001-2), p. 462.

something that is simply “one form of sexual behaviour” and their disorder is manifested in their wrongheaded desire to change their sexual orientation.<sup>25</sup> Not surprisingly, attempts at ‘conversion therapy’ (also known as ‘reparative therapy’) have increasingly been regarded as unethical, if not abusive. Consequently, since 2000, the Australian Psychological Society has strongly recommended that “ethical practitioners refrain from attempts to change individuals’ sexual orientation,” and a number of U.S. states (e.g., California, New Jersey and Illinois) have now made it illegal to engage in sexual orientation change efforts with minors.<sup>26</sup>

### *Public propaganda*

As significant as such changes have been, in terms of game changing influence there is little to parallel the 1989 publication of *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the 90s*, written by two Harvard graduates, Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen.<sup>27</sup> Combining neuropsychiatric insights (Kirk) and public relations expertise (Madsen), the book issued a clarion call for homosexuals to lose their image as a promiscuous and deviant sexual minority seeking greater freedom, and provided detailed instructions as to how to repackage themselves as decent, mainstream citizens, deserving of equal treatment. In short, it was nothing less than a powerful and practical handbook for a homosexual revolution.

Writing at the peak of the AIDS crisis in the U.S., Kirk and Madsen saw a unique opportunity to win public sympathy and to change public opinion. “As cynical as it may seem,” they wrote, “AIDS gives us a chance, however brief, to establish ourselves as a victimized minority legitimately deserving of America’s special protection and care” (p. xxv). Indeed, playing the victim card would be the key to their success. As they candidly explained: “The purpose of victim imagery is to make straights feel very uncomfortable; that is, to jam with shame the self-righteous pride that would ordinarily accompany and reward their antigay belligerence, and to lay groundwork for the process of conversion by helping straights identify with gays and sympathize with their underdog status” (p.

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<sup>25</sup> In 1997, as a result of ongoing pressure to bend to politically correct ideology, the APA made a subtle but (again) highly significant change in the way it diagnosed all the ‘paraphilias’ (its new term for all forms of sexual ‘deviation’ – e.g., sadomasochism, pedophilia, fetishism, exhibitionism, etc). In a revised edition of DSM-IV, the Nomenclature Committee insisted that such diagnoses would only apply if the impulses or activities in question “cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.” As a result of this change, by 2003, the wider “sexology” community was seriously debating the removal of all the “paraphilias”, including pedophilia, from the DSM (on the same grounds as homosexuality had been removed). Even more disturbingly, the American Psychological Association had published an article which claimed that pedophilia was not harmful. Interestingly, when DSM-V appeared in 2013, both the paraphilias and the diagnostic criteria of DSM IV remained. However, the updated manual distinguishes clearly between paraphilias (which are not regarded as disorders), paraphilic behaviors (which are presented as neutral forms of sexual expression) and paraphilic disorders. What makes for a ‘paraphilic disorder’ is a “paraphilia that is currently causing distress or impairment to the individual or a paraphilia whose satisfaction has entailed personal harm, or risk of harm, to others.” See further, J.B. Satinover, “The ‘Trojan Couch’: How the Mental Health Associations Misrepresent Science.” 2005 research paper for National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality. Found at: <http://www.narth.org/docs/TheTrojanCouchSatinover.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> This in spite of the fact that none of the studies and researchers commonly cited by gay activists to prove the genetic nature of sexual orientation has made anything like such a claim. To quote David Benkhoff: “to date, the totality of the scholarly research on homosexuality indicates gayness is much more socio-cultural than biological.” See D. Benkof, “Nobody is ‘born that way’, gay historians say” (19 March, 2014). Found online at: <http://dailycaller.com/2014/03/19/nobody-is-born-that-way-gay-historians-say>.

<sup>27</sup> M. Kirk & H. Madsen, *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the 90s*. New York: Doubleday, 1989.

183).

To achieve this outcome, a systematic desensitization program would be needed. This, in turn, would require an unrelenting “gay advertising campaign”. Kirk and Madsen articulated the strategy as follows: “to desensitize straights to gays and gayness, inundate them in a continuous flood of gay related advertising, presented in the least offensive fashion. If straights can’t shut the shower off, they may at least eventually get used to being wet” (p. 149). They were also quite serious about the need for the reality of homosexual practice to be disguised and for various members of the gay community to be kept well hidden. Consequently, “cocky mustachioed leather-men, drag queens, and bull dykes would not appear in gay commercials and other public presentations. Conventional young people, middle-age women, and older folks of all races would be featured, not to mention the parents and straight friends of gays” (p. 183). Most importantly, “groups on the farthest margins of acceptability, such as NAMBLA [North American Man-Boy Love Association], must play no part at all in such a campaign. Suspected child molesters will never look like victims” (p. 184).

Another of their suggested strategies for ‘normalizing’ homosexuality was simply to talk about it openly and constantly. For “[o]pen, frank talk makes gayness seem less furtive, alien, and sinful; more above board ... Constant talk builds the impression that public opinion is at least divided on the subject, and that a sizeable bloc – the most modern, up-to-date citizens – accept or even practice homosexuality” (p. 178). Nevertheless, they were also aware that there is a kind of exposure to homosexuality that will not help their cause. So they qualify: “And when we say *talk* about homosexuality, we mean just that. In the early stages of the campaign, the public should not be shocked and repelled by premature exposure to *homosexual* behavior itself. Instead, the imagery of sex per se should be downplayed, and the issue of gay rights reduced, as far as possible, to an abstract social question” (p. 178).

On the question of what to say publicly about the origins of homosexuality, Madsen and Kirk gave the following advice: “We argue that, for all practical purposes, gays should be considered to have been *born* gay – even though sexual orientation, for most humans, seems to be the product of a complex interaction between innate predispositions and environmental factors during childhood and early adolescence” (p. 184). They further advised: “To suggest in public that homosexuality might be *chosen* is to open the can of worms labeled ‘moral choices and sin’ and give the religious intransigents a stick to beat us with. Straights must be taught that it is as natural for some persons to be homosexual as it is for others to be heterosexual: wickedness and seduction have nothing to do with it” (p. 184).

So what should be done with ‘religious intransigents’? Madsen and Kirk’s first piece of advice was to “use talk to muddy the moral waters, that is, to undercut the rationalizations that ‘justify’ religious bigotry and to jam some of its psychic rewards. This entails publicizing support by moderate churches and raising serious theological objections to conservative biblical teachings. It also means exposing the inconsistency and hatred underlying antigay doctrines” (p. 179). In addition to this, the moral authority of conservative churches can be successfully undermined “by portraying such institutions as antiquated backwaters badly out of step with the times and with the latest findings of psychology” (p. 179). But the ultimate solution is to cast conservative Christians as “victimizers”, vilify them “homohaters”, and link them with the Ku Klux Klan and the Nazis. “The objective is to make homohating beliefs and actions look so nasty that [people] will want to dissociate themselves from them” (p. 189). “After all, who on earth would choose to be associated with the Nazis?” (p. 190).

They even offered a suggestion as to how this could be achieved in a TV

commercial: “For example, for several seconds an unctuous beady-eyed Southern preacher is shown pounding the pulpit in rage against ‘those perverted, abominable creatures.’ While his tirade continues over the soundtrack, the picture switches to heart-rending photos of badly beaten persons, or of gays who look decent, harmless, and likeable; and then we cut back to the poisonous face of the preacher. The contrast speaks for itself. The effect is devastating” (p. 189-190).

Needless to say, Kirk and Madsen’s call did not go unanswered. Indeed their program appears to have been followed to the letter and the effect has indeed been devastating. Virtually everything that most westerners (including many Christians!) now believe about homosexuality, bears a striking resemblance to the results envisaged by *After the Ball*.

### *Ideological subversion*

We come now to the third piece of the puzzle that helps to account for the broad scale acceptance of homosexuality and homosexual behaviour as both normal and healthy. This is the slow but steady subversion of the traditional (and especially Judeo-Christian) understanding that human gender and sexuality is binary (male and female), and its replacement with a very different ideology (as we will see).

On the surface, this has been a simple matter of tinkering with language as political commentator, Mark Steyn, explains:

Language has been an important weapon in the gay movement’s very swift advance. In the old days, there was “sodomy”: an act. In the late 19th century, the word “homosexuality” was coined: a condition. A generation ago, the accepted term became “gay”: an identity. Each formulation raises the stakes: One can object to and even criminalize an act; one is obligated to be sympathetic toward a condition; but once it’s a fully fledged 24/7 identity, like being Hispanic or Inuit, anything less than wholehearted acceptance gets you marked down as a bigot. [...] The transformation of a “crime against nature” into a co-equal civic identity within little more than the span of one human lifetime is one of the most remarkable victories ever achieved by any minority group in the Western world. A minority that didn’t even exist in a formal sense a century ago has managed to overwhelm and overhaul a universal societal institution thousands of years old.<sup>28</sup>

In its most extreme form, these shifts in terminology support a radical and highly ambitious ideology that aims at transforming the way we think about all aspects of human existence, but especially our sexuality, gender and identity. The ideology is known as ‘Queer Theory’.<sup>29</sup>

Queer Theory builds upon the feminist dogma that gender is not an essential part of human nature and also upon the claim arising from GLBTI studies that sexual identities are socially constructed, not biologically determined. Queer Theory, therefore, rejects the idea that heterosexuality is the norm for sexual formation and instead regards sexual identity as plastic; a malleable array of equally unstable possibilities. Put simply, “Queer theorists seek for a freedom from the limitations of gender itself.”<sup>30</sup>

In the writings of some early theorists, the debt to feminism is all too clear. For

<sup>28</sup> Mark Steyn, “There’s no stopping them now”, *Chicago Sun-Times* (13 July, 2003). Found online at: <http://freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/945379/posts>. Accessed 3 July, 2014.

<sup>29</sup> The term was coined by the Italian feminist and film theorist Teresa de Lauretis for a conference she organized at the University of California, Santa Cruz in 1990, and for a special issue of the conference journal (of which she was, then, the editor) called *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*.

<sup>30</sup> P. Sanlon, *Plastic People*, p. 14.

example, appealing to a clearly female audience, Monique Wittig avers:

[O]ur survival demands that we contribute all our strength to the destruction of the class of women within which men appropriate women. This can be accomplished only by the destruction of heterosexuality as a social system which is based on the oppression of women by men and which produces the doctrine of the difference between the sexes to justify this oppression.<sup>31</sup>

For others, like the philosopher and gender theorist, Judith Butler, the driving force is a hatred of all constraint and a desire for total personal autonomy. So Butler writes:

The prospect of being anything, even for pay, has always produced in me a certain anxiety, 'to be' gay, 'to be' lesbian seems to be more than a simple injunction to become who or what I already am ... I am not at ease with lesbian theories, gay theories, for identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes.<sup>32</sup>

Therefore, in line with Simone de Beauvoir's famous assertion that "[o]ne is not born, but becomes a woman",<sup>33</sup> the contention of Queer Theory is that gender "does not happen once and for all when we are born, but is a sequence of repeated acts that harden into the appearance of something that's been there all along."<sup>34</sup> However, even once gender 'appears' it is not fixed; it is also free to change and morph repeatedly – hence the term 'gender plasticity', which is often applied to this view.

Nevertheless, for all their talk of 'freedom' and the need for individuals to be free to develop their sexuality in any way they choose, Queer theorists, like Butler, do not believe that heterosexuals are truly free. Building on Freud's theory of sexual development (noted earlier) and also Michel Foucault's belief that homosexuality underlies all heterosexuality (i.e., that all heterosexuals are latent homosexuals),<sup>35</sup> her logic seems to be as follows: because gender is acquired through the rejection of homosexual attachments and desires, the person who retains or returns to such attachments and desires has moved beyond gender and so is more truly themselves. In other words, "only the homosexual has come to self-conscious awareness of who he/she really is."<sup>36</sup> Sanlon's summary is apt:

In Butler's world of genders formed by discourse, the homosexual discourse reigns. We see the cultural outworking of this in television shows where the gay man is thought to have some valuable insight into a topic, simply because he is gay. Homosexuality is not only given preferential treatment as a lifestyle; it is thought to flow from deeper, more accurate self-understanding than heterosexuality.<sup>37</sup>

### *Educational agenda*

Whilst the end point of Queer Theory (that homosexuality is superior to heterosexuality) is only just beginning to impose itself upon popular consciousness, the

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<sup>31</sup> M. Wittig, "One Is Not Born a Woman," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (ed. H. Abelove, M.A. Barale & D.M. Halperin). London: Routledge, 1993, p. 108.

<sup>32</sup> J. Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (ed. D. Fuss). London: Routledge, 1991, p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> S. de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*. New York: Bantam, 1952, p. 249.

<sup>34</sup> S. Salih, *Judith Butler* (Routledge Critical Thinkers). London: Routledge, 2002, p. 66.

<sup>35</sup> M. Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure, vol. 2: The History of Sexuality*. Middlesex: Viking, 1984, p. 85.

<sup>36</sup> P. Sanlon, *Plastic People*, p. 22.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p. 24.

influence of Queer Theory is already being profoundly felt by the youngest and most impressionable minds in western society. Indeed, since the early 1990s gay activists have been seeking to gain greater access into public schools, pushing for schools to employ greater numbers of gay and pro-gay teachers and counselors, and advocating the introduction of various educational programs that promote their agenda. This is simply the fulfilment of the infamous promise chanted at the 1993 Gay Pride march in Washington: “We’re here. We’re queer. And we’re coming after your children.”<sup>38</sup>

In the U.S., two key organizations – the Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) – have been enormously successful in establishing a foothold for homosexual speakers, programs, and curricula in public schools. In the hope of making schools a safer place for ‘gender nonconforming or transgender students’, they’ve been given enormous freedom to promote the normality and benefits of homosexuality. An examination of their materials, however, reveals that education and safety for such students is only the shop front.<sup>39</sup> For instance:

1. Both organizations believe that the early sexualization of children is beneficial for them. This means that any sexual activity, as well as exposure to pornographic material, is not just permissible for children, but an important part of the process of discovering their sexuality.
2. Both organizations believe that ‘coming out’ – calling oneself a homosexual, cross-dressing or experimenting with homosexual practices at a young age – ought to be encouraged by teachers and parents.
3. Both organizations believe that bisexuality, ‘fluid’ sexuality and sexual experimentation are not only healthy options for children to explore, but they are a student’s right.
4. Both organizations believe that it is important to meet other ‘gay’ and ‘questioning’ youth, even without parental knowledge, so that minors can have contact with college-age and adult practitioners of homosexuality.
5. Both organizations promote misinformation about Christianity, the Bible’s teaching on homosexuality and the possibilities of reorientation.

More recently, in Californian state schools, an activist group call ‘Gender Spectrum’ has been invited to teach children about ‘gender diversity’. Their message is simple: just as some dolphins have ‘boy and girl parts’, and clownfish can switch genders, so humans can choose to be either male or female, both or neither. For “gender identity”, according to a ‘teacher’ shown on Fox News taking a class at an Oakland elementary school, “is about what’s in here [pointing to his head] and in here [pointing to his heart] ... People can ... feel like girls, they can feel like boys, they can feel like both, and they can feel like ... kinda-like neither.”<sup>40</sup> As we’ve seen, the ideology driving this and similar programs is that the ‘binary’ understanding of gender, where people are viewed as either male or female, is false. If we are to embrace the reality, apparently reflected in nature,

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<sup>38</sup> Charles W. Socarides, “How America Went Gay”. Accessed 7 July, 2014.

<sup>39</sup>E.g. E. M. Diaz & J. G. Kosciw, ‘Jump starting youth community leadership: An evaluation of a leadership program for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender & ally youth’, *Journal of Youth Development* 7/1 (2012): 125–136. See the research done by Linda Harvey, referenced and summarise in Kerby Anderson, “Gay Agenda in School – A Christian Worldview Perspective”, Probe Ministries, 2007. Found online at: [http://www.probe.org/site/c.fdKEIMNsEoG/b.4219121/k.48F3/Gay\\_Agenda\\_in\\_Schools.htm#text6](http://www.probe.org/site/c.fdKEIMNsEoG/b.4219121/k.48F3/Gay_Agenda_in_Schools.htm#text6). Accessed 4 July, 2014.

<sup>40</sup> The Fox News segment can be viewed at: <http://anglicanmainstream.org/the-transgender-agenda-in-elementary-school>. Accessed 4 July, 2014.

we must be 'inclusive' and concede that gender exists on a broad spectrum. Not surprisingly, Facebook now allows users to choose from over 50 gender options, including 'transgender,' 'cisgender,' 'gender fluid,' 'intersex' and 'neither'.

Closer to home, since 2010, the NSW Department of Education has been piloting a program called "Proud Schools" in order to prevent bullying. However, the program only addresses one kind of bullying – that arising from "homophobia, transphobia and heterosexism". Moreover, it does so by seeking to normalize children's attitudes to homosexuality and same-sex marriage. As part of this program, on February 26, 2013, a drag queen was invited to Burwood Girls' High School. According to the New South Wales Teachers Federation website, "Staff and students were encouraged to wear colours of the rainbow, reflecting the colours of the gay and lesbian pride, or rainbow, flag".<sup>41</sup> In addition to this, students were asked to indicate their support of homosexual 'marriage', as part of the celebration. Disturbingly, when some declined, they were bullied by other students!<sup>42</sup> Christian conscientious objection is not considered an acceptable reason for dissent.

As was forecast as early as 1964, the broad consensus of 21<sup>st</sup> century western society is now that "deviancy is a desirable, noble, preferable way of life".<sup>43</sup> The pressure to agree with this consensus comes from many sides, but especially from those born after 1982 (Generations Y and Z) – so successful has been the educational indoctrination of 'our children'.<sup>44</sup> Even the former Australian Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, has revealed that his own 'change of mind' was (in part) a result of the fact that his children regarded him as "an unreconstructed dinosaur for not supporting marriage-equality legislation".<sup>45</sup>

### **The challenge for Christians**

Such 'intolerant tolerance' or 'exclusive inclusivity' bears witness to the juggernaut-like success of the LGBTI movement and the extraordinary power of its radical gender agenda. All who stand in its way, or even raise questions about its legitimacy, can expect to be victimized and marginalized, labeled as bigots and homophobes, painted as the enemies of science and progress, and cowed into silence, if not taken to court. 'Religious conservatives' continue to be an explicit target. This is precisely the kind of vilification regime that Kirk and Madsen insisted would be necessary if their cause was to prevail and 'straight society' was to be effectively overhauled. As things stand, the overhaul is virtually complete.

All of this highlights one aspect of the challenge facing Christians in the western world at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: how do we even begin to engage in dialogue on these issues, let alone expose the ruse that has been perpetrated by gay activists, when

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<sup>41</sup> New South Wales Teachers Federation, "Colourful day of celebration" (11 March, 2013). Found online at: <http://www.nswtf.org.au/news/2013/03/11/colourful-day-celebration.html>. Accessed 3 July, 2014.

<sup>42</sup> Family Voice Australia, "NSW citizens query 'Proud Schools' program" (28 May, 2013). Found online at: <http://www.fava.org.au/news/2013/nsw-citizens-query-a-proud-schoolsa-program>. Accessed 3 July, 2014.

<sup>43</sup> This language comes from a 1964 report written by the New York Academy of Medicine's Committee on Public Health. Cited in Charles W. Socarides, "Sexual Politics and Scientific Logic: The Issue of Homosexuality", *The Journal of Psychohistory*, 19:3, Winter 1992. Found online at: <http://kidhistory.org/homopolo.html>. Accessed 7 July, 2014.

<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, behind claims of 'overwhelming community support' there is often a significant demographic divide. For example, Gallup reports that only 40% of Americans over 55 support gay marriage compared to 66% of those under 35.

<sup>45</sup> K. Rudd, "A matter for the state, not church" (21 May, 2013). Found online at: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/features/a-matter-for-the-state-not-church/story-e6frg6z6-1226647193217>. Accessed 7 July, 2014.

freedom to question the cultural consensus or engage in genuine debate seems to be at an all time low? Tolerance, as it has generally been understood, is not even an acceptable option in the current climate. For, as Denny Burk observes, “gay rights advocates are not asking for tolerance. They are insisting on endorsement. Because ‘gay is good,’ the public space can no longer tolerate those who say it is *not* good”.<sup>46</sup>

As regards the issue of ‘gay marriage’ (the current moral and legal battlefield), Christopher Caldwell puts his finger on the chief difficulty:

The most troubling aspect of the gay-marriage movement is that, more than any social movement in living memory, more than feminism at its bra-burning peak in the 1970s, it aims not to engage in lively debate but to shut it down ... Anyone who expresses the slightest misgivings about gay marriage can become the object of boycotts, blacklists, and attempts to get him fired ... Since 2009, if ... estimates are correct, support for gay marriage has been increasing by 4 points a year. Public opinion does not change this fast in free societies. Either opinion is not changing as fast as it appears to be, or society is not as free.<sup>47</sup>

Interestingly, it is not only ‘religious intransigents’ (as Kirk and Madsen liked to label evangelical Christians) who are troubled by such intimidation tactics. The left-wing libertarian and atheistic journalist, Brendan O’Neill, also expresses his profound concerns about the current gagging of dissenting voices:

In truth, the extraordinary rise of gay marriage speaks, not to a new spirit of liberty or equality on a par with the civil-rights movements of the 1960s, but rather to the political and moral conformism of our age; to the weirdly judgmental non-judgmentalism of our PC times; to the way in which, in an uncritical era such as ours, ideas can become dogma with alarming ease and speed; to the difficulty of speaking one’s mind or sticking with one’s beliefs at a time when doubt and disagreement are pathologised.<sup>48</sup>

In fact, O’Neill reports to having been publicly booed, rebuked by friends, and even sent death threats for daring to criticize the “lemming-like lining up” of politicians behind the issue, and for his own refusal to endorse the ‘gay marriage’ consensus.<sup>49</sup>

Here, then, is another aspect of the challenge facing Christians living in the western world today. In an age when eschewing political correctness is a risky business, and might even land you in jail, are we willing to stand up for our convictions in the public square, to speak the truth in love to our contemporaries, and to reach out with the compassion of Christ to a generation that has been ‘queered’ to an extreme level of gospel suspicion? For the sad reality, as Peter Sanlon confirms, is that “[a]ll people have been changed by the impact of Queer theory – not just homosexuals. There are deep-seated fears and misunderstandings in both gay and straight people about what the claims of Jesus mean for their gender and sexuality”.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup> D. Burk, *What is the Meaning of Sex?* Wheaton: Crossway, 2013, p. 187.

<sup>47</sup> Christopher Caldwell, “Gay Rites,” p. 25.

<sup>48</sup> B. O’Neill, “Gay Marriage: A Case Study in Conformism” in *Spiked* (11 April, 2013). Found at: <http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/13518#.U7Ys4xZLceR>. Accessed 4 July, 2014.

<sup>49</sup> Indeed, “the space for dissent has shrunk so rapidly”, O’Neill continues, that “I don’t think we can even call this a ‘consensus’, since that would imply the voluntaristic coming together of different elements in concord. It’s better described as conformism, the slow but sure sacrifice of critical thinking and dissenting opinion under pressure to accept that which has been defined as a good by the upper echelons of society: gay marriage. Indeed, the gay-marriage campaign provides a case study in conformism, a searing insight into how soft authoritarianism and peer pressure are applied in the modern age to sideline and eventually do away with any view considered overly judgmental, outdated, discriminatory, ‘phobic’, or otherwise beyond the pale.” Ibid. Accessed 4 July, 2014.

<sup>50</sup> P. Sanlon, *Plastic People*, p. 38.

## Conclusion

These, then, are difficult days in which to preach the gospel and stand firm for Christ. We must be prepared for persecution, ready to suffer, and not surprised when, in the name of tolerance, our beliefs are not tolerated and “democracy becomes tyrannous”.<sup>51</sup> But, as insufficient as we might be for these things, we must not be afraid. The Lord is with us and the gospel remains the power of God to save the lost and to sanctify the found. Furthermore, the call of the gospel also remains: to “take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5), to “preach the word . . . in season and out of season” (2 Tim. 4:2), to have “mercy on those who doubt; to save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh” (Jude 22-23). To that end, we hope that the chapters that follow will further equip each of us for the task before us.

The fundamental questions we must settle, however, are whether we love the approval of God more than the approval of the world, and whether we love fellow sinners enough to patiently bear with their contempt in order to help them see that the confusion they are experiencing can only be resolved in Christ, just the freedom they are seeking can only be found in him (John 8:36). For, as Vaughan Roberts reminds us, we must not forget that “homosexuality is not simply an ‘issue’; it concerns people, created and loved by God, many of whom are Christians”.<sup>52</sup> Our response to the agenda that continues to unfold around us must take this simple fact very seriously indeed. At the same time, our answer to the questions and challenges of the moment must not be anything less than utterly truthful. For love is not an alternative to truth, just as biblical faithfulness is not an alternative to compassion. Al Mohler’s plea is, therefore, important for us to heed:

The church has often failed people with same-sex attractions and failed them horribly. We must not fail them now by forfeiting the only message that leads to salvation, holiness and faithfulness.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> D.A. Carson, *The Intolerance of Tolerance*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012, pp. 175. See also the discussion of ‘Majoritarianism and Democracy’ on pp. 151-159.

<sup>52</sup> V. Roberts, *Battles Christians Face: Tackling Big Issues with Confidence*. Milton Keynes: Authentic Media, 2007, p. 105.

<sup>53</sup> A. Mohler, *God and the Gay Christian: A Response to Matthew Vines*. Louisville: SBTS Press, 2014, p. 23.

## Chapter Two

# Applying the Bible to Same-Sex Relationships

### The Bible under fire

Christians believe that God speaks to us through the Bible, and that what he says there is not only true but applicable to our lives today.

However, as we've already seen (in chapter 1), many today do not share that belief, particularly with respect to the Bible's teaching about homosexual practice. In fact, most non-Christians today view the Bible as a relic from a primitive and crueler age when sex was surrounded by rules and taboos from which we have now been mercifully freed. This view was expressed memorably on the ABC TV's *Q&A* program when one of the panellists expressed his outrage at traditional Christian teaching about sex and homosexuality:

You people have no idea how unspeakably cruel you are. That nonsense, that poetic nonsense, 'All God's creatures, and we love you!' But you can never have sex. You have to live your life, an entirely sterile life without sex ... It is so unspeakably nasty and cruel ... I'm sorry, I have no patience with it anymore. It is just bigotry and cruelty and hatred. (*Q&A*, 17 July, 2008)

As the *Q&A* audience applauded loudly, it was difficult for the Christian viewer not to feel a sense of unease. Is the teaching of the Bible about same-sex practice in fact cruel? Could it be that the Bible is indeed the product of a more primitive culture, and that on issues like same-sex relationships its teaching can no longer stand?

For those who don't believe the Bible to be God's revelation, the answer to these questions is obvious. For them, the Bible is a human production, and simply reflects the cultural, social and sexual prejudices of its time. It is an ancient, out-dated religious text that has about as much relevance for understanding 21<sup>st</sup> century sexuality as it has for understanding 21<sup>st</sup> century telecommunications or space travel.

### Doubts about the Bible's applicability

However, some authors from within the Christian camp have also raised doubts about the Bible's relevance or applicability to the issue of same-sex relationships. And this only increases the sense of unease ordinary Christians feel. Are we needlessly causing pain and offence to our homosexual friends and family? Could we still believe the Bible to be God's word, but safely adopt a more accepting attitude towards same-sex relationships?

These doubts about the Bible's applicability to our understanding of same-sex relationships come in at least two forms:

First, some argue that while the Bible does prohibit sex between two men or between two women, this is part of its teaching that we may now respectfully resist or leave behind. The popular form of this argument is expressed in a famous episode

of the television series, *The West Wing*, where President Bartlett rounds on conservative radio host Jenna Jacobs and challenges her to be consistent – if we are going to take the Bible’s prohibition on homosexual sex seriously, why not also put people to death for working on the sabbath or for planting different crops side by side (as Leviticus teaches)? Surely if we no longer regard the latter as really relevant to us anymore, may we not also leave behind some of the other culturally-conditioned teachings of the Bible (such as those which see homosexuality as an ‘abomination’)? An example of the more scholarly form of this argument can be found in Richard Treloar’s essay in *Five Uneasy Pieces*, which argues that it is on the basis of church tradition, reason and the growing empirical evidence of the social sciences that we determine which of the Bible’s prohibitions do or do not any longer apply.<sup>54</sup> According to Treloar, the Bible’s ban against all forms of homosexual sex fits into the ‘no longer applies’ category, much like the Old Testament ban on eating shellfish.

A second form of doubt about the Bible’s applicability does not resist or leave behind the Bible’s teachings or prohibitions, but seeks to argue that there are in fact no biblical prohibitions that actually apply to the modern phenomenon of long-term, loving same-sex relationships. So some argue that when Paul speaks against “men who practise homosexuality” (e.g., 1 Cor. 6:9 or 1 Tim. 1:10), he is in fact talking only about those who use male temple prostitutes, or those who practise pederasty, not about homosexual practice in general, and certainly not about a settled partnership.<sup>55</sup> Thus, the supposedly very different form of homosexual practice being discussed today (i.e., of a stable, partnered sexual relationship between two consenting adults of the same sex) is simply not addressed, and so not forbidden, by these particular passages. Consequently, we cannot say that the Bible is ‘against’ same-sex relationships of this kind.

What are we to make of these objections? And given the doubts they raise, how are we to have any confidence as Christians that the apparently clear teaching of the Bible about homosexuality is in fact clear, let alone applicable to our conversations both with other Christians and with the wider community?

These are big questions, and we can only begin to answer them in this brief chapter. But the answer to all of them begins with an understanding of what the Bible is and how God speaks to us through it.

### **Seven convictions about the Bible**

As evangelical Anglican Christians, we believe that God speaks to us truly, clearly and authoritatively through the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. We will,

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<sup>54</sup> R. Treloar, “On ‘Not Putting New Wine into Old Wineskins’, or ‘Taking the Bible Fully Seriously’: An Anglican Reading of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13” in Nigel Wright (ed.), *Five Uneasy Pieces: Essays on Scripture and Sexuality*. Adelaide: ATF Press, 2011, pp. 13-30.

<sup>55</sup> This was the case made by Robin Scroggs in *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) and, most recently, by Matthew Vines in *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* (New York: Convergent Books, 2014). See also Alan Cadwallader’s ingenious argument that Paul’s terms *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* in 1 Corinthians 6:9 are not about male-to-male sex at all, but are a reference to the man sleeping with his mother (from 1 Cor. 5). See A. Cadwallader, “Keeping Lists or Embracing Freedom: 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 in Context” in *Five Uneasy Pieces*, pp. 47-67.

therefore, not argue for this position in this chapter, but tease out seven aspects of it that bear on how we understand and apply God's word today.

*One: God's Word addresses the morally ordered world he created*

The God who speaks truly to humanity in the world is the God who created humanity and the world. God's words about us and the world are not the arbitrary commands of an outsider making up a set of rules. His words express the mind and will of the one who made us and everything else. When God, for example, declares faithful marriage to be good and adultery to be evil, this is not a flip-of-the-coin decision on his part as to which of these two actions would be designated 'good' and which 'evil' (as if the opposite could just as easily have been the case if God had decided so). The creation has God's goodness and character woven into it, such that certain actions are good in themselves and have good effects, and others not. As Proverbs 8 puts it, there is a wisdom – a certain way of knowing and living in the world – that was present with God when he made the world, and formed the basis for the deepest structures of creation. The world has a certain moral shape or order to it, one that is not arbitrarily imposed upon it by God but which reflects the very wisdom and character and purposes of the God who created everything.

This means that we can be confident that the world we inhabit now has the same moral shape or order as it always has, because of the eternal character and purposes of God the Creator. In the Bible, God speaks truly and authoritatively about this world that we inhabit. Languages, customs and cultural norms change and vary from place to place, and time to time, but the moral order woven by God into his creation is the same everywhere and at all times. Adultery is as much contrary to that moral order for an 8<sup>th</sup> century BC Hebrew as it is for a 21<sup>st</sup> century Eskimo.

Our conviction about God being the Creator of a coherent, good, morally ordered world (about which the Bible speaks) puts us seriously at odds with the modern, secular critics of the Bible. Their moral vision of the world tends to be more evolutionary – that is, that mankind is constantly progressing towards greater freedom and enlightenment by casting off the outmoded or conventional moral restrictions of an earlier time. Why this should be the case is less clear. Can we simply assume it is all onward and upward? Who is to say that one form of moral order is superior to another, simply because it came next?

*Two: We are all morally disordered people*

There is another universal feature of the good, morally ordered world that the Bible addresses, namely that none of us are good, morally ordered people. We are a race in rebellion against our Creator, and consequently live in a fallen, disordered world under his judgement.

As we observe our world and live in it, we don't do so as neutral spectators. We are players; we have chosen sides. As we think about ourselves and the moral situations that face us, and indeed as we read the Bible and ponder its relevance, we do not do so in a detached, objective manner. Our desires, choices and commitments markedly affect our reasoning. As Ashley Null puts it (summarizing a key anthropological insight of Thomas Cranmer): "What the heart loves, the will chooses and the mind justifies".<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ashley Null, 'Thomas Cranmer's Theology of the Heart', *Trinity Journal for Theology and Ministry 1* (2007), p. 30. For a further Christian exposition of this idea, see S.K. Moroney, *The Noetic Effects of Sin: A Historical and Contemporary Exploration of How Sin Affects Our Thinking*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2000. For a more secular exploration of how moral commitments and decisions influence intellectual

Scripture itself warns us that some will pore over the Scriptures and yet fail to come to the truth, because of their stubbornness and unbelief (John 5:38-40); others will twist or distort the words of Scripture to their own destruction (2 Pet. 3:16); and still others will continue in and even celebrate immorality, despite knowing that God condemns such behaviour (Rom. 1:32).

This means that we should not only expect humans to ignore or reject the Word of God but, apart from the regenerating work of the Spirit, to fail in their reading of it. We should neither be surprised nor unnerved by the existence of diversities of interpretation, or challenges to the Bible's teaching or flat out rejection of God's Word. And as we come to the Bible ourselves to read it, we should examine our hearts and repent of our rebellion against God. The reader that the Bible itself urges us to be is one "who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word" (Isa. 66:2).

### *Three: God's unfolding revelation climaxes in Jesus Christ*

The Bible of course has a lot to say about our common human predicament. But it is not organized like an instruction manual or troubleshooting guide for the world, divided into subjects and categories – like the manual that comes with a digital camera, written by the 'creators' to describe its features and to help us solve problems. The Bible is a story, or rather a history, of redemption, with a beginning, middle and end. God's revelation unfolds or progresses from the creation to fall, through the redemptive promises to Abraham, the events of the Exodus, through the rise and fall of Israel, the prophecies of the One to come, and climactically to the incarnate, crucified, risen and ascended Jesus Christ, the Saving Lord, in whom all God's promises and purposes are Yes and Amen (2 Cor. 1:20). It also addresses the still-to-come future that Jesus' own resurrection has guaranteed. This coming glory is so great it is not even to be compared to the sufferings and distortions of the present time, and it will consist of the renovation of all things, including the redemption of our bodies and the re-ordering of all creation to conform to the Creator's original intention.

In other words, the Bible doesn't address a static creation but a created order that is going somewhere, that has a history and an end. Jesus Christ is the centre and climax of that history, and also its end. And accordingly, as we read the Bible, we very quickly see that it has its own inner logic and shape, its own sense of movement and direction, all centred around Christ and the gospel. It is not a flat a-historical collection of sayings or teachings, but a coherent, unfolding history of salvation.

This is particularly important for understanding the relationship between the Old Testament and the New. According to Jesus and the apostles, all the Old Testament Scriptures are spoken or 'breathed out' by God, and are thus permanently true, authoritative and applicable to God's new covenant people (e.g., Matt. 5:17-21; 22:29-32; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). However, the manner in which they apply now is shaped by the history of which they are part. The Old Testament is not a stand-alone book of rules; it is a book of history and promise, and all that it promised and foreshadowed has now been fulfilled in Christ (Luke 24:44; John 5:39-40; 2 Cor. 1:20).

The apostle Paul speaks of the law as a "guardian" or manager that was in place "until Christ came" (Gal. 3:23-27; 4:1-11), and this is a helpful image for describing its relevance and applicability today. The old covenant laws and statues (like the various food laws and civil regulations) were like the lessons or rules of childhood, which teach

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commitments and theories see Paul Johnston, *Intellectuals: From Marx and Tolstoy to Sartre and Chomsky*. New York: Harper & Row, 1988.

and train and restrain children in a way that is appropriate to their age. They help us learn to identify harmful and inappropriate behaviour and make us conscious of our own sin. But when children reach adulthood they no longer need the strictures and regulations of childhood. Some lessons may still apply quite directly in adulthood (e.g., both children and adults should remember to say ‘Thank you’, although adults should not need to be reminded to); others may no longer be necessary (e.g., an adult doesn’t need to hold someone’s hand when crossing the road, even though the principles of safety and care still apply). Adults have (hopefully) internalized the lessons, and now live them out.

In much the same way, the laws of the old covenant are still applicable, and authoritatively teach, instruct and encourage us in multiple ways. Note, for example, how Paul applies the law about not muzzling an ox (Deut. 25:4) to the paying of Christian pastors in 1 Corinthians 9:8-10 and 1 Timothy 5:18 (see also 1 Cor. 10:11; Rom. 15:4). However, to obey them as if we were living in ancient Israel under the covenant of Moses is to misunderstand the time we are living in and the nature of Christ’s fulfilment of the law.

This is the answer to the jibes of President Bartlett about shellfish and planting crops side by side. A fairly basic knowledge of how the New Testament understands, fulfils and applies the Old Testament would have been able to answer his tirade.

*Four: We live in the same situation as the readers of the New Testament*

At one level the Bible is an ancient book that we read. At a more profound level, however, it is the means by which God himself actively and presently speaks to us to save us. God’s word is living and active in our lives today, not only because his own saving power and presence comes with it, but because we are participants in the realities it describes. Like the Corinthians to whom Paul wrote, we are people “upon whom the end of the ages has come” (1 Cor. 10:11). Like the first Christians, we live in what the New Testament calls “the last days” (e.g., Acts 2:17), the age in which the crucified and risen Jesus Christ has ascended to the right hand of the Father with all authority, and poured out the Spirit on his people, the age in which we are to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the triune name, and teaching them to be obey all that Christ has commanded, while we await his glorious return and the new creation.

That is, while we may often feel removed from the time of the New Testament, because of the passage of time, and by differences in language, culture and custom, we should not see ourselves as observers of the Bible from a distance. We occupy precisely the same salvation-historical position, at the “end of the ages”, as the Christians to whom the New Testament was written (1 Cor. 10:11).

In the Bible, God speaks authoritatively not only to our world, with its created moral order and fallen disorder, but to the very time in which we live in God’s great history of redemption.

*Five: The historical nature of God’s revelation anchors it in the real world in which we still live*

The Bible speaks clearly to us and to all humanity, and has always done so. But it is also true that every part of the Bible is written by particular historical people addressing particular historical circumstances in a particular language and literary genre at a particular historical moment. Reading the Bible, as with reading any document or text, requires a recognition of this obvious fact. In this sense, all reading is an activity of history.

However, the historical particularity of the Bible in no way lessens its abiding relevance. In an important sense, it is in fact the guarantee of it. The Bible addresses real people and circumstances in our world with real words from God, and reveals God's character and purposes and promises within those circumstances. As we read the Bible, we constantly recognize that this is our world being addressed, the world that God has created, with all its order and complexity. We hear God's voice in these words about what is good and true and right in each of these particular instances, and are challenged to heed that voice and put our trust in it and follow it in our own lives and work and family and church and relationships and so on.<sup>57</sup>

We need to be aware (again) of how much this view of history and reality distances us from many of our contemporaries. In the modern secular view of the world, there is no Creator, no moral order, no over-arching history or story of where the world is going, and no Word from God to explain us to ourselves. We are profoundly separated from all other times and places in history; there is no thread to connect us; no common human nature to explain us to each other; no common created order to unite us and orient us to the way of things, and certainly no speaking God to reveal the truth about himself and our world to us.

We may see this strong clash of worldviews as a disadvantage in our discussion of same-sex issues with our non-Christian friends. As we'll explore more fully in chapter 4, we come to the discussion with very different assumptions. However, there is a positive aspect to this difference that is worth teasing out with our friends. The view that same-sex relationships should be endorsed or that same-sex marriage should be legalised usually relies on an appeal to values like equality, justice and love that are seen to be universal and unquestionable – such that pursuing these rights in all cultures around the world is regarded as obligatory. However, why should these particular values of our modern Western democracy be imposed upon, say, the Islamic culture of an Arab state, or the often strongly anti-homosexual beliefs of traditional African culture? Without any common created moral order, let alone any God to render it intelligible to us, why should these particular values be regarded as universal?

The Christian worldview, anchored as it is in the self-revelation of the Creator of all things, can account for and explain why there is a universal moral order, and what that order is. Rationally speaking, the atheist worldview cannot.

*Six: The danger of limiting application through comparing surface particulars*

The influence of the modern view of history leads, in part, to some of the Christian objections to the Bible's relevance we noted above – particularly to those that discount certain biblical passages (such as 1 Cor. 6:9 or 1 Tim. 1:10) on the basis that the historical particulars of the two situations do not sufficiently match our own (e.g., that the specific situation referred to supposedly concerns male prostitution rather than a committed same-sex relationship).

Putting to one side whether the exegetical and historical claims are correct (i.e., whether 1 Corinthians 6:9 does in fact refer to male prostitution – the weight of evidence

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<sup>57</sup> None of this is to imply that good reading is not necessary as we hear God's voice through the different pieces of literature that make up Holy Scripture, nor that prayerful reflection and deliberation can be avoided in determining what thoughts, attitudes or actions are called forth as we apply any particular text to our lives now. But our connection with the text of Scripture, or rather its authority over us, is anchored in the fact that it is addressed to the real history of the created world.

strongly suggests that it does not),<sup>58</sup> the larger concern is with this way of limiting the Bible's application through a close comparison of historical particulars.

The most immediate problem is that this method cuts both ways and too deeply – that is, if we begin to reduce the applicability of the Bible on the basis that our historical situation is different in certain particulars from the circumstances to which the biblical word was addressed, where does one stop? Doubts could be raised in almost every instance as to whether the details of the specific situation addressed in the biblical text match sufficiently closely with our own. One obvious example would be the frequently made claim that loving, long-term same-sex relationships are valuable and good because God frequently affirms and blesses faithful, loving relationships in the Bible. But the relationships that God affirms and blesses in the Bible are in every case monogamous man-woman relationships. And since same-sex relationships differ from these relationships in important particulars, how on the basis of these biblical passages could we with any confidence say that same-sex relationships are good and valuable? There is surely doubt as to whether the particulars correspond.

This points us to the deeper issue with limiting the Bible's application in this way – it fails to seek out with trembling what this particular Word of God is saying to us about the created-moral-order-fulfilled-in-Christ, and how this Word relates to everything else that God says in Scripture. It runs dangerously close to the method of Bible reading that Jesus so trenchantly criticised in his contemporaries, of seeking to avoid or domesticate the force of God's law by tightly limiting its application on the basis of surface particulars (see Matt. 5:17-48).

So while it is possible that the particular cultural expression of Corinthian same-sex practice addressed in 1 Corinthians 6:9 would have been different in various ways from that practised in 15<sup>th</sup> century Paris or 21<sup>st</sup> century Sydney, this does not limit the importance or relevance of this text to our assessment of homosexual practice today – any more than with the other condemnations in the verse (e.g., of the greedy, or the sexually immoral, or of drunkards), even though these ways of living would also have had their own culturally specific expression in 1<sup>st</sup> century Corinth. Would we want to say that the materialistic excesses of Wall St are not addressed by the word 'greedy' since ancient Corinth had no stock market?

In other words, the suspicion that this modern way of reading the Bible raises is that the Bible's ethics do not correspond to something abiding and profound in the moral fabric of the world and in God's purposes for the world, but are a culturally specific imposition upon it.

In response, some may say that an equal danger is simply to read the Bible as a 'flat' and arbitrary set of commands or examples to be followed—so that, for example, if Jesus sent his disciples out "two by two" (Mk. 6:7) then that is also how we should evangelize. However, the issue here is not the historical particularity or otherwise of Jesus' command, but a failure to read—that is, to discern what the text is seeking to or communicate about that historically situated command of Jesus (whether, for example, it is presenting to us an abiding example for Christian ministry or something else). The nature and communicative intention of the text guides our reading and application of it, not the extent to which it is more or less anchored in history.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> See, for example, the arguments in R.J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), pp. 306-332.

<sup>59</sup> There is *much* more that could be said here about the process by which we read both the Bible and the situations that we face in life, and bring the two together. It is not an uncomplicated process—in fact, it is very difficult to reduce it to a formula that covers all eventualities. And yet it is also a common process that

*Seven: The sufficiency of Scripture*

The Bible itself not only affirms its own abiding relevance and authority (for the reasons outlined in the first five convictions above), but also its sufficiency. What God has revealed in and through Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of his plans for the world. The divine Son is God's revelation for the last and climactic phase of the world's history (Heb. 1:1-4), in which we are currently living. All that we need for life and godliness is revealed through him, and the only access we have to him is via his Word in Scripture (2 Pet. 1:3-4, 16-21).

This of course contradicts the claims of some that the Bible has nothing to say to us today about same-sex relationships. In telling us about the nature of what it means to be male and female, what God's purposes are for sex, and what constitutes the true and the good in human sexuality and relationships, the Bible speaks very clearly and challengingly to the moral field that is the modern same-sex debate.

It does so not only in isolated texts or commands, but in the rich and grand sweep of its teaching about God's purposes for us as humans, created as man and woman in his image, with a destiny fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

It is to these grand themes that we now turn.

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Christians have always undertaken. See Oliver O'Donovan, *Self, World and Time* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), pp. 76-80.

## *Chapter Three*

# **Marriage and Sexuality in the Bible**

Having explored the social pressure for change in the definition of marriage in Chapter 1 and the principles for applying the teaching of the Bible in Chapter 2, in this chapter we will focus mostly on marriage as it is portrayed in the Bible and consider homosexual practices in the light of this portrait. The reason for this approach to the issue is quite simple. Marriage as the union of a man and a woman is quite central to the Bible's story. It receives repeated and sustained treatment in the pages of the Bible and is linked to the heart of the Bible's message. Homosexual sex, on the other hand, is not. We must be careful to ensure that the proportions of Scripture are maintained. We do not want to allow something which is actually quite peripheral to the Bible's witness to unduly shape our understanding of something which is much more central.

One of the most important passages of apostolic teaching concerning marriage comes in Ephesians 5:21-33. This passage provides us with an ideal entry point into the grand themes of Scripture and shows us, in particular, (1) how central marriage is to humanity in the world, in relationship with God and each other; (2) what the breakdown of marriage tells us about dysfunctional relationships with God, between humans and their environment; (3) what marriage tells us about God and his actions to reconcile himself to a dysfunctional creation. Each strand will be examined for what it teaches about God's intention for marriage and the terrible consequences of rejecting his will. From our starting point in Ephesians 5, we will see that the marriage bond as depicted in the Garden of Eden is a lasting testimony to God's desire for humanity in the light of its perfection at the return of Jesus Christ.

### **Strand One: Marriage and Humanity in the World**

The first strand of our enquiry concerns what marriage tells us about humanity in the world in relation to God and each other. It is signaled in Ephesians 5:31. In discussing the relationship between a husband and wife, Paul invokes Genesis 2:24 to show that his words are in keeping with God's intentions since the Garden of Eden. To consider the exclusive bonding of a man and a woman as both the appropriate way for a pair of humans to live together and the only relationship fit to have the title marriage is, as Paul puts it, "what nature itself teaches us". This is the common way in which a man and a woman have lived together and out of which families have grown, as the Lord Jesus said, "from the beginning" (Matt. 19:8; Mark. 10:6). Christians, many Jewish interpreters and even Muslims (though they largely reject the text as we have it) look to the opening chapters of Genesis for this interpretation of "natural" phenomenon in order to understand its origin and place within God's intention for creation. The apostle Paul and the Lord Jesus himself set a precedent for Christians by making explicit reference to Genesis. Following both Paul and Jesus back to Genesis to discuss marriage is a normal and necessary part of biblical theology. However, we do so keeping in mind that the creation account is about much more than this particular issue. While we derive our understanding of marriage from the relationship between Adam and Eve, their story represents much more than what

we might come to understand about the relationship of a husband and wife. Ultimately it is only when in the New Testament we are shown the fulfilment to which marriage points that we see this much more. However, to appreciate marriage in the context of God's intentions for creation, we must follow both Paul and Jesus back to a consideration of human beings in the network of relationships as described in Genesis 1–3.

### *United in complementarity*

In stark contrast to the current fascination with “choosing” one's gender, in the Bible's first chapter we read that *God made humankind male and female* (Gen. 1:27). At this basic level human beings, like most other living things, are “to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Gen. 1:28). However, unlike all the other living things, God declares that the man and the woman will be his image in the world and that they should “rule over” the world and “subdue it” as they multiply. From the beginning, then, humanity exists to mediate God's rule to the rest of creation and it does so *as male and female together*. Their maleness and femaleness is necessary for this divine mandate to be carried out, since only a male and a female can “be fruitful” and hence fill the earth. This observation provides us with a basic but important insight into God's intention for human beings: *humanity is complementary at the most fundamental level*. The sexed complementarity of humanity also serves humanity's relationship with God and his will for them in relation to the rest of creation. We see the significance of this in Genesis 2.

The description of humankind in Genesis 2 develops the concept of complementarity through “likeness and difference”. Humanity is like the ground but different because, like the other living things, the human beings have “the breath of life” (v. 7). However, unlike other living things the human beings are created to form or fashion the earth, to “till it and keep it” (v. 15) and in this way they are like God who creates form then content in Genesis 1. Most importantly, and most like God, human beings speak to and about creation. Their speech echoes the divine creative speech in Genesis 1. The man and the woman are the same kind of creature. Indeed, the woman is described as “taken out of man” (2:23). From Genesis 1, we learn that God wills them to be his image *together* as they rule over creation. In Genesis 2 this is confirmed as God describes the woman as the counterpart/complement of the man. They speak and act together in creation for God. Yet they do so in a complementary fashion, as by virtue of their physical distinctions (necessary for multiplying) their union creates a “oneness of flesh”. Their shared humanity encompasses both sameness and difference. The man and the woman have largely similar *human* bodies and therefore share a *human* way of living in the world. This human way of living enables them to blend the distinct male and female elements of their “humanness” into a union that is complementary.

The most obvious distinction between them is their sex – male or female – which will have a governing effect on the gender that is subsequently expressed. These basic or essential physical characteristics will contribute to the development of behavioural patterns and responses that will mean that a man and woman will express themselves differently in the world. This relates to God's design for the man and the woman to unite physically, cognitively, and emotionally to be “one-flesh”. They have a finely-tuned reciprocity so that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. All this points to the important fact that when the woman is created for the man, she does not merely serve the reproductive aspects of humanity. When the man declares that the woman is “bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh” (2:23), she is the only living thing with whom the man can have *communion* according to *his kind* as human. It is more than a simple sex act that unites them. Instead, the man without the woman can never be what God intends for his

image in the world. Since Adam and Eve are representative of humanity, their “one-flesh-ness” represents a fundamental characteristic of humanity. There is no humanity except man being complemented by woman to create a social whole, while at the same time this integral pattern provides the context in which celibate singleness can be valued and guarded.

In their complementary interdependence the man and the woman find their true integrity as individual human beings. But as they do, they create a communion with each other that perfects, completes and fulfils the being of humanity in relation to the ground, the living things, the garden and, most importantly, the Lord. For it is *only with* the woman that the man can be God’s image, and it is *only with* the man that the woman can be God’s image. So again, *to be united in this complementarity is essential for the humanity that God describes as “very good”* (1:31). Such a declaration means much more than functionally good for the purpose of fulfilling the mandate God has given them. Rather, it is a relational or moral good, in that it conforms to God’s desire for humanity to share in fellowship.

*For this reason ...*

Genesis 2:24 speaks of how “a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife”. That is, the subsequent social institution that is called marriage is both a result of and recognition of the intrinsic complementarity between men and women. Whenever a man and a woman are drawn together in this way, the ‘one-flesh-ness’ that results is meant to express the image of God in the world. It is confirmatory of the biblical account that throughout time and all over the world, human societies that are otherwise extraordinarily distinct recognise some public form of marriage. Any alternative to this basic definition is either an historical anomaly or a contemporary idiosyncrasy, as we saw in the case of Margaret Mead in chapter 1. Furthermore, while the family unit created by the one-flesh bond is intended by God to involve same gender relationships between fathers and sons or between sisters, or even extra familial relationships in terms of male or female friendships, there is no place for any kind of sexual bond as an alternative to or in addition to the one-flesh bond between a husband and a wife.

*Sin and the ‘battle of the sexes’*

The ‘ideal’ picture of marriage in Genesis 1 and 2, is, like everything else, marred by the events of Genesis 3. *The man and the woman disobey God*. Aided and abetted by the serpent they give in to envy and the desire for autonomy and choose their own version of creaturely order over God’s. Even though we are told in Genesis 1 that God makes them “like us, in our image” (v. 26) they succumb to the temptation to grasp for more. They want to determine good and evil for themselves (3:6). The immediate result of their envy towards God is estrangement from him and from each other. They fall from being stewards of the Garden in the presence of the Lord to hiding in the bushes in shame, losing their place in God’s creaturely order. But the repercussions of their actions don’t stop there. The Lord restores the creational order between the sexes, for despite the fall this is still God’s world. However, living as male and female in God’s world will now involve pain. As Paul describes it in Romans 1:24, “God gave them over” to the futility of living in *his* world *their* way. The woman will give birth with pain and the man will work the ground with pain. The most significant consequence though, for our discussion, is the effect on their marriage.

The Lord tells the woman: “Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule

over you” (Gen. 3:16). The essential and harmonious complementarity between maleness and femaleness has been fractured. They will continue as one flesh, but they will struggle against one another to determine “whose” flesh they will be most like. The word used to describe the woman’s “desire” for her husband is the same as the word used to describe sin’s “desire” to master Cain (Gen. 4:6). The woman’s default reaction will be to try to make them both live in conformity with *her* sinful desires. In comparison and reaction, the man will seek to dominate his wife. His default attitude towards her will be to try and make them both live in conformity with *his* sinful desires.

The primary consequence of human rebellion against God is death (Gen. 2:17; cf. Gen. 5 *passim*). Death casts a shadow over all human living such that Paul can speak of us being “dead in our transgressions and sins” (Eph. 2:1). Human beings are completely corrupted in mind and body as a consequence of sin. No aspect of human life is untouched by corruption and death. In terms of human society (which both man and woman together represent), the blessing of being ‘one flesh’ is corrupted by a struggle against each other’s distinctiveness. This struggle is profoundly futile, for their distinctions, like their unity, are a gift from God over which they, as creatures, do not have total power. Nevertheless, it is an insistent, painful struggle. The man will seek to force the woman to be “the kind of woman” he wants. The woman will seek to manipulate the man into being “the kind of man” she wants. As they do, they will inevitably fall short of properly displaying God’s image in the world, an image that requires them both to be ‘the kind’ God made them to be.

After the fall, man and woman continue to be drawn together but their disorderly desires are an ever present problem. As early as Genesis 4:19–24 we are introduced to Lamech whose place in the line from Cain features two things – polygamy and violence worse than his ancestor. No editorial comment is made regarding this situation, but the man addresses his wives with a boast about his violent deeds, perhaps implying a threat to them as well.

Perhaps surprisingly, although polygamy seems to stand opposed to the Genesis ideal of one man and one woman in marriage (affirmed by Jesus in Matthew 19), polygamy is never explicitly condemned in either Old or New Testaments. The levirate system (Lev. 25) even institutionalised the possibility of a man having multiple wives, albeit as a form of social security in Ancient Near Eastern cultures. Furthermore, according to the Law, a man was required to support his brother’s family and is not released from such responsibility unless it would only make the situation worse (Ruth 4). The practice of taking concubines (Gen. 25:1ff) also existed, although a concubine was probably understood to be “an additional or secondary wife” who enjoyed a different status either in regards to her children’s inheritance or her own family’s ability to provide a dowry.<sup>60</sup> Significantly, in comparison to the nations, the Hebrews seldom used the language of master or owner for the relation of the husband to the wife. In fact, Hosea places the expressions “my husband” and “my master/Baal” in sharp contrast (Hos. 2:16).

What we do find in the Old Testament, however, is that there are no recorded instances of polygamy existing harmoniously. Sarah and Hagar squabble (Gen. 16:4; 21:9-10), Rachel and Leah fight over Jacob (Gen. 29 and 30), Peninnah taunts Hannah (1 Sam. 4:6) and ultimately, of course, Solomon’s many wives lead him astray (1 Kings 11:4). To the extent that these episodes represent masculine dominance and the destructive effects of sin in human culture, they also support the claim that disruption to the balance of marriage undermines the ability of human beings to live in communion within the world and before the Lord.

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<sup>60</sup> John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*. Vol. 3: *Israel's Life* (Downer's Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2009), p. 351.

The desire for dominance is not exclusively a male problem, even if it is predominantly so. Indeed the first reference to a desire for mastery is associated with Eve. This was part of her legacy to the generations which followed. The daughters of Lot seduce him (Gen. 19:30–36), Sarai distracts Abram from the Lord’s promise (Gen. 16:1–4), Rebecca masterminds the deception of Isaac (Gen. 27:5ff) and, most famously, Delilah deceives and betrays Samson (Judg. 16). Each episode of greater or lesser consequence involves the woman seeking mastery over “her man” and frustrating both the promises of God and the manner in which humans are designed to fulfil God’s mandate. The struggle between men and women in marriage and human society is one of the tragic consequences of sin that we come across in the Bible’s story, even when the ordinary bonds are upheld; i.e., even when husbands and wives remain faithful to their one-flesh bond.

We now turn our attention to another consequence of sin for relationships – infidelity. As we shall see, infidelity occurs where men and women dilute, fragment or abandon the one-flesh bond of God’s design by joining themselves to others in increasingly disorderly ways. Infidelity not only casts a shadow over the whole story of God and his people, but it is here that the Bible locates the phenomenon of homosexual practice.

### **Strand Two: Marital Infidelity as the Story of Humanity with God**

The Genesis accounts show that marriage signifies much more for humanity than simply the creation of a one-flesh bond between a man and a woman. The health of marriages is an indicator of the health of wider human society. The second important aspect marriage to which Paul draws out attention in Ephesians 5 is the extent to which marriage serves as an analogy of God’s relationship to his covenant people. Thus, Paul compares the relationship between a husband and wife to the relationship between Christ and the church. The two supreme Old Testament examples of this analogy are Ezekiel and Hosea. In both contexts, marital *infidelity* or the deliberate compromising of the exclusive one-flesh relationship is clearly on view.

#### *Sin and disorderly bonding – promiscuity*

In Ezekiel 16 (cf. Jer. 31) the prophet is instructed to explain to Jerusalem the true cost of her “detestable practices” (v. 2). What follows is an allegorical account of the Lord’s life with Israel in the form of a man wooing an abandoned and unclean woman. The Lord’s compassion and generosity transform the unwanted and despised offspring of Canaan into the “exceedingly beautiful” princess (v. 13). Tragically, the princess degenerates into an insatiable adulteress taking all the good gifts given her, including children, and giving or sacrificing them to foreign men. The prophet’s message is that despite all the riches and blessings that the Lord had poured out on Israel, her only response was idolatrous adultery of the most despicable kind.

The implications of this analogy are that the infidelity of Israel represents not only a breach of God’s orderly bond but also a disorderly bonding with other gods. Israel’s infidelity towards the Lord is represented by a severe compromise of the one-flesh communion envisaged by God for husbands and wives. That is, Israel was meant to be joined to the Lord, like a wife to her husband. Instead Israel ignored her relationship with him, joining herself and consequently debasing herself to and with the nations around her and their idols. As she does so, the unfaithful wife pollutes the bond that she has with her actual husband. Similarly, in the opening chapters of Hosea the prophet is given the

extraordinary command from God to personally enact the dreadful state of the covenant between the Lord and Israel: “Go and marry a promiscuous wife and have children of promiscuity, for the land is committing blatant acts of promiscuity by abandoning the LORD” (Hos. 1:2).

The opening chapters then chronicle the awful testimony that the prophet’s life has become as he lives out this parable of the unfaithfulness of Israel and the righteous anger of the Lord (3:1). On the one hand, the children born out of wrongful joining bear in their names a catalogue of complaints from the Lord against Israel. The Lord declares that Israel will be punished and shamed before her adulterous lovers. On the other hand, the Lord is determined to preserve his promise to Abraham. So he woos her again, pictured again by Hosea taking his wife back to his home. In keeping with his self-exposition in Exodus 33, the Lord is gracious and compassionate towards Israel, the promiscuous adulteress, showing mercy even while not allowing the guilty to go unpunished.

In both Ezekiel and Hosea, the Spirit uses the fundamental institution of human society, marriage – and especially its dysfunction – as an analogy of the wretched state of Israel’s relationship to the Lord, the God of promise. The basic message is clear: idolatry is like adultery. For the purposes of this essay, we can also say that adultery in marriage is comparable to idolatry towards the true and living God. Any action by either partner that compromises the exclusive one-flesh relationship will be as serious to God as having “other gods before me” (Exod. 20:3; cf. Rom.1:25). Marital infidelity dilutes, fractures or fragments the one-flesh relationship of marriage that God intended as the basic unit of human society. All of human society perpetrates infidelity in its idolatrous response to God. In this way, sexual infidelity is one idolatrous form — a particular and intensely personal form — of the larger pattern of disorderly behaviour.

#### *Sin and disorderly bonding – perverting the gift of life*

At this point, and in light of the current discussion, it seems fair to ask, “What about homosexual practices? Why aren’t they more prominent in all this talk about marriage?” Despite the impression conveyed by popular media, same sex practices are not at all prominent in the unfolding narrative of the Bible, just as they are in fact peripheral to ordinary life today (despite regularly rehearsed statistical data which has repeatedly proven to be manipulated and inflated). Within the larger category of disorderly bonding, however, there are a number of less frequent but more consequentially serious examples that occur on the periphery of the biblical story and — as we shall now see — homosexual sex is one of them.

Genesis 6:1–4 sketches a joining between “the daughters of men” (humans) and “the sons of God” (angels). It seems that a God-determined boundary between heaven and earth has been violated in this union that leads to widespread wickedness on the earth. This prompts the terrible words: “the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and he was grieved in his heart” (Gen. 6:6). Whether the joining described in this passage is an affront to heaven or a flaunting of creaturely distinctions, the consequences mark the lowest ebb in the story of creaturely rebellion thus far and warrant the prosecution of extreme divine justice.

Later, in Leviticus 18, the Israelites are warned: “None of you shall approach any one of his close relatives to uncover nakedness” (Lev. 18:6). This rather euphemistic statement implies that there is to be no joining of a sexual kind between close relatives, either from within a single marriage bond/family unit or across a bond with “in-laws”. When men and women engage in incest, the one-flesh communion that creates a new family (Gen. 2:24) is compromised in a way that perverts familial structures and the good

that God intends for his people.

Leviticus 18 includes references to sex acts that denigrate the union between a husband and wife and God's intention for that union. We see a progressive rise in the level of condemnatory terms from dishonor, to wickedness, to uncleanness, to profanity, to abomination and finally perversion. At the extreme end are located homosexual sex and bestiality. While the whole list is mentioned in the context of the practices of the nations whom the Israelites are to drive out, with the exception of child sacrifices to Molech (v. 21) there is no reason to think that they are exclusively or necessarily cultic. Nevertheless, their seriousness should be self-evident to the people the Lord has redeemed. This is how the nations which stand under judgment have behaved. These practices are how they defiled themselves and these are why they were being ejected from the land. Furthermore, if this behavior was adopted by members of God's chosen people, it would be a repudiation of their covenant bond with the Lord himself, a challenge to the promises made to Abraham which speak so intimately of family and descendants (esp. Gen. 17:11-14). A disregard for the blessing of life that comes from the Lord alone is a blatant rejection of his election of Israel as the children of Abraham. It is also worth noting in passing that the seriousness of the sexual sins in Leviticus 18 far outweighs the seriousness of a breach of the food laws, as evidenced by the consequences in each case.

As we saw in the opening chapter, the public discourse has now reached the stage that even to disagree with calls to change the definition of marriage to include sexual relationships between persons of the same sex is widely portrayed as bigotry at best and hate speech at worst. Nevertheless, Christians must hold fast to the biblical reality that same sex acts are on the ragged edge of the tapestry that is our disorderly humanity. When the one-flesh bond of marriage is distorted and perverted as indicated in these last examples then we must expect broader human culture to reflect similar distortions and perversions.

#### *An apostolic summary of the story of sex and sin*

We can tie together the first two threads of our biblical inquiry into marriage and sex with the help of Paul's interpretation of disorderly human behaviour in Romans 1. As we have seen, rebellion against God has produced two basic distortions in male-female relationships that can be encapsulated in marital dysfunction. The first is the struggle for dominance rather than complementarity, and the second is disregard for marital fidelity that leads to various disorderly bondings. Together the faults represent the failure of men and women to image God to the world. Both of these dysfunctions feature prominently in Romans 1.

In 1:21-32 Paul explains that disregard for the creator has perverted humanity and its ability to relate rightly to the world and to each other. He draws a relatively straight line from rebellion against God to futile thinking (vv. 21-22), to idolatry (v. 23), to sexual depravity (v. 24) and finally to same sex practices (vv. 26-27). The list is a succinct summary of our journey from the central breakdown between God, Adam and Eve to the periphery of disorderly bonding that is homosexual sex.

In addition, Paul makes some connections that add greater clarity to our observations. We observed a latent sinful desire in men and women to make each other in their own image – the futile attempt to live in *God's* world *their* way. We also observed an association between idolatry and adultery as comparable forms of infidelity towards God. In Romans 1:21-32, Paul directly connects idolatrous worship of the human image (vv. 23-25), sexual depravity (v. 24) and finally lesbian and homosexual sex (vv. 26-27). The implication is that not only are these same sex practices the logical extreme of

disorderly human culture, they are also the polar opposite of what God intends for the complementary union between men and women; the union we call marriage.

### **Strand Three: The Enduring Purpose of God for Marriage**

We now bring together all that we've seen in the larger Bible story with that story's fulfilment in the Lord Jesus. Ephesians 5:22-33 allows us to see how marriage testifies to our heavenly Father's desire to reconcile himself to his rebellious creatures. Moving out from this passage we will see that the complementary one-flesh bond between a husband and wife is a living testimony to God's eternal purposes. Through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, the gospel holds the promise of a new humanity, free from our disordered desires for dominance and infidelity.

#### *The place of marriage in a new humanity*

Throughout this chapter we have treated human society as an expansion of or an extension from the basic unit of marriage in which man and woman could together represent God to the world. In the gospel, God has revealed that the Lord Jesus Christ is "the image of the invisible God" in the world; "the radiance of his glory" (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3). This means that the Lord Jesus fulfils the role of representing God to the world that was originally given to the man and the woman (Heb. 2:9-10). In a very important sense he has become the 'basic unit' of humanity in the world. However, the apostolic message is that in Christ a new humanity has been created (Eph. 2:15). The new humanity expands out from Jesus to include all those who are "in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17). The old ethnic, class or gender differences that prevented sinners from receiving the promises of God have been abolished (Gal. 3:28). All in Christ now have access to the Father and enjoy the blessings of the gospel. Now, in the power of the Spirit, God is transforming us into Christ's image (2 Cor. 3:18). This new humanity is gathered to God the Father in the church, which the New Testament refers to as the body of Christ (Eph. 4:15). So God's desire for fellowship with humanity, begun in the Garden of Eden but fractured by sin, is brought to its completion and perfection through the Lord Jesus and his body, the church.

We need to be careful not to misapply these passages in ways that do not fit with either their immediate context or the wider biblical theology of humanity which we have only been able to sketch briefly in the earlier sections of this chapter. Tragically, some have taken the promise of a new humanity in Christ as a call to abandon marriage (1 Cor. 7:10-11), or even to regard it as ungodly (1 Tim. 4:3). They suggest the one flesh complementary bond has somehow been superseded by our union with Christ. Worse still, others have asserted that on the basis of passages like Galatians 3:28 the new humanity in Christ is not only gender neutral but also perfectly commensurate with homosexual or lesbian sexual relationships.

Of course, we must not diminish the glorious salvation that the Father has achieved for humanity in Christ Jesus. In Christ, divine life and creaturely life come together and by the Spirit we participate in the first fruits of this new humanity, becoming "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4). Hence, Christ and his body are "one flesh" in a way that can only be described as "a profound mystery" (Eph. 5:31-32). We can understand humanity as glorified by God because the Spirit seals us as his sons and daughters (Rom. 8:14-16; 2 Cor. 1:22) and constitutes us as the body of Christ, those conformed to his image (Col. 3:10; cf. 1:16-17).

The constitution of a human body is an important metaphor used by Paul to describe interpersonal relationships. By comparing the spiritual bond between Christ and the

church with the natural connections within a human body Paul is able to give concrete substance to the spiritual relationship between the Lord Jesus and his people. In addition, the metaphor also serves to depict the essential connectedness that the followers of Jesus are expected to have with one another in the Spirit (Eph. 4:4-15).

So, we should expect God's Spirit working in the members of Christ's body to overcome the sinful desires we noted above in strand one and achieve a form of communion in a church (1 Cor. 12:13-26). Furthermore, in the power of the Spirit we have the promise of a new fidelity to God in contrast to what we observed in strand two. The Spirit applies the benefits of Christ's death to us and gives us "a new heart" (Ezek. 36:26-27) so that we are now able to call on God as our "Abba! Father!" (Rom. 8:15). Therefore, the new humanity that we anticipate for the new creation will be a corporate experience the likes of which we have not previously known (Rev. 21:1-4).

Rather than contracting, the significance of marriage in creation actually expands with this promise of the new creation in Christ Jesus. As we saw above, the one-flesh bond between a husband and a wife was integral to the creator's desire to set up his image in the world. Marriage, in fact, played the primary role from which the rest of humanity expanded. In the gospel we learn that now through Christ Jesus and in the church "the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:8-11). The purpose is both eternal and realized in Christ Jesus our Lord. So the significance of the original institution expands because, unlike the church, marriage is both a testimony to God as creator *and* God as saviour (a point repeated in Ephesians 5:22ff.). Let's then take a closer look at the passage to see how this works out in greater detail.

### *The revelation of God in marriage*

From Ephesians 5:22 onwards, Paul understands the complementary one-flesh marriage relationship as an analogy of the union between Christ and the church. Consequently, wives are to act towards their husbands as the church relates to Christ and husbands are to act towards their wives as Christ does towards the church. The husband is the wife's "head" as Christ is the head of his body, the church. The wife is to submit to the husband as the church submits to Christ (vv. 23-24). Paul expands the analogy by drawing an analogy between the husband's love of his wife and Christ's love of the church which explains his saving work for her:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish (vv. 25-27).

Just as the reality of the church reveals the *eternal purposes* of God in the world, the reality of human marriage is specifically designed to reflect the *redemptive means* by which God's wisdom is made known – through the loving and sacrificial character of Christ's ministry for the church in the world.

Even when Paul moves to describe a seemingly more mundane reason for the husband's way of loving his wife – i.e., "he who loves his wife loves himself" (v. 28), he maintains that it is still Christ-like (vv. 29-30).

In the last part of this passage, Paul directly appeals to the Genesis 2:24 prescription for marriage (Eph. 5:31-32). He makes a definite link between the Genesis one-flesh bond and the mysterious unity between Christ and the church: "This mystery is profound, but

I am talking about Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:32). There is a special profundity then to the manner in which the marriage bond is like Christ and the church. Since the Garden it has been God’s intention that a husband should consider his wife to be “his own body” – Adam said as much of Eve (Gen. 2:23) and hence they became “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24).

Ephesians 5:31-32 allows us to see afresh the theological dimension to marriage. The bond between a man and woman which always had the potential to represent God in the world (cf. Gen. 1:26-28) finds its deepest meaning in the way it mirrors the relationship between Christ and his body. This fits with the way this common human institution is used in the Old Testament, where the prophets use marriage as a concrete analogy of the state of the relationship between the Lord and Israel. However, the significance of the testimony of marriage is that the *eternal purposes* of God are being made known in the world. This gives marriage an extraordinary importance for God’s activities in the world but, at the same time, it enables us to understand something extraordinary about God’s intentions for marriage.

In the first section of this chapter we observed that the truth about marriage has been known and understood “from the beginning” (Matt. 19:4, 8) — that is, in the account of the man and the woman in Genesis 2. The associations that we have drawn between the marriage bond and the eternal purposes of God suggest that there is a prior “beginning” from which our understanding of marriage must come. That beginning is in the eternal mystery of God’s will that is summed up in the person and work of Christ (Eph. 1:9–10). The origin, present meaning and ultimate end of creation belong to God the Creator, who makes that meaning known by his Spirit in the biblical testimony to the risen Lord Jesus. Hence by its association with the revelation of God in Christ Jesus, the meaning of marriage is likewise drawn up through Christ into the wisdom of the creator – since all things were created through him (John 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-17). Consequently, we must now discuss the definition of marriage above and beyond the context of ‘the Garden’ (Gen. 2) to include the purposes of the gospel of the Lord Jesus that will be revealed in ‘the City’ (Rev. 22). In other words, it is now insufficient to approach the *natural origin* as though we were untouched by what God has revealed to us about the *ultimate purpose*. In fact, we are required to re-read the Genesis origin in light of the eternal origin that has been revealed in Christ and the church.

What does this mean for our definition of marriage and its significance for a Christian understanding of sexuality?

When Paul aligns the relationship between a husband and a wife with the spiritual union between Christ and the church, he creates a connection between the complementary bond described in Genesis and actions that have their origin in the eternal being or life of the triune God. God’s will is a perfect “self-expression” because he only ever acts as he determines to act and his acts are perfectly in line with his intentions. When God acts to perfectly reveal himself in the Lord Jesus, we receive in the Lord Jesus a perfect insight into God’s inner life. When Paul associates God’s acts in Christ with marriage then the concept of a man and a woman coming together as one flesh serves the purpose of anticipating and then symbolizing God’s plan. From Ephesians 1:9-10 we learn that his plan involves uniting himself with creation through Christ for the “summing up of all things”. While God’s decision to be present to the world in and through his incarnate Son is a decision made in freedom, it is by no means an arbitrary one. The Father creates the world for his eternal Son in order to sum up creation in the glory of the risen and ascended Jesus Christ. This is why the marriage metaphor is so significant. This is also why the form in which marriage is given to us is so significant.

Since God’s actions in Christ Jesus are an expression of the very being of his triune nature, everything else that is summed up in and by Christ Jesus is equally purposeful

when understood in relation to Christ, for “in him all things hold together” (Col. 1:17). Hence, it is possible to see that God’s will for the man and the woman is a creaturely expression of his saving acts as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So just as God’s single intention for created reality was to reveal his glory in the spiritual union of Christ and the church, in the same way, it is essential to the expression of God’s mysterious will that the one flesh relationship of marriage be between a man and a woman. *Only a man and woman united in one flesh can reveal the mystery that is the relationship between Christ and the church in the eternal purposes of God.*

Therefore, above and beyond all the things that we have examined in this chapter, Christians must define marriage theologically – as an image of Christ and the church. In light of this, the necessity of the marriage complementarity between a man and a woman includes but exceeds the production of children. It includes but exceeds the physical and cognitive needs of men and women. The marriage relationship of the man and the woman includes and exceeds an analogy for the state of the covenant relationship between God and his people in the history of salvation. The union of a man and a woman is a profound testimony to the Father’s saving activity in the Son and through the Spirit.

So of course we expect a marriage bonded in the gospel to overcome, in the power of the Spirit, our anti-complementary desires that work against marriage. Likewise, the husband and the wife are prompted towards a new fidelity in keeping with Christ Jesus’ sacrifice. However, the complementarity which on so many levels (physical, emotional, intellectual and sexual) constitutes and sustains the marriage bond makes clear why there is no place for homosexual or lesbian practices. No matter what they might be thought to contribute to individual identity, such practices stand in stark contrast to the glorious potential of a gospel-bonded marriage between a husband and a wife.

### **A Postscript for those who are not married**

It is possible that the account of marriage given in this chapter might seem discouraging for those who never marry or whose circumstances have meant they are currently unmarried (e.g. widows). Therefore, for all of us who are Christians, it is important to remind ourselves that our hope is in the resurrection of Christ Jesus and the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:23). In the coming age, the practice of marrying and giving in marriage will give way to the final revelation of Christ and his bride (Matt. 22:30; Luke 20:34; Rev. 21:1-4). All of God’s children will participate in that wedding and enjoy that marriage forever. Until then, unmarried men and women may find their solace in the words of Jesus: “Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). This is all the more the case for those who choose to remain unmarried because of their struggle with same-sex attraction. However, for each of us struggling to live godly lives in Christ Jesus, a foretaste of that rest should be found as we participate in the body of Christ Jesus. Here we “bear one another’s burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). We will address the possibilities for ministry practice and church culture directly and in more detail in the final chapter of this book.

For now, however, it is important to acknowledge and endorse the possibility and value of remaining unmarried for the Lord. This is a subject that Paul touches on in 1 Corinthians 7:8-9 and 32-35, as he makes a number of remarks to the church in Corinth concerning marriage prior to the resurrection. Without casting any aspersions on God’s gift of marriage, Paul indicates the positive alternatives of life for the unmarried. He stresses that the call to Christ ought not be an occasion for Christians to change their relational state of life for the sake of that call (1 Cor. 7:17). However, due to the temporal significance of Christ’s resurrection for all creaturely life (1 Cor. 7:29–31), the unmarried

may participate more fully in the affairs of the Lord. The perfection of humanity in Christ and the church implies that it is by no means necessary for men and women to marry in order to participate purposefully in the church and in human society. In whatever relational state of life God calls a person, exactly in that position they can “remain with God” (1 Cor. 7:24).

In an environment of perceived crisis it would be very easy for Christians to over-react in either of two directions. We have already mentioned those who mistakenly forbid marriage or even consider it as ungodly given the priority of serving the Lord. Yet it would be just as wrong to idolize marriage as the only way to live in service of the Lord Jesus. To do this would be to forget the warnings about family from Jesus himself (Mk. 10:37). Paul also reminds us that it is possible to live unmarried for the Lord. Perhaps the more that *this* alternative way of living in the world for single men and women is affirmed and celebrated in our churches, the greater will be the contribution that married couples can make towards bearing the burdens of others.

## Chapter Four

# Arguing in the Public Sphere

This chapter deals with the question of how to talk about issues concerning of human sexuality when there is no agreement that the Scripture has authority. Believers will often find themselves discussing issues surrounding so called ‘gay marriage’ with others who do not share a Christian starting point — members of their family, friends, workmates or even in the media. In these situations the arguments and material in other sections of this report will not be easily communicated or understood. How do we proceed when there is so much less common ground? If you can’t appeal to the Bible how far can you get?

It is important to think about what you are aiming to achieve in such discussions. Of course, it would be great to be able to convince our discussion partner to change their mind. But that need not be the only goal in such discussions, and is often also simply unachievable in the short term. It is still worthwhile to conduct such discussions with the purpose that the other person might at least understand where you are coming from and the reasonableness of your approach, even if they remain unconvinced. Given some of the tone of recent debates, just to show that the Christian objection to ‘gay marriage’ is at least not driven by mindless prejudice, but has a coherent nature and a positive goal, is an achievement worth striving for, though we will, of course, be praying for much more.

It is also important to keep in mind that reason by itself is not decisive in how people come to and hold moral convictions, for intuitions play a major role as well.<sup>61</sup> Simply seeking to persuade someone by strict logic may prove singularly ineffective. It is not for nothing that Peter urges his readers to answer those demanding explanations of them “with gentleness and reverence” (1 Pet. 3.15-16). If someone is to be persuaded, there needs to be a deep conviction at the heart level brought about by the Spirit of God, which requires Christian conversation to be conducted “in the hope that God will grant them repentance, and that they will come to their senses” (2 Tim. 2:25–26). How the discussion is conducted is as important as the content, as we seek to proclaim Christ and the gospel of grace even as we address such a difficult and controverted subject.

### **Beware of icebergs**

We now turn to the terms of the discussion itself. There is something iceberg-like about the debate over ‘gay marriage’. At one level it looks like it is about a simple, if deeply felt, question of a moral principle like equality, or some other such matter. In fact, as with an iceberg, that which is visible is only a small proportion of what is really there. Beneath the surface of any position on the matter lies a whole series of deeper assumptions and commitments. These are often hidden even from the person who holds a particular view, let alone the one who is disagreeing with them. This is one reason why the Christian believer may find it extremely difficult in arguing with others, or even knowing what is to be said.

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<sup>61</sup> For a stimulating discussion of this from a secular social psychology perspective see the discussion in Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*. London: Penguin, 2012.

On top of this the believer will be discussing this issue in a context where the terms and assumptions of the debate are already skewed against them. It is not just that a whole series of deeper assumptions and commitments lie beneath any position, but that in our society the assumptions and commitments that support the pro 'same sex marriage' point of view are simply (and unconsciously) taken for granted as obvious. Even the terms used to describe the question like 'gay marriage' and especially 'heterosexual marriage', let alone 'marriage equality' beg many questions.

This means that the first thing the believer must do in discussing the issue in the public sphere, whether in the media or amongst family, friends or work mates, is to listen in depth to what others are saying, both to what their concerns are as well as the take-it-for-granted-assumptions behind what is being said. Furthermore, it is important not to be intimidated in the process.

For example, the issue is often presented as though we all know what marriage is, and the only matter in dispute is whether same sex couples should be allowed also to be part of it. When the issue is presented this way the case will revolve around issues of equality of opportunity or of worth. The use of such terms as 'Marriage Equality' locks in this interpretation of the question and effectively silences any other way of looking at it.

A good example of this approach to the question can be found in the editorial of *The Sydney Morning Herald* on 5 November 2013.

The *Herald* believes same-sex marriage must come, so as to afford Australian homosexuals in love the same compassion, legal status and social acceptance as enjoyed by heterosexuals.

And the editorial backed that approach by quoting a homosexual journalist: "It comes down to whether you think I am good enough to be married to the person I love." The question is framed, as it so often is in this debate, not in terms of what marriage is and what it is for, but simply in terms of whether a particular person is good enough to be afforded that which others already have. Put this way the Christian believer has already lost the debate.

Even when the question is presented in a more general way, rather than about the worth of a particular individual, Christian believers finds themselves in something of a dilemma. For what is really being asked for is that homosexual attachments be publicly recognised, by legislation, as no different from and equally necessary to society as legitimate heterosexual attachments. As we have seen in *The Sydney Morning Herald* editorial, however, this deeper question is often presented in terms of the personal acceptance and dignity of homosexual persons, and not what it really is, a question about the meaning of marriage or the morality of homosexual acts. For the reasons outlined in the previous two chapters, the Christian believer is unable to accept this view of homosexual attachments, irrespective of what the law may or may not say, and irrespective of what civil rights and freedoms may or may not otherwise be properly granted to citizens.

### **Explaining the deep Christian logic**

But how should the believer argue and defend such views? Inevitably they flow from a biblical understanding of God's will and purposes for human sexual behaviour. As the previous chapter made clear, this is not simply a question of the meaning of a few isolated biblical texts but arises from a grasp of the sweep of the biblical story and from an in-depth understanding of the nature of humanity before God. With those who share a

common Christian understanding it is relatively easy to argue and defend such views, although even within the general Christian community it can be remarkably difficult to get assent to the classic Christian position. However, with people who do not share a common Christian understanding, and particularly with those who reject the Bible's teaching, the matter becomes much more difficult. Here, without an operation of the Spirit of God, direct appeals to the teaching of the Bible will fall on deaf ears.

This does not mean that nothing more can be said. There is still the opportunity, hopefully to convince, but at least to explain what the Christian faith is and how its moral judgments on sexual behaviour are formed. In an environment where dissent from the prevailing approval of homosexual acts is caricatured as 'homophobic' prejudice, understanding is a worthwhile achievement even if agreement is elusive.

This is where it is helpful to have as much understanding as possible as to why homosexual sex is forbidden by God is really helpful. God blesses sexual marriage between a man and his wife (Gen. 1:28). He also blesses an unmarried life lived in sexual abstinence (Matt. 19:12). But he condemns sexual acts between unmarried persons of the opposite sex and between those of the same sex. The believer loves and trusts God and so keeps his word, believing it is for their good, even when it is not clear why God may have said what he has. But to grasp something of the logic behind the biblical prohibition deepens and strengthens such trusting obedience and aids understanding in the unbeliever. That is why a deeper understanding of the biblical and theological issues presented in chapters 2 and 3 is important, even when arguing with someone who gives little credence to the Bible or Christian theology as such.

### **Uncovering underlying differences about what marriage is**

A second approach to discussing 'gay marriage' is to highlight the underlying question of what marriage is in the first place. Rather than assuming a take-it-for-granted common understanding of marriage and then asking if same sex couples can be admitted to it, it is important to draw attention to the significant underlying differences between your and their understandings of marriage.<sup>62</sup> That there are differences may well be something of which your conversation partner is not fully aware.

The argument for same-sex marriage is based on a particular understanding of marriage; namely, that it is no more than the legal public recognition of a committed sexual and loving relationship. This understanding is rarely argued for but simply assumed. Consequently, all that is thought to be in dispute is whether the people involved can be of the same sex. If this is the only relevant question, it is easily asserted that to deny same-sex couples such participation is discriminatory and unjust.

However, it is well worth asking if this view of marriage is sound and on what basis it is held. Marriage has existed in human experience long before it was legislated in our society. It is worth pausing to ask why. What purpose and role does it play in human affairs? Why have it at all? Why have a public recognition of such a relationship? Of course, there are clear answers to these questions in the Scriptures. But if God has ordered his creation (as Scripture reveals he has) then, despite the fall, we can reasonably expect to find good in what he commands 'out there' in the world. Furthermore, what alternative explanation for the institution of marriage does the person who does not take the Bible seriously have? (Notice this is a question about the public purpose of marriage, not the

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<sup>62</sup> As is helpfully argued from a Roman Catholic viewpoint by William May, *Getting the Marriage Conversation Right: A Guide for Effective Dialogue*. Steubenville: Emmaus, 2012.

private reasons that people have for getting married.)<sup>63</sup> Marriage, as it has existed long before any move to ‘admit’ same sex couples arose, is understood only to involve a man and a woman. Why would a man and a woman’s exclusive sexual relationship be recognised by wider society and be intended to be life long?

One answer is that this certainly makes sense if the primary purpose of marriage as a public institution is to unite a man and a woman with each other and with any children born from their union. As such it is the societal institution that unites children with their (biological) mothers and fathers. It does this by the legal presumption of paternity, which means that children born to a married woman are presumed to be the children of her husband. On this understanding a central purpose of marriage as a public institution involves clarifying parental rights over children and attaching children to their parents. Especially from the point of view of the wellbeing of the child, this is important. It has had many ancillary purposes, but this has been at its heart. This would explain why an institution like marriage can be found in every known society.

The obvious objection to understanding the meaning of marriage as an institution like this is that not every marriage produces children. That is true. (Although it might be pointed out that, from point of view of children, it is also true that every child has parents.) But the absence of children from some marriages does not in itself change the meaning and social value of marriage as a public institution. If children were never involved it is hard to see why adult sexual relationships would be any of the state’s or society’s business. As one writer has put it: “What we now call marriage would be nothing more than a government registry of friendships”.<sup>64</sup> But if that were so why would every known society have an institution like marriage?

### **Questioning the case to change the meaning of marriage**

Changing the Federal Marriage Act to allow for ‘gay marriage’ will, in fact, turn marriage into a government and societal register of sexual friendships. This will necessarily change what marriage is, not simply add to it. The case for this change is much harder to make than the simple call to end so called discrimination. Why should the meaning of marriage be changed? By what authority? What long-term consequences may flow, now that the link between child and parent is no longer secured by marriage? Indeed in a gay marriage it is impossible that the couple be the natural biological parents of any children. Once the state intervenes to change so basic an institution as marriage – one that existed before the state itself, who knows what unintended consequences will emerge? These questions should be put with vigour and gentleness to the proponent of ‘gay marriage’.

If marriage is the public institution that unites a man and a woman with each other and any children born from their union, then denying a same sex couple ‘the right to marriage’ is not unjust discrimination. No person of the appropriate age is prohibited by law from marrying. Other than kinship restrictions, there are no exclusions to marriage. It is just that marriage is a particular institution with a particular structure. Anyone can become married who is able to fulfil the conditions that make marriage marriage. The so-called restriction is not arbitrary to the institution, as the restriction against mixed race couples would certainly be, but rather essential to it.

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<sup>63</sup> This way of formulating the question and much else in this section owes a great deal to the insights of Jennifer Roback Morse, “Privatising Marriage is Impossible” (April 2, 2012). Found at: <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/?s=morse>. Accessed 7 July, 2014.

<sup>64</sup> Morse, ‘Privatising Marriage’.

### **If it isn't really about discrimination, then what is it about?**

If the case for 'gay marriage' cannot be based on the issue of discrimination, or the question "Am I good enough?", then the Christian believer would do well to press the person they are discussing with to provide a good reason for such a change.

This task of defending the change to 'gay marriage' is more difficult than it at first appears because those wishing to change marriage only want to change one aspect, the sex of those taking part, and to preserve the rest unchanged. In a real sense, that seems to be the point of the move. It shows up most tellingly in an emphasis on the wedding ceremony that is often conceived of in quite traditional terms. But if the primary purpose of the public institution of marriage is not to unite a man and a woman with each other and with any children born from their union, but simply to recognise sexual friendship, then there is no reason, other than conservatism, why it should be restricted only to two participants. This is not a re-run of the 'gay marriage will lead to polygamy' argument (which normally is greeted with howls of shocked, though somewhat disingenuous protest), but is making the more subtle point that it is very difficult to give a compelling argument to change only the one aspect of the intuition of marriage without redesigning the whole. In other words, it is virtually inevitable that 'gay marriage' will change more about marriage than many of its proponents actually want. As evidence of this point, it is noteworthy that three women in Massachusetts (a state that has legalised 'gay marriage') have recently claimed to have all married each other and are now a 'throuple'.<sup>65</sup> This should not really surprise us. For once the two-ness of man and woman is abandoned, what reason, other than an arbitrary decision, is there to restrict marriage to only two persons? "Don't you think I am good enough to be married to the persons I love?" This kind of questioning may well be unsettling for someone arguing for 'gay marriage', as usually they have unwittingly assumed you will always be more conservative than they are. But addressing the issue from an unexpected direction may not only surprise them, but cause them to rethink their position.

### **Conclusion**

There is even more to the iceberg in this debate. The Christian believes that same-sex relationships and the marriage of a man and woman are different realities, different things. To call them by the same word, 'marriage', is confusing and wrong. This is because God's world is ordered, and in that order a same-sex relationship cannot be 'one flesh'. This is a reality that exists, and will continue to exist, independently of human choice and irrespective of redefinition by the state. However, the non-Christian may well hold the view that it is really up to us to make of things what we wish, and that our wills and desires are what determine reality. And so what we call things is what they are. So if we call same-sex relationships and the marriage of a man and woman the same kind of thing, they are the same kind of thing. This difference in how to think of reality is quite deep and usually not even consciously acknowledged. The point is that when two people approach the issue with such fundamentally different assumptions of which they are not conscious, they will frustratingly talk past each other without knowing why. The Christian should be on the lookout for signs of this deeper part of the iceberg and if possible draw it into the light. Although by this time, the discussion may then have moved to deeper and more fruitful matters of the reality of God and our need to make sense of

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<sup>65</sup> *New York Post* 23 April 2014 <http://nypost.com/2014/04/23/married-lesbian-threesome-expecting-first-child>. Accessed 7 July, 2014.

the world and, in particular, human existence. At least that's where you can hope and pray the discussion will go.

## Chapter Five

# Ministering to Those Who Experience Same-sex Attraction

As same-sex attraction and relationships gain more acceptance in our society, Christians face the two-fold challenge of how to stand up for the Bible's view of sexuality and relationships, as well as how to minister to those in their families, friendship circles or churches who may experience same-sex attraction.

In order to address ourselves to the second part of this challenge, a number of questions need to be answered. Firstly, what are the reasons some people experience same-sex attraction? Secondly, is it possible for someone who experiences same-sex attraction to change? Thirdly, what is appropriate to expect of someone who continues to battle with same-sex attraction? In the current climate many find it difficult to know how to answer these questions and, therefore, how to respond to those who experience same-sex attraction. This chapter seeks to offer some clarification about the nature of same-sex attraction, and in the light of that to offer suggestions as to how we as churches might seek to care for those who experience it.

### **The causation and permanence of same-sex attraction**

Understanding how and why people develop same-sex attraction is complex. However, some grasp of this complexity is necessary as we consider how best to minister to those who experience it and whether change is possible.

It is generally recognized that the cause of same-sex orientation is multi-dimensional. The scientific literature is also clear that there is no single explanation. In other words, genetic, hormonal and environmental factors may all play a role in the development of same-sex desires or attraction in any given case.

Studies of genetic heritability indicate that the probability of someone inheriting same-sex attraction is as low as about 20%. By contrast, inheriting personality traits such as 'agreeableness' from parents is more than twice as likely.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, the likelihood of a person experiencing same sex attraction, simply because their father or mother did, is quite low and not typical.

Some researchers and commentators have sought to identify a specific 'gay gene' as a singular explanation for same-sex attraction. The idea is that if such a gene existed, then a person could not be held responsible for, and would be unable to change, their feelings and desires. However, while some population studies suggest the existence of a biological component to same-sex attraction, no clear link to any particular gene has been found, let alone the isolation of such a gene from scientific procedures. Other studies, in particular a famous study by the British-American neuroscientist, Simon LeVay,<sup>67</sup> have examined hormonal composition, and have suggested a link between same-sex attraction

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<sup>66</sup> J. Bailey, M.P. Dunne, N. Martin, 'Genetic and environmental influences on sexual orientation and its correlates in an Australian twin sample'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 78 (2000), pp. 525-536.

<sup>67</sup> S. LeVay (with D.H. Hamer), 'Evidence for a biological influence in male homosexuality' in *Scientific American* 270 (1994), pp. 20-25.

and hormone levels *in utero*. However, most elements of this study have not been able to be replicated, and even if they could, it is likely that hormonal effects would be only a small part of overall causation.<sup>68</sup>

In addition to research into genetic or biological causes, other studies have focused on environmental factors, such as the instability in parental relationships in the early years of those who come to experience same-sex attraction.<sup>69</sup> Once again, while there might be certain instances where these factors affect some people with same-sex attraction, it is not true for all. It is clear that despite the various studies conducted none have come close to providing a definitive cause for same-sex attraction.

In the end, whatever the complex nature of causation, there are some individuals who develop an early, deep-seated, seemingly unchangeable same-sex orientation. For some people, these desires are not only unwanted but a cause of great shame, especially if they are in a context where such feelings would not be accepted.

There is little consensus about whether all same-sex attraction is unchangeable. The evidence suggests that there is a spectrum of both permanence and degree of same-sex attraction, and so consequently varying degrees of change are possible.<sup>70</sup> Despite the rhetoric claiming any attempt to encourage someone to change their sexual orientation is impossible and cruel, the evidence simply does not support this.

The reality is that God normally changes people incrementally, not with an instantaneous bolt of healing. He calls his children to the (often) painful pursuit of holiness and, by so doing, gradually changes them into the people he has made them to be and destined them to become. Sanctification, for all forgiven sinners, is a slow character building process that issues in faithful obedience to Jesus Christ.

### **Pursuing holiness, resisting temptation and desiring change**

In ministering to any person, regardless of their sexual orientation, our first concern ought to be their conversion to Christ and subsequent growth in Christian maturity. But in seeking to help those who experience same-sex attraction, a number of particular factors also need to be appreciated and addressed.

First, in a way that is rarely the case for heterosexual persons, their sexual orientation can be unhelpfully fused with their self-identity to the point where their personhood is subsumed into their ‘gayness’. Much of this confusion is fostered by contemporary attitudes and by the entertainment media. For example, it is now common for a ‘gay’ contestant in a reality television show to be identified by their same-sex orientation, as if this is what defines them as a person.<sup>71</sup>

Second, whether members of the church or outsiders, the person experiencing same-sex attraction usually knows that the Christian community is opposed to homosexual practices and regards homosexuality as one of the sad consequences of the

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<sup>68</sup> See W. James, ‘The cause(s) of the fraternal birth order effect in male homosexuality.’ *Biological Sciences* 36 (2004), pp. 51-59.

<sup>69</sup> See M. Frisch, A. Hviid, ‘Childhood family correlates of heterosexual and homosexual marriages: a national cohort study of two million Danes.’ *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 35 (2006), pp. 533-547.

<sup>70</sup> See R.L. Spitzer, ‘Can some gay men and lesbians change their sexual orientation? 200 participants reporting a change from homosexual to heterosexual orientation.’ *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 32:5 (2003), pp. 403-417; S.L. Jones, M. Yarhouse, *Ex-Gays: a longitudinal study of religiously motivated change in sexual orientation*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2007.

<sup>71</sup> This phenomenon, and the theory that lies behind it, is often referred to as ‘essentialism’. As we saw in Chapter 1, it has played major role in the ‘gay political agenda’. The reason for this is that, along essentialist lines of thinking, any criticism of homosexual behaviour is seen as an attack upon the personhood of those who experience same-sex attraction.

fall. Consequently, those wrestling with same-sex attraction within the church may do so with great shame and secrecy, finding themselves reluctant to admit their struggle to others for fear that they will be marginalized or condemned.

Third, whilst sensitivity to these issues is vitally important, it is neither loving nor helpful to compromise the truth. As we saw in chapter 3, the consistent teaching of the Bible, and particularly Paul's discussion of homosexuality in Romans 1, makes it clear that homosexual sex is contrary to God's purposes and an assault on the image of God. An intentional homogeneity, expressed in same-sex acts, is the very opposite of marriage, which stems from a delight in the difference between the genders. Consequently, same-sex desires are viewed as "dishonourable passions" and homosexual behaviour regarded as both "shameless" and "contrary to nature" (Rom. 1:26). It is for this reason that it is explicitly condemned in Scripture.

Fourth, it is also important to challenge the view that it is wrong to encourage a same-sex attracted believer to seek to change their orientation, and also the belief that change is impossible. If such an orientation is not 'according to nature', but part of the brokenness of our disordered world, then reorientation is clearly the ideal. Moreover, by the grace of God, radical change has been experienced by many – albeit often slowly. At the same time, it must also be acknowledged that not all who seek deliverance from same-sex desires find it. Why this is so is rarely clear – any more than it is clear why some prayers for healing are answered and others not.<sup>72</sup>

Fifth, what is clear is that same-sex inclination does not give permission to engage in behaviour that goes against God's word. Like immoral heterosexual desire, and indeed all other sinful yearnings, homosexual desire is one of the results of the fall and a symptom of a greater disease pervading all of humanity. No matter what combination of genetic, biological, hormonal, or environmental causes might have given rise to it in a particular person, homosexual acts are never acceptable or excusable.

Sixth, the complexity of causation, however, ought to deepen our compassion for those who are struggling in this area, particularly if they are captivated by the promise of a homosexual lifestyle. We need great patience and perseverance, as well as an appropriate measure of 'tough love', as we support one another in our battles with temptation (of any and every kind), and have constantly held before us the transforming power and hope of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Seventh, it is also vital that we help those dealing with same-sex attraction to understand that sexual orientation is not the core of self-identity. As Vaughan Roberts insightfully explains: "The gay movement appeals to those who experience same-sex attraction to 'come out' and publicly accept a homosexual identity. But the path to Christian maturity lies in recognizing that our true identity is in Christ and that we are defined by our relationship to him, not by our sexuality".<sup>73</sup> This, needless to say, is a lesson for all Christians.

Eighth, the call to holiness is also for all Christians. As 1 Peter 1:15-16 reminds us: "But as the One who called you in holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; for it is written, 'Be holy, because I am holy'". It is important to realise, however, that this call is based on our new identity in Christ, so that we are being called to be what we really

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<sup>72</sup> The answer, no doubt, lies in the hidden counsels of God's wise dealings with his individual children. We are not told, for example, why the Lord did not take away Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' (whatever it might have been), despite his repeated pleas. The only answer given to Paul was a general one: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9).

<sup>73</sup> V. Roberts, *Battles Christians Face: Tackling Big Issues with Confidence*. Milton Keynes: Authentic Media, 2007, p. 117.

are (1 Cor. 5:7). It can also only be successfully heeded by the power of the Holy Spirit within us (Rom. 8:13).

With these things understood, and in line with the biblical pattern of sanctification that all Christians are to follow, the following steps will be important for those who are dealing same-sex desires:

- Recognising that homosexual desires are not from God, and should therefore not be embraced, indulged or acted upon;
- Renouncing homosexual behavior as sinful and destructive, knowing it will not deliver what it promises;
- Rejoicing in the free forgiveness we have through faith in Christ (for whatever we have desired or done) and our full acceptance as beloved children of God;
- Pursuing a lifestyle that is consistent with the will of God, our new identity in Christ, and our new life in the Spirit;
- Rediscovering healthy, non-erotic friendships with those of the same gender, so as to enjoy appropriate relational intimacy without sexual activity.
- Remembering that none of God's children will be free from our sinful impulses or battles with temptation in this life.

### **Supporting those who are seeking to remain faithful in their sexuality**

Whilst all Christians need encouragement and many struggle with doubts of various kinds, the same-sex attracted person has a particular need to be reminded that they are loved completely, unconditionally and eternally by the triune God, and loved also by their Christian brothers and sisters. For those who are seeking to support and care for them, it is critical that this message is regularly communicated and consciously embodied. For many, at their core, feel unloved, unworthy, shameful and perverted. They may also battle a sense of isolation as they struggle in silence, feeling like they are leading a double life with a public and private face. As one same-sex attracted person has candidly confessed in a private email to one of the authors of this chapter:

As a homosexual struggler I crave to be accepted and loved like any other man, but sometimes with a bit more intensity as I fear the judgment and being unloved by Christians who might reject me and not just my behavior.

Reminding such 'strugglers' of touchstone passages, such as 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, is absolutely vital. Christians who experience same-sex attraction need to understand that they have been washed clean and set free from the guilt of their sins. Whatever they once were, it is not what they are now, nor is it what they will be forever. They are new creation in Christ, called to become what they already are!

Such liberating knowledge can help a person to 'live out' as someone who experiences unwanted same sex attraction, without having to deny it or be defined by it. Affirmation and acceptance by fellow forgiven sinners will not only reinforce the reality of their cleansing, but help them to celebrate the wonder of their new identity in Christ. Wesley Hill's testimony is apposite at this point:

I know that whatever the complex origins of my own homosexuality are, there *have* been conscious choices I've made to indulge — and therefore intensify, my homoerotic inclinations. As I look back over the course of my life, I regret the nights I have given in to temptations to lust. And so I cling to the image — *washed*. I am washed, sanctified, justified through the work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Whenever I look back on my

baptism, I can remember God has cleansed the stains of homosexual sin from the crevasses of my mind, heart, and body and included me in his family, the church, where I can find support, comfort and provocation toward Christian maturity”.<sup>74</sup>

Finally, the person who battles against same-sex desires and resists homosexual behaviour needs to be continually affirmed in their determination to be faithful and to suffer for the sake of the gospel. Such suffering is, of course, one aspect of the larger call to all believers to share in Christ’s sufferings (Phil. 3:10), for self-denial is at the heart of all Christian discipleship (Mk. 8:34). All who abstain from sexual immorality need to be encouraged that the ‘cost’ they are willing to bear in order to be obedient to Christ is not only in their own temporal interest, helping them to avoid painful regret and to grow into mature manhood or womanhood, but is eternally worthwhile (Rom. 6:22-23).

### **The importance of healthy Christian community**

There are a number of important steps, both attitudinal and practical, which church communities need to take in order to positively care for and effectively minister to those with same-sex attraction.

First, churches need to work hard to rid themselves of fearful and unhelpful attitudes towards those with a same-sex orientation. Such people are already present in most congregations. Moreover, churches ought to be safe places both for believers dealing with such issues and for unbelievers to hear the gospel of the friend of sinners.

Second, this will only be possible if we develop a church culture that encourages honest recognition of the fact that all Christians struggle in various ways to live as Christ intended us to and all of us, in one way or another, are sexually broken. Those battling with same-sex desires are not more sinful than those battling with immoral heterosexual desires or greed or drunkenness or pride.

Third, churches ought to be especially careful not to use offensive labels for homosexual people or pejorative speech that puts down those who experience same-sex attraction. Such practices are not only hypocritical and lacking in compassion, but prevent people asking for the support they need, as they are too fearful of rejection. Sometimes in youth or young adult circles, language such as 'gay' may be used as a term of insult with respect to persons or objects which are not in any way related to homosexuality. This also lacks compassion as it contributes to a culture of fear, and prevents people from asking for the support they need in their struggle.

Fourth, many churches need to work much harder at loving, affirming, supporting and practically caring for all those in their congregations who are unmarried. When this is done, the call to abstinence for those with same-sex attraction will be seen in the context of a wider valuing of chastity for all who are unmarried, and not as a punishment. For at this point, those with same-sex attraction and those with heterosexual desires stand together in their striving for holiness and their witness to Christ. Furthermore, in such a climate, the biblical message, that the unmarried life provides a unique opportunity for “undivided devotion to the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:35), will be more easily heard and appreciated.

### **Conclusion**

As the call to legitimize homosexual relationships through same-sex marriage gets increasingly louder, the task of equipping the saints to believe, behave and to minister

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<sup>74</sup> Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010, p. 49.

biblically becomes increasingly urgent. As we noted in our opening chapter, through a mix of protest and pressure, advertising and education, lobbying and legislation, a very successful social engineering campaign has been waged in western society. The result is the widespread acceptance and positive endorsement of the homosexual lifestyle. Rhetoric such as “let’s just allow them to express their love for one another” is now ubiquitous.

In such a climate, it’s all too easy for Christians to ‘go with the flow’ and capitulate to the prevailing ‘gay worldview’. The cost, however, for both society and church, would be catastrophic and our loss of nerve inexcusable. For to fail to understand same-sex attraction and behaviour from a biblical standpoint will not only perpetuate the present confusion, but leave Christians with nothing to say and no help to offer. If our prophetic voice is to be heard in our generation and the saving and sanctifying power of the gospel known by our contemporaries, we must not allow the message of the mainstream media and the political agenda of one particular interest group to drown out the voice of God or undermine our confidence in his word.

Furthermore, it is critical that those who are pastors of God’s people do not abdicate their responsibility to instruct and equip those under their care by faithfully and fearlessly teaching the Scriptures, and clearly communicating God’s intentions for marriage and human relationships, as well as the nature of God-honouring sexuality. Whatever happens in regard to societal attitudes, and whatever persecution may come as a result of changes in government legislation, the people of God must stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel and not be frightened in anything by our opponents (Phil. 1:27-28).

In seeking to help those with same-sex attraction, we must be alert to the complexity of both the causation and continuation of their feelings. Ministering to those among us who bear this affliction will take much time, love and prayer; there is no ‘quick fix’. Indeed whilst there may be times when great progress is made, there will be other times when the road is more difficult and seemingly impassable. Great wisdom is thus required in advising those who desire reorientation to have realistic expectations, and to work out the necessary practical changes to make as well as the best help to receive.

At the same time, we must not discount the powerful way God can and does transform his people by his Spirit. It is his work to change us, and his will that change should take place. So as we minister to those with same-sex attraction we must do so in hope and in prayer, and let his word be our teacher and guide. Whatever progress is made down the path of reorientation in this life, it is imperative that we support those who, in obedience to God, have chosen to remain chaste in their singleness and have seized the opportunity to maximize their service of the Lord.

### **For further reading**

- Sam Allberry, *Is God anti-gay? and other questions about homosexuality, the Bible and same-sex attraction*. Croydon: The Good Book Company, 2013.
- Rosaria Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into Christian Faith*. Pittsburgh: Crown & Covenant, 2012.
- Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2001.
- Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.
- Chris Keane (ed.), *What some of you were: stories about Christians and homosexuality*. Sydney: Matthias Media, 2002.
- Mark Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian: a guide for parents, pastors and friends*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010.