

***Executive Summary: Reflections on Biblical Reality, Pastoral Ministry, and the Issue of Homosexuality*** by Jay Thomas, Lead Pastor, Chapel Hill Bible Church

God has designed sexuality, from sexualized interpersonal communication in subtle form to intercourse in the most ultimate form, to take place between one biological male and one biological female in a lifelong covenant of marriage.

**Genesis 1:26-29**

*26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth. 29 And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food."*

The positive teaching on gender, marriage, sexuality, and the image of God is laid out here. This is the paradigm, not just of pairing and procreation, but of the fixed reality of gender, marriage, sexuality, and the image of God. The rest of the Bible must be read with this paradigm and thought-world as the backdrop.

The point is that all forms of sex outside of the Genesis 1 paradigm of gender, marriage, and sexuality are forbidden because they stem from spiritual decay.

In the rest of the Old Testament, every positive example of gender, marriage, and sexuality is the Genesis 1 paradigm. All other arrangements are put in negative light, explicitly or implicitly.

**Leviticus 18:22, 20:13**

*22 You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.  
13 If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.*

These verses reside in contexts where sexual sin is mentioned in the greater context of the holiness codes of the Law of Moses. The ultimate narrational point, the principle, is that all forms of idolatry, literal and spiritual, usually materialize in sexual sin.

**1 Corinthians 6:9-10**

*9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

One thing to note is that this passage is talking about active and unrepentant participation in these sins, not those who struggle with them or those who fall into them with remorse and desire to repent. And, homosexual actions are put in a list with other things, like greed and swindling. We are held to account with the whole list.

The good news of this passage is what Paul says in v 11. Such WERE some of the Corinthians. In other words, they have been forgiven and bestowed with the Spirit to no longer live for such sins. They may struggle with them. They may even fall back into them from time to time. But the Spirit is winning and sanctifying and giving them pure desires to replace ungodly desires.

In terms of the administration of official ecclesial duties that confer blessing and moral validity, we will prohibit CHBC leaders and staff from officiating the marriage of two gay people or any other ecclesial act that would condone and offer God's blessing on active and unrepentant sin.

It should be our hope to honor Jesus Christ, to make the gospel central, to be faithful to the Bible, to be consistent, just, and wise in applying the Bible, and for sinners to be saved, not only in status but also from the power and presence of sin. We will not focus on homosexuality nor will we ignore or redefine the Scripture's teaching on same-sex behavior.

***Reflections on Biblical Reality, Pastoral Ministry, and the Issue of Homosexuality***

Submitted by Jay Thomas, Lead Pastor, Chapel Hill Bible Church

October 2014

*If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at the moment attacking, then I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is tested.*

~ Martin Luther

**INTRODUCTION**

There is no longer any doubt that one of the most pressing issues for the church in the West is what it thinks about and how it will respond to the LGBTQ community, both outside and, increasingly, within the church. This paper cannot identify all the complex issues involved but I will attempt to hit the salient issues and I hope this provides value for all Christians at all times, for the purpose of protecting and empowering health in the Gospel.

The aim of this reflection is to consider our church's doctrinal commitments, the commensurate sexual ethics we affirm, and just as importantly, our pastoral commitments to the people whom God has called the Bible Church elders to shepherd, wherever they may be in their understanding of sexuality and spirituality. Much of what I will discuss will be shared with the greater evangelical community in terms of belief and practice, but our mission field is the Triangle area of North Carolina. God has called us to represent Christ, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to this mission field. This reflection is, then, primarily a pastoral act of truth and grace that is local in application and yet universal in truth.

This reflection is not primarily an exegesis paper on the relevant texts. I will address those texts but will recommend to the reader the many strong resources already published that review general theological truths and particular texts which address sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular. I will list in this opening section some of the better and more widely used treatments available today, and I will name some of the works that are the basis of the revisionist arguments being put forth as well. What I hope this paper will contribute is insight on why the traditional view on Biblical sexuality is currently under revision and how to clear the table of that background noise so that faithful interpretations and applications of Scripture can be made according to the authorial intent of the Bible. I also hope that we arrive at some guiding principles in our ministry to the sexually tempted and broken, along with some sense of procedure when it comes to how to disciple gay men and women who worship with us and want to be a part of our community.

Let me begin with articulating the gist of this reflection in the positive so that the spirit of this paper is not simply reactive. Rather, on the whole, my hope is that this paper is actually a commendation of the beauty and truth and goodness of what God has created and purposed in marital heterosexuality and why we should pursue and protect that vision. I do not want to put forth a polemical treatment that is purely defensive in posture.

## Guiding Definitions and Assumptions

Let us articulate a definition of what we want to commend as the good reality God has given us in sexuality. *God has designed sexuality, from sexualized interpersonal communication in subtle form to intercourse in the most ultimate form, to take place between one biological male and one biological female in a lifelong covenant of marriage.*<sup>1</sup> Any other form or context for sexuality is considered fornication. Now let me render the theological basis for this definition. *God has designed gender in humanity, and consequently how gender plays out sexually, as a typology of two things: 1) gender and sexuality are a typology of difference, that of difference between the Creator and creature (Gen 1, Rom 1), and 2) gender and sexuality are a typology of the Gospel, a relationship between the Creator and creature, because of grace, through Christ, for the purpose of a personal, intimate, and eternal covenant of love (Eph 5).* In other words, sex has a design and is meant to be expressed in such a way that the design is always honored. That design demands marital heterosexuality, I believe, in light of the Scripture. Since God is unchanging and the gospel is unchanging, and sex and gender reflect God and the gospel, sex and gender should not and cannot come under revision. Having stated that, I want to build from there, exegetically and theologically, as it pertains to the question of homosexuality.<sup>2</sup>

But there is more to the story. This is not just about the definition of fornication in terms of behavior. The current debate is centered on the issue of desire, especially so-called fixed desires that have not been chosen or are the seeming result of other sinful choices. What do we do with the issue of desires? Sexuality is not just about actions, but desire. Some of our modern language is now adopting the grammar of *orientation*. What is orientation? Is it a valid concept? Where is the line between temptation, desire/orientation, and sin? While I will let some of the outstanding resources do the heavy lifting in terms of exegesis regarding homosexual actions, I will want to spend some time considering these complex issues and what Scripture paints for us in terms of being human with desires that may or may not lead to godly actions.

Then there is one of the most important issues that the evangelical church is still wrestling with and on which it still has a long road to travel, namely, our policies and practices as institutions. What does it mean to minister in a world that no longer reflects the traditional understanding of gender and sexuality, a world that has made gender and sexuality a first-tier apologetical issue, and where there is

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<sup>1</sup> This is a statement that applies to all humans, regardless of what gender they feel most attracted to. Much of how modern western dating is practiced, I believe, falls under the heading of sexual misappropriation and even sin, given this statement. For a fuller treatment of this, see the book I co-authored with Gerald Hiestand, *Sex, Dating, and Relationship: A Fresh Approach*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2012. This book is the positive vision I hold to in terms of sexuality and it also reveals the hermeneutical issues, which are central to the discussion.

<sup>2</sup> The denial or acceptance of this theological basis is perhaps the theological and philosophical linchpin that the exegesis rests upon. If there is not a theology of body, gender, and sexuality as both a starting point and a conclusion to Biblical exegesis, then individual texts can be rendered in many possible ways, even to the degree to which gender and sexuality are fluid as part of God's creation purposes. The Roman Catholic natural theology school is something we Protestant evangelicals can learn from in this respect. While our authority is Scripture and Scripture alone, there is something to the idea that reality is reality by God's design, and Scripture picks up on this and gives it a doctrinal context. For a technical and thorough Catholic work on the body, see John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*. Rome: Pauline Books & Media, 2006; and Dennis P. Hollinger, *The Meaning of Sex: Christian Ethics and the Moral Life*. Grand Rapids, Baker: 2009.

growing confusion in the evangelical community as to Biblical authority, clarity, content, and sufficiency?

Likewise, what does it mean to love, reach, and invite into community people who range from those struggling with same-sex attraction and are convicted that it is not a Biblically appropriate behavior, to those who have same-sex attraction and have not concluded their view yet, to those who feel there is Biblical merit to same-sex expressions, even marriage? This, I believe, is the vital issue for the leadership of CHBC and where I hope this paper will guide us with the most fruitful direction and momentum.

I want to proceed this way:

- 1) A small bibliography.
- 2) Why the exegesis is under revision and the theological issues at play.
- 3) The basics of the exegesis.
- 4) A pastoral way forward: the woman caught in adultery as our model (John 8).
- 5) Principles for the ministry and policy culture of CHBC.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

This list is not comprehensive by any means, but I have found these works to be some of the most useful, scholarly, pastoral, and most widely used texts today, based in an evangelical understanding of Scripture. I will also list two books that are popular and reflect the revisionist perspective.

### The orthodox perspective.

Allberry, Sam. *Is God Anti-Gay: And other Questions About Homosexuality, the Bible and Same-Sex Attraction*. UK: The Good Book Company, 2013. \* an articulate and brief explanation of the issues, unpacking of the relevant texts, and very practical. Very appropriate for teenagers on up. The author is a pastor and has same-sex attraction and believes celibacy is his Biblical choice.

Butterfield, Rosaria. *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*. Pittsburg: Crown and Covenant, 2012. \*a personal story of spiritual conversion and sexual re-orientation, elucidating the theological and psychological issues involved in belief, sexual desire, and faithfulness.

Dallas, Joe. *The Gay Gospel? How Pro-Gay Advocates Misread the Bible*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2007.

DeYoung, Kevin. *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?* Wheaton: Crossway, 2015.

Gagnon, Robert A.J. *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*. Nashville: Abington, 2001. \*This is one of the most comprehensive and scholarly treatments of the exegesis and issues involved in the debate.

Hill, Wesley. *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010. \*A great narrative of personal experience from a young Biblical scholar who experiences same-sex attraction and is convinced his only choice is celibacy, and yet embraces a

conviction that a theology of suffering and endurance makes his journey fair and good, not worthless and cruel.

Jones, Stanton L. and Yarhouse, Mark A. *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2000. \*The perspective of two Biblically minded and theologically aware psychologists. Good use of scientific data, combined with Biblical framework and assumptions.

Marin, Andrew. *Love Is An Orientation: Elevating the Conversation with the Gay Community*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2009.

Mohler, Albert, ed. *God and the Gay Christian? A Response to Matthew Vines*. Louisville: SBTS Press, 2014. \*Free e-book. I would recommend this as a must read because it responds to the arguments made by Brownson, which are popularized now by Matthew Vines.

Stott, John. *Same-Sex Partnerships? A Christian Perspective*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998. In classic Stott style, very Biblical, clear, and insightful.

Wilson, Todd. *Mere Sexuality: Rediscovering the Christian Vision of Sexuality*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017.

\*If you can only choose a few, I recommend Allberry (very short), Hill, and Wilson.

### The revisionist perspective.

Brownson, James. *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013. \*Brownson has compiled and synthesized many of the long held and also recently formulated attempts to re-envision Biblical interpretations of texts regarding sexuality and gender. His views are a product of his hermeneutics and assumptions drawn from extra-biblical sources. Interesting points are made, some we can learn from, but pay close attention to those hermeneutical principles he assumes, and the sociological and psychological assumptions he maintains.

Vines, Matthew. *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case In Support of Same-Sex Relationships*. New York: Convergent, 2014. \*Vines became known through a YouTube video of a lecture he gave which went viral. He just published this book, outlining the popular revisionist arguments, drawing heavily upon Brownson.

### **WHY THE EXEGESIS IS UNDER REVISION AND THE THEOLOGICAL ISSUES AT PLAY:**

The following reasons are interrelated. Some people focus on a few reasons; many are implicit and assumed in other arguments; all, in some fashion, relate to why the traditional interpretation of Biblical sexuality is being eschewed in favor of newer understandings.

Let's begin with the forces at work outside the church, which affect the church:

1. *Sexuality has always been one of the most attacked aspects of humanity due to the Fall.* The Bible has a lot to say about sex and sexual sin because it is a part of the image of God that is so powerful and thus so broken by the curse.
2. *Sexual morality has always been depreciated by non-Christians, but the prevailing culture until the 1960's had a vestige of traditionalism.* The public sentiment once leaned toward a sex-in-heterosexual-marriage-only mentality. Since the 1960's, culture at large has increasingly loosened its standards as to what is appropriate sexually. Starting with sexualized dating, to pre-marital sex, to multiple sexual partners prior to marriage, to co-habitation, and now to homosexuality, every few years there is a new norm in terms of culture's acceptance of sexual desires and behavior. As of now, most people would agree that extra-marital sex is taboo, but as homosexual relationships become even more normalized, I believe open marriages, plural marriages, and even more radical forms of sexual relationships will be normalized.
3. *There is a recent development: subcultures of sexuality have formed, such that their self-identification is tantamount to gender and race.* I believe this reality started informally and became more institutional over the years, such that a public grammar that views homosexuals as a people-group became common somewhere in the 1990's.
4. *While heterosexual expressions outside the bounds of Scripture have been normalized steadily since the 1960's, the pace at which homosexuality has been normalized has been surprisingly quick.* This normalizing process has involved very powerful and ingenious forms of culture-shaping through media, academia, and politics (not least the judiciary). Very powerful and wealthy individuals and groups have successfully changed a whole generation's view of sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular.
5. *The gay lobby is not satisfied simply to have civic freedoms and protection, but it also insists on a consensus of moral affirmation.* For instance, the move to legalize gay marriage is not just about property rights, hospital visitation rights, and the like, but also very much about moral validation. The term 'marriage' is a moral term, and the culture at large wants access to the term in order to have access to moral validation.
6. *The church now feels the pressure not only of moral and social dismissal, but also legal action.* Whether we know it or not, this legal intimidation impinges on our sensibilities and our ability to hold firm to Biblical truth. We also have a generation of younger Christians who have grown up in a country with homosexuality as a norm. The countercultural feel of non-marital sexuality and the emotional repulsion at non-marital sex that former generations experienced have been wiped away in our young people. With a new moral sensibility, along with legal threat, the pressure on beliefs and practice is enormous.
7. *Given the processes above, the issue is now cast in a new-morality language of bigotry.* The church is being pulled in different emotional directions. We want to stand for the equality and dignity of persons and to fight bigotry wherever we find it, yet we also want to protect the purity of the church. Both are right and the call of the church, but we are being put in a place to have to choose between the two, because of the logic of our culture at large. Our millennials in particular hate bigotry. That is good. But given the framework within which they have been acculturated, they do not know how to make sense of the Bible's teaching on sexuality and our call to dignify all humans as those made in the image of God. This generation is now beginning to embrace the argument that sexual identity is tantamount to gender and race. Thus to deny an individual this

identity as morally valid, and to likewise protect it, is to embrace bigotry. We must appreciate this dilemma, and it must make us aware of the background noise surrounding Biblical fidelity.

8. *More personal connections have had the unintended effect of theological compromise.* Due to the rapid cultural change and the growing personal connections people now have with gay people, not least with family members and close friends, the general population no longer views this as a distant and abstract issue. With the addition of a healthy disposition of compassion that many Christians are embracing in a post-fundamentalist world, an unfortunate theological cocktail has been mixed that has led to presuppositions and intense lenses for reading Scripture that no longer look for the text's meaning but rather eisegete, or import, meaning from those extra-Biblical presuppositions. Along with the above-mentioned forces, the internal pressures of personal connection and the desire to have compassion have led to the misconstruing of the Bible's teaching.

Those are some of the forces at work outside the church that are affecting us. Now we want to explore many of the ways those outside forces have created and shaped perspectives, priorities, and values within the church such that we have internal forces that affect our ability to interpret and apply Scripture accurately. Here are the most common and pertinent forces at work:

1. *Emotion.* Let us begin here because the emotions that this situation arouses seem like a common thread in all the conversations, reading, listening, and personal relationships I have with regard to the issue of homosexuality. I do not want to suggest that those with a traditional view are emotionally detached and thus completely objective. On the contrary, it is true that many who defend the traditional view are extremely controlled by their emotions and end up misinterpreting or misapplying Scripture because of it. We are all emotional beings and, thus, subjective. But I do think emotions can serve the right handling of Scripture, rather than serve as an impediment. In the case of those who affirm homosexual behavior, I find that emotions run high and often serve to master the discussion and impede responsible, interpretive methods of understanding Scripture. This is not an abstract discussion for many believers. We are now dealing with siblings, children, parents, close friends, neighbors, co-workers, and other loved ones who experience same-sex attraction and who live in openly homosexual lifestyles. We must be sensitive to backstories. This is a very emotional issue. Nonetheless, I believe God has designed his self-revelation and the moral vision of our world to be clear and beautiful to emotional creatures that live in the background noise of a fallen world and who themselves are fallen and sinful. The emotions of this issue are an obstacle, but not an insurmountable one.
2. *Moral-instinct reasoning.* One of the effects of an emotion-driven approach is what we might call 'moral-instinct reasoning', a type of reasoning that many Christians employ in many issues, at many levels, not just this one. It can be defined as a means of reasoning that is as much emotional and experiential as it is intellectual and objective, bound more by an inner sense of morality versus an external and clear authority. It is very prevalent with regard to homosexuality, made more vivid in that people who are typically very careful and methodologically sound in every other area of doctrine and life become quite inconsistent and unBiblical in their logic when it comes to their beliefs with regard to homosexuality. Texts that are quite clear suddenly appear technical and obtuse. Contexts that demand that certain ideas are parallel are suddenly parsed in such a way that references to homoeroticism are exceptional, while the other prohibitions still stand. The main lines of arguments are based in vague claims to the priority of love, acceptance, equality, and justice, without Biblical renderings of each of those attributes. I do believe that God endows us



with moral instincts, but I think those instincts must be constantly tethered to, upheld by, and deepened by Biblical exegesis anchored in authorial intent.

3. *The lack of a theological and natural law framework for marriage.* The Christian tradition, I think based in accurate exegesis, has maintained that gender, sexuality, and marriage are all rightly construed based in conditions not subject to alteration. Gender is fixed and determined by Scripture as male and female. Sexuality and sex are to be expressed within marriage. Marriage is by definition a lifelong covenant between a man and woman, which is both a friendship and a romance, and which is designed for both procreation and as a beachhead for the creation mandate. So, desires and other internal orientations are part of that creation order, and the definitions of each are based in creational and objective conditions God has written into the universe by His design. Desires may be in flux or disordered, but marriage is static. The motives and conditions of marriages may be disordered, but two broken people who consist of one male and one female still have a marriage. If one does not have this theological framework, then it makes sense that gender, sexuality, and marriage are open to applications outside of heterosexuality.
4. *Comfort with inconsistency.* There exists an astounding comfort with clear inconsistency in the current debates about Biblical interpretation with regard to homosexual behavior in evangelical Christianity today. There does not seem to be a big problem with the implication of the revisionist arguments that all forms of sexual expression prohibited by Scripture can be viable as long as certain conditions exist, like: mutuality, love, lack of clear negative consequences, lifelong commitment, and, the linchpin, fixed orientation. In every Scriptural case, the same arguments used to affirm gay marriage can be used for polygamy, pederasty, incest, pedophilia, etc. The usual response to this is that those other forms have obvious setbacks and commonsense sinfulness attached to them. But that is what our culture at large believed about homosexuality 30 years ago. There is no reason that homosexuality has an exceptional status that those other sexual forms do not have. In fact, there is no less clarity with regard to homosexual behavior in the Bible than any of those other forms. They are in parallel in the Levitical texts. Polygamy was a common practice among the Biblical patriarchs, and many other heroes of the OT had multiple wives, not least King David. The one clear NT text that prohibits polygamy, in an extremely explicit way, is 1 Tim 3:2 which requires elders to be the husband of one wife. Technically, and reading the text in such a way that many advocates for Christian gay marriage do, one could say that an elder could share his wife with other husbands, as long as there was only one wife in the arrangement. But no one is arguing, yet, for a viable Christian polygamous marriage status, as long as it is mutual, loving, bears good fruit, is life long, and practiced among those who have a fixed orientation toward such an arrangement. The exegetical and logical inconsistency is quite apparent but does not seem to have sway with those revising the traditional understanding.
5. *Unfortunate and inaccurate parallels between historical turning points in Christian worldview.* Some argue that we are on the wrong side of history. If we could only see that this issue is like many others that have gone before, which history has ironed out, we would put down our arms, loosen our grip on a tradition of interpretation, and embrace the better worldview which science, good exegesis, and common sense make clear. One example is the comparison with how the telescope changed cosmology in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Galileo and his theory of a sun-centric solar system caused great upheaval in the church of his day. That is true. But at no point was cosmology recognized in the Bible or by our early creeds as an issue of orthodoxy, nor something on which the Bible has clear teaching. Not unlike the length of the creation days controversy of the modern church, there is latitude, given the nature of the texts in question. Genesis chapters 1-2 are not conventional prose texts. The authorial intent on that passage is not straightforward, as if it was a

historical narrative or epistolary prose, so whatever the best interpretation of Gen 1-2 is, nowhere in the rest of Scripture is there any further teaching that makes the content or consequence of creation days a central concern. Also, cosmology itself does not have a large effect on central doctrines or ethics. In this case, while it did cause upheaval, the text itself did not commend the traditional view of cosmology. So, science raised a good point, one that did not have doctrinal and ethical implications, and one that the text allowed for. Our present issue is quite the opposite. It is theologically and ethically loaded, the texts in question are in very propositional genres of Scripture, and the teaching is throughout Scripture.

Another comparison is that the church finally stopped using the Bible to defend bigotry, namely, the anti-Semitism of the early church (even rampant among popular Protestant Reformers<sup>3</sup>), American chattel slavery, and the bigotry of the Jim Crow south. The argument goes: eventually, thoughtful Christians realized the Bible does not commend or even allow for the inequality of the races and evangelicals began to commend racial unity and justice. This argument views fixed-orientation homosexuals as a minority group [see previous list of forces at work outside the church] and thus the modern church should open its mind and its Biblical interpretation to stop defending sexual bigotry. But again, the parallels are unfortunate and inaccurate. It is true the early church had strains of anti-Semitism. That was wrong. But the difference is that the Bible is not anti-Semitic in the least. There is no exegetical ambiguity. Jesus excoriated Jews who did not receive Jesus as the Messiah and Lord due to their self-righteousness and hard hearts, not because of their race. In Romans 9-11 it is clear that the NT has a very positive view toward ethnic Israel and the hope is that ethnic Jews will be saved by the gospel through faith in Christ as God's first chosen people. One can even argue that some of the anti-Semitism of the early church, while unfortunate in its language, was focusing on theological and spiritual realities, not ethnic realities. When it comes to chattel slavery, voices in favor of slavery, which used the Bible to defend their view, were marginal at best. In fact, 19th century evangelicals in the UK and America largely led the abolitionist movement.

Finally, it is worth looking at the current comparison between the traditional view of homosexuality and the racial frictions in post-Civil War America. In the case of American racism, the populous view was bigotry, not equality. The church was not defending Biblical truth and had caved to this populous view. Thus, the suggested parallels are actually opposites. Today, the populous view is the affirmation of same-sex sexuality and the revisionist arguments are assimilations to that populous view rather than Scripture. If the church were to embrace this, it would behave like the church of the Jim Crow south, compromised and lacking the courage to do the right thing, even if it meant persecution. To speak out on the traditional understanding of gender, sexuality, and marriage is to be the minority prophetic voice, standing up for truth and justice in the face of persecution.

The wrong-side-of-history arguments simply do not stand.

6. *A lack of understanding of the relationship between OT Law and NT gospel morality.* Another hermeneutical obstacle for many is not having exegetical and theological categories to understand the difference between temporary holiness code laws of the Mosaic Law, which were abrogated when Jesus fulfilled them by his work and in his person, and the eternal moral laws, also found in the Mosaic Law, which are still operative today, even in light of Christ. The Protestant tradition has always viewed the Law as having distinct and categorically different aspects. We usually think of three different uses of the Law. One usage is the mirror effect that shows us our sin and our need for Christ. The other is a civil function that restrains evil and promotes good, even among

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther is infamous for his negative view of Jews.

general society. And then there is the moral usage that forever reveals what it means to live righteously by God's standards. One can parse that differently, and there are some nuanced differences between Protestant movements, but that is the gist of it.

When it comes to the revisionist arguments, there is almost no acknowledgement that these categories exist and are part of how the Law works. Because of that, the way that continuity and discontinuity between the covenants work is misunderstood or ignored. So, for instance, the revisionists claim the traditionalists are themselves inconsistent in that we hold to sexual purity laws while at the same time we no longer require people to refrain from pork or mixed fiber clothing. It is an easy thrust move, but lacks any real exegetical power. The NT makes it quite clear that the holiness code laws, like dietary laws, Sabbath keeping, circumcision, and all the bits and pieces about clothing, pots, menstrual cycles, skin rashes, etc., were symbols of holiness. They reflected that Israel was holy and therefore different and set apart from the other nations. And the laws were typological, pointing toward the need for a holiness-establishing Savior, Jesus Christ. Thus, when Jesus came, they were fulfilled. But laws that pertained to personal character, especially behaviors related to the dignity of life, the features of love, and sexual purity, were eternal moral realities that predated the Law and were part of God's design for the world, period. We know this because Jesus not only called us to these laws, and even heightened their significance [see Sermon on the Mount], but the ethics of personal character involving sex are taught all over the NT as a part of the gospel working its way into our lives. Thus, there is no inconsistency. Holiness code laws that were external, ritualistic, and typological were abrogated. Holiness code laws that were about personal character and are re-established in the NT are of the eternal moral order. So, OT prohibitions against same-sex behavior stand for all time.

7. *The prohibitions of the OT are essentially tied to the historical situation rather than to eternal principle.* Yet another objection is that the Bible does speak of homosexual behavior in consistently negative terms but those references speak of same-sex acts that are intrinsically tied to ancient pagan worship, or the cultivation of excessive lust, and/or refer to heterosexual men or women who are behaving homosexually. The argument continues that the Bible is not referring to people who have a fixed orientation, who want to obey the Bible in all its other teachings regarding sexual purity and marriage, and who find themselves attracted to their own gender by nature, not by choice.

While it is true that the prohibitions against homoeroticism in Leviticus 18 and 22, and the context of homosexual gang rape in Genesis 19 and Judges 19, did have historically particular contexts, one must realize that the whole story of Israel is both a historical chronicle and a theological drama. So, while ancient near eastern cult practices were highly sexualized and Israel was called to covenant fidelity away from those practices, the larger point is that sex was quite damaged by the Fall and Satan is consistently attacking human sexuality in order to mar the glory of God. The presenting context in the ancient world was Baalism and other ancient near eastern cults, but the principle is the same for today. All forms of idolatry tend toward sexual brokenness in some form. The homosexual gang rape cycles of Genesis 19 and Judges 19 are not just about homosexuality per se, and revisionists are right to point that out, but the sexual brokenness in those stories is at least part of the transcendent spiritual story, as is the case with the inhospitality and overt darkness of those stories. You will notice that in the OT narratives, where there is distance from God, there is distance from sexual health. Homosexuality, then, is not merely a part of cult practices, but rather, along with other sexual deviances, an outworking of a world apart from God.

When it comes to the NT, some argue that the terms used for homosexuality are technical terms referring to the pederasty that was quite the norm in ancient Rome. In Romans 1, the revisionists

point out that Paul is condemning homoeroticism that occurred between people who were actually heterosexual, and so the sin was going against one's nature, not so much the very act of same gender sex per se. But as one follows Paul's argument, it is clear that the condemnation is both rooted in creation, not the historical context of paganism and Greco-Roman culture, and it talks about men who "were consumed with passion for one another" (Rom 1:26). These were men and women who possessed *desires* for each other, not just adherence to custom and pagan worship forms. The revisionist argument largely rests on the issue of desire or orientation, and Paul actually speaks to that in this context. Paul is clear: one of the ways the curse of the Fall plays out is that some men and women are given over to same-sex desires, which is idolatry writ large in that people of the same gender want ultimate union with each other. Let me explain. Homoeroticism is a deconstruction of the typology that marriage should be, which I articulated in the introduction. The binary reality of male and female, male-female sexuality, and male-female marriage is a typology of the distinction between Creator and creature and the union between them, which is meaningful precisely because of the very real difference and yet very real union. Idolatry is what happens when the creature wants or treats another created thing as god. When a creature desires ultimate union with its own kind, rather than its opposite, it is illustrating the heart of idolatry because the difference is erased. Union now happens between two same things. That is the nature of homosexuality and that is the Bible's point; and that is why we see homosexuality and other forms of sexual sin as a common feature of paganism, both ancient and modern, both literal and spiritual.

This connection to idolatry and original sin helps us make sense of the causality of homosexuality. I think we must acknowledge that there is not one type of person who has same-sex desires. Some people have experimented with sex and the pleasures of sin have re-wired their senses in such a way that they find their own gender sexually stimulating. Others have unwanted brokenness from early childhood abuse. Likewise, it might be the case that brain chemistry does affect some people to have desires for their own gender. But I think a Biblical understanding of the Fall, of sin, and anthropology prompts us to embrace the idea that sin is not just choices and consequences, but also a matter of physiological brokenness that has moral implications. The good news is that God gives grace to us holistically - mind, body, and soul - to be transformed by the Gospel.

Finally, let it be noted that one could utilize the above reasoning to argue the same thing for any other form of sexuality prohibited in the OT, namely polygamy, incest, sex with animals, etc. If one buys the argument that the Bible only prohibits sexual acts tied to paganism and that go against intrinsic orientation, and the Bible is not referring to consensual, monogamous, life long, fixed-orientation relationships, then those other forms should be just as affirmed.

8. *There exists a very narrow definition of fruitfulness and bad consequences.* One of the beguiling features of the current debate is that revisionists suggest there is a lack of important, tangible, and inherently negative consequences of two gay people who want to be married, love Jesus, be good citizens, and serve the world like any other Christian. Taxes are paid. Tidy homes are kept. Children are adopted and loved. It seems like this life is everything any other family would want, except that the couple is the same gender. Where is the bad fruit? There is bad fruit with other sexual sin. People are hurt. People are used. But, if there is love, lifelong monogamy, and fixed-orientation, is this not a recipe for fruitfulness?

Sometimes bad fruit is obvious, to the degree that everyone, Christian or not, would agree on it. So, for now, everyone agrees that murder is wrong, at least when it comes to a person outside a

uterus<sup>4</sup>. We believe that the very act of taking an innocent life is wrong, regardless of intent, the level of consequence, or any other contingency. But when it comes to most of life, we look at consequences, not the act itself. Because of the cultural mores regarding sex now, in general culture no longer views sex outside of marriage as wrong. The act itself is relative. Most people view adultery as wrong, because of the consequence of a hurt spouse. However, open marriages are less taboo today, because the sex outside that marriage is consensual. So, consent and lack of obvious bad consequences are the rule, no longer the act itself.

This reasoning has made its way into the revisionist argument. If sex itself is a neutral act, then motive, consent, and seeming consequence define the morality of the act. But in the Bible, while motive and desire are part of the equation, actions themselves are inherently defined as outside the will of God. No matter how normal and even commendable in every other way a gay couple's life may be, the very fact that their relationship is sexual is itself a transgression of God's will.

Having said that, I think it is fair to say sin always has an impact. The impact may be hidden, or it can be repressed for lengths of time, but there is an impact. God has designed this world to run according to His plan. When that plan is not adhered to, bad stuff happens. Whether we see that bad stuff, or choose to recognize it, that does not mean bad stuff does not exist. We must trust that the negative consequences of sin will be apparent at some point and are having an effect on the souls of those who commit it in the present, whether felt or not. We also must acknowledge that sin is seemingly pleasurable in the short term.

Out of love, we should pursue truth on this matter in order to wake people out of their slumber, some of whom are heading into disaster that is cloaked in light. Let us remember what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 11:14 "for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." We must affirm that actions themselves involve morality and, because of that, there will be good or bad fruit, regardless of how immediate, felt, or visible that fruit is.

9. *This issue is treated like non-essential, mid-impact issues.* There are many issues in which the Bible allows room for application. There are many issues that are non-essential. We certainly want to be a center-weighted church that makes the person and work of Christ the most important foundational matter, along with other pillar truths. I do not think that one's doctrine of sexuality is essential, at least in the same way we speak of these other core doctrines. But I do believe that how one views this issue is highly reflective of how one views the Bible and the nature of the Christian faith. The exception is the case where some people are thoroughly evangelical on every other issue of doctrine and life, and yet are feeling the extremely strong pull of the emotions, personal connections, politics, and media forces on this issue. Either way, I do believe this is a very high impact issue, though non-essential. I may feel worried and sad for brothers and sisters who don't maintain a Biblical perspective on homosexual behavior, but I do not need to automatically question their life in Christ.

At the same time, we cannot treat this the way we do baptism, eschatology, worship music, or even the ordination of women. This is an issue that is more than just about theological and ecclesial health, but rather morality. I do not believe there is a way for a local church to allow for both convictions in the same body. Eventually, the inconsistencies would be apparent and

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<sup>4</sup> I would argue that this same line of reasoning applies to the current debate regarding the choice of women and the life of a fetus. Many people do not see the moral and physical consequences of a killed fetus. No one is arguing that women should have rights, but many question whether the life of the fetus is the same as the life of a 1 month old baby. In the latter case, almost everyone would agree that the mother's choice must be curtailed if she wanted to take that baby's life. In fact, she would be prosecuted as a murderer if she did. So, the rub of the issue is the definition of fetal life, not choice.

decisions would have to be made. It is one thing to have a person teach our children in Sunday school who may have different convictions about eternal security, baptism, or the gifts of the Spirit, which we don't agree with. It is quite another thing for Sunday school teachers to be role models who have a part of their lives that most of our people would consider in unrepentant and principled sin. To illustrate this, think of a hospital. There are issues where doctors disagree on a manner of treatment. They all agree that they want to help people get better, but they don't all agree on how to do that. That is a nonessential and low to mid-level impact issue. But picture a hospital where some doctors believe they are being helpful while other doctors think that a treatment option is actually going to kill patients, and it is not just about treatment perspective, but rather that one set of doctors view health as death and others view that same death as health. This latter situation is what I suggest is the reality for churches that want to allow for mixed opinions on this matter. Given the nature of the situation, this is a very high impact issue that is full of mutual exclusives and is a dividing line. We must exude love in our articulation and application of our beliefs but being agnostic or having policy that allows for unrepentant sinners to openly live in and commend that unrepentant sin is not something we should embrace.

10. *There is lack of appreciation for the regulative principle.* The regulative principle is basically the idea that the Bible teaches us how to live according to what it commands, shows by way of positive example, or can be reasonably deduced from the text, much more than what it allows by way of silence or lack of explicit prohibition. So, as we look to the Bible to see how we should shape our worship services, we look to see how worship is taught or described in the Bible. There is a lot the Bible teaches in terms of worship in public gatherings and what happens in those gatherings. The point is to lean into those patterns, more than we see how many loopholes or lack of prohibitions there are. Now, the regulative principle is principial, as the name suggests. We should not be committed to the regulative law. The regulative law is a way of interpreting the Bible such that there are extremely limited freedoms in applying Biblical principles, because only the given examples in Scripture are available for us to embody today. So, some churches only sing hymns a cappella. That is not what I am suggesting, but rather a principle-based approach that relies heavily on what the Bible commands and steers us toward by way of positive example. Therefore, wherever we see a principle, I think we should stick with that principle and then apply it appropriately. In the case of sexuality, we see the clear principle of marital heterosexuality. Every other form is prohibited and/or spoken of negatively. Rather than searching for loopholes or possible freedoms due to technicalities, we should lean into marital heterosexuality. That gives us freedom as to when men and women get married, what weddings can look like, how many children they may have, what jobs they can take, etc. We are not searching for loopholes that allow for any other form of sex and marriage outside of a lifelong covenant between one male and one female.
11. *The revelatory role of science/creation and Scripture are confused.* God has gifted us with the realm and profession of science. I am so thankful that our church is full of godly scientists who want to know about, teach about, and promote the glory of God through their study of the created order. Science, as the exploration of the created order for the benefits that this can produce in knowledge and applications, is an evidence of the image of God in people. But science must be categorized as a general revelation and common grace source of truth. It is not on par with Scripture and should not try to be an authority or source for truth in domains that are for the Scripture alone, like systematic theology and ethics. Put another way, while science is by its nature the method of recognizing, synthesizing, and theorizing about the data it finds in the created order, it is only the Bible that can provide the ultimate meaning and purpose for this knowledge. The Bible limits the possibilities of hypotheses and applications when there are theological and ethical

implications or when authorially-intended Biblical claims pertaining to history and other tangible facts are contradicted<sup>5</sup>.

As it pertains to the issue of homosexuality, if science were to find a physiological reason that certain people are exclusively attracted to their own gender and unable to be attracted to the opposite gender, then it must restrict its role to the simple analysis that there are pre-volition physiological causes for sexual attraction. There is a lot of debate about the usefulness of the term orientation, but for argument's sake let us say that science determines that people's sexual orientation is in part a result of brain chemistry. At this point, I think science has appropriately used its tools and methods and thus asserted a possible truth that does not contradict anything Biblical. In fact, a faithful Biblical theology establishes that all of creation was cursed in the Fall, including our physiology. There are probably a host of ungodly desires that are in part caused by brain chemistry and other physiological factors. But if science takes a further step and deduces that said desire or orientation does not fall within the category of behaviors accountable to the moral order found in the Bible, because they are not volitional but rather physiological and inherent, then we must affirm that science has attempted to conclude something only Scripture has the authority to conclude. At this point, science has done more than study the created order. It has also tried to establish an authoritative theological and ethical grid. I realize that science cannot be separated from theology and ethics. We actually want them very connected. But the revelatory path of theology and ethics must be from Scripture to science, not vice versa.<sup>6</sup>

Here are some issues to consider in light of this.

- a. In theorizing about what the created order was like before the Fall, I believe we must affirm that everything, both morally and physically, was as it was meant to be, namely, good. There would not have been ungodly desires, either inherent or chosen. There would not have been chemical depression, or addictive tendencies, or homosexual desires. Yes, certain things don't seem to have changed, due to their nature, like gravity or photosynthesis<sup>7</sup>, but everything with a direct theological and ethical implication did change. By the way, we really don't know how this plays out with laws of physics or chemistry either. Obviously, we have no data from before the Fall, except what the Bible

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<sup>5</sup> By authorially-intended Biblical claims, I mean Biblical assertions that are meant to be taken literally. So, I think Jesus used the mustard seed to make a point about the kingdom because the mustard seed was the smallest known seed in that day. That does not mean the Bible literally asserts that it is the smallest seed. The Bible is being phenomenological at that point. However, when it comes to the miraculous, or events like the exodus, conquest, or existence of a Davidic monarchy, I believe the authors meant for us to literally believe those things happened and so we must affirm that they are true. Any archeological data we have, then, could not contradict these events. We may lack data, but no data will actually contradict these events. Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.

<sup>6</sup> A key argument in the revisionist perspective is that the ancients did not have a category for sexual orientation, and therefore only spoke of excessive lust, or culturally normative pederasty, or sexual actions tied to cultic worship - both secular and Biblical writers included. A recent set of blogs by Dr. Preston Sprinkle and a paper that he has recently written document several secular writings that do attest to the concept of orientation, or innate desire, for same-sex erotic behavior. See Preston Sprinkle, "Paul and Homosexual Behavior: A Critical Evaluation of the Excessive Lust Interpretation of Romans 1:26-27" (2014). This paper was presented at the fall symposium of the Center for Pastoral Theology. Sprinkle hopes to have it published in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*.

<sup>7</sup> It could be said that processes like photosynthesis are less efficient post-Fall, given the curse. We cannot say for sure, as Scripture does not address this specifically enough.

tells us in terms of the spiritual, moral, and quite general descriptions of nature it gives us in Genesis 1-2<sup>8</sup>.

- b. Christian scientists should use all the gifts and instruments we have to fulfill their task, but allow the Bible to frame their findings with ultimate theological and ethical meaning and enable Scripture to limit what seems like a possible conclusion if that conclusion has theological and ethical implications.
- c. The Bible and science will never contradict, but the Bible is a full record and science is still a work in process. I am not a scientist, but I have interacted with enough scientists to know that they always want a measure of humility in their conclusions because new data consistently arises that completely changes theories that were assumed as gospel truth for decades. Often contradictions are not contradictions at all. It is just that we don't see all the data on our end yet. The Bible is a full record, so let us trust it completely in terms of its theology, ethics, and overall vision for the created order.

12. *This is as much about gender as it is sex.* An interesting dynamic in the current debate is that most people who experience same-sex attraction do not question their identity as a physical male or female. There are of course people who do question this and their sexual desires seem to result from not feeling assigned an emotional gender that comports with their physical gender. So, transsexual or asexual people feel attracted to their own gender but they would see that as the result of their interior self-identity being the opposite gender or a non-gender. In other words, they would read the situation of their physical homosexuality as a result of their emotional heterosexuality. But most homosexuality is between people of the same gender who also feel emotionally confirmed in their physical gender.

I do not think the Bible allows us to separate physical gender from the whole identity, emotional or otherwise, of gender. The Biblical story asserts that physical gender is the visible expression of a whole reality that is inherent and ontological. For a man to be attracted to a man, or a woman to a woman, is a breach of gender identity. Some gay individuals do in fact express this by tracking toward the other gender in personal expression, but even the most gender-conformed man or woman who wants to be sexual with their own gender is experiencing a contradiction of their identity at a certain level. I think it would be more Biblical and clarifying if we talked about how sexual desire and gender identity go hand in hand so that we can find answers, insights, and redemption in the Biblical truths about gender as a holistic reality. I think this kind of dialogue can occur without a hint of derision, too. If we pressed a gay man on the question of how and why he sees other men through the eyes of a woman, I do not think that would be inherently insulting, if a theology of gender was established. It would merely be a good conclusion based on Biblical convictions. It is already established he is sexually attracted to men, which is something he shares with almost all women. So, to take the step to say that his sensibilities track with the female mind and heart, rather than his own gender, would help clarify why Biblically rooted Christians cannot

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<sup>8</sup> An implication of this line of reasoning is that in heaven there will also be no ungodly desires, and thus no homosexual orientation in any citizen of the new heaven and earth. We don't know what it will mean to be gendered and sexual in heaven, of course, but in as much as we experience some continuity as male and female, our genders will relate in the way they were supposed to, as types of Creator-creature distinctions and union between the church and Christ. Wesley Hill in *Washed and Waiting* speaks of his hopefulness that his gay orientation will be wiped away when he sees Jesus face-to-face in eternity.



affirm homosexual sex. This is not merely about sexual dysfunction but the desire to see people identify with, be comfortable in, and walk in step with their God-given genders.<sup>9</sup>

One implication of this is that while heterosexual sexual sin is not any less a sin, it is not an issue of gender confusion. Heterosexual lust and non-marital sex is a twisting of the truths of exclusive union, fidelity, and covenant, but it is not a twisting of Divine otherness, the Creator-creature distinction that marriage and marital sex typify. That is why pre-marital sex can be resolved if a man and woman eventually get married. Or, a Biblically unwarranted remarriage is redeemable, even if it started in sin, such that we would not encourage a Biblically unwarranted remarried couple to seek yet another divorce to make amends. We would simply ask them to be honest before God, contrite about what they did, repent of any ways which that unbelief or skewed theology works its way out now, and to seek God to sanctify their current marriage. In other words, heterosexual sin is redeemable in a way that homosexual behavior can never be by its very nature. Sexual-gender complementarity does indeed make all the difference. We must be Biblically and pastorally clear and comfortable with this, as a truth that makes sense of all the Biblical data and which is not a contradiction or inconsistency.

13. *The place of celibacy is not appreciated Biblically.* We need to be compassionate when it comes to this debate. This is not just about ideas. This is about men and women we are calling to holiness with huge sacrifices to be absorbed. But some of those sacrifices seem like cruelty because we do not have a robust and big enough theology of sexuality and non-sexuality. In other words, part of the way forward in this discussion is the promotion of a robust theology of celibacy, even celibacy that is a moral requirement and not simply a chosen path of discipleship. In the case of someone with a fixed gay orientation, we must teach that their option is both demanded AND a chosen path of discipleship. I know the following comparison is often rebuffed but it need not be so. If a young woman desperately wants to be married but the right man has not come along, she is in a situation that demands celibacy and yet she is also choosing to be celibate. You see, celibacy should not only be a chosen lifestyle but also the required state of everyone not married, if Biblical holiness is to be followed. In that light, we have a theological purpose for that state of being. That woman is suffering, in a sense. She longs for the intimacy of marriage, but she cannot have it yet, because God has not provided it. Likewise, gay Christians are inhibited by the reality that they feel attracted to their same gender, exclusively. The factors are different, but they also cannot have what they long for. It might be the case that their desires change, and hope and prayer should always be offered for that. But until then, or until they meet the One to whom marriage and sex point face to face, the Lord Jesus, they must persevere in this hard yet meaningful journey of unmet longing.

Some hungers are essential, like for food, water, and shelter. Others are powerful and yet are at times left unfulfilled on purpose so we can be walking symbols of our need for union with Christ in heaven. Sex is one of those hungers. It is given to almost everyone. It is powerful. There is a good reason to want sex, because it ultimately reveals the union we have with Jesus. But sex is not an essential hunger. We must appreciate that and remind our friends with same-sex desires of this truth. So, sex is not a right. It is good. It is a gift. But it is not a right. The language of essential hunger and inalienable rights must be backed out of this discussion, because this is not an issue

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<sup>9</sup> It should be mentioned that I do believe that there are overlaps in masculinity and femininity. I am not suggesting that masculinity must look a certain way, which includes hunting, working on cars, Nascar, and lots of plaid shirts, and that true femininity is about homemaking, baking, knitting, and pink. But sexual desires are a hallmark of gender conformity and the Bible gives no hint there is the option of attraction toward either sex regardless of one's own physical gender.

premised on either. Rather, it is an issue of some people who are called to fast from sex due to unchosen realities within them. Fasts are always good. If it is not seen as a fast, it will seem like God is starving our friends. He is not. He would never do that. But he calls every one of his children, in some area of their life, to bear an unfulfilled dream, to bear an unquenched hunger, so that we cling to Him, the one to whom all desires and hungers point.

What if this is not only about sex? This is correct. It is not. That is why the alternative to marriage, which is by definition sexual, is deeply Christ-centered friendship. I believe the hunger we have for intimacy can be fulfilled in all of us, in some fashion, through spiritual friendship. Let us not forget that and let us keep that as a part of our pastoral approach to those who believe they are being asked to live in an all or nothing reality. They are not. Friendship is a blessing God wants for everyone, and friendship is what we should offer to and also encourage gay Christians with who face lifelong celibacy.

14. *We have little place for a theology of suffering in this debate.* Finally, let us conclude with the very critical area of suffering. I have been astonished that so many Christian voices who affirm gay marriage either avoid or deny that sexual orientation is an issue of divinely sanctioned suffering for some people. But there is no Biblical reason for this denial, and there is every Biblical reason to accept suffering as the pivotal doctrine upon which to rest our view of homosexual desires and faithfulness to God. I believe that the Bible commends a vision of reality where pre-volitional homosexual desires are a reality God has purposed for certain people as a cross to carry for Jesus' sake. I know this assumption is big pill to swallow. Sex and gender identity strike at the core of who we are. In terms of crosses, it is a big one. But nothing in the nature of same-sex attraction voids it as a place of suffering to which God has called some people. Some revisionists seem so astounded that traditional evangelicals would ever call them to live with such a suffering. But doesn't God call us to things like this all the time? Is this not the basic reality of true discipleship, that we take up our cross and follow Christ? What of the person who cannot find a spouse? What of the person who has had an accident or disease that impedes his or her ability to have sex? What of the person who was married and whose spouse has tragically died? What of the person who is too intellectually disabled to be functionally married but still bears the image of God and desires what we desire, albeit in a more simple form? And, let's be honest, the rest of us still battle desires and lusts in our heart that wage war with our heterosexual purity. We did not choose those things a lot of the time. We would love for them to be gone. How wonderful would it be if our sexual desires were always pure and for our spouses. But they are not, and we must always fight for faith to say no to them. We must flee those desires. We must ask God to heal us, and in the meantime we must also pray to be kept by His grace. And, when we fall, we must repent and seek forgiveness and begin to walk in obedience again. This is the call we all have, and the call that those with irreversible and inherent same-sex desires must also heed.

### **THE BASICS OF THE EXEGESIS:**

Let's begin with some interpretive guideposts. These were implicit and explicit in our section on how and why the revisionist argument came about, but it will be important to have them stated before the relevant texts are examined.

1. The original meaning of the passage is the only meaning.
2. The Bible teaches what reality is and how to live in light of reality primarily by way of command, positive examples, and reasonable deductions and not just prohibitions and/or silence. The space left by prohibitions and silence should be filled with the commands, examples, and deductions. This is the regulative principle.

3. Behaviors that are prohibited without a clear and necessary connection to a specific situation are universal prohibitions against that behavior.
4. The moral laws of the OT are still authoritative and even elevated in the person and work of Christ in the New Covenant.
5. The Bible gives ultimate context for and limits the field of possible conclusions of scientific discoveries.

With those in mind, let us now proceed to the relevant texts.<sup>10</sup>

## **OLD TESTAMENT**

### **Genesis 1:26-29**

*26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth. 29 And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food."*

The positive teaching on gender, marriage, sexuality, and the image of God is laid out here. This is the paradigm, not just of pairing and procreation, but of the fixed reality of gender, marriage, sexuality, and the image of God. All those aspects are inherently connected. The rest of the Bible must be read with this paradigm and thought-world as the backdrop.

### **Genesis 19:4-5**

*4 But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house. 5 And they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them."*

The story of Sodom and Gomorra, which involved the intent of a homosexual act of gang rape, portrays same-sex eroticism in negative light. The author chose to point out that the sinfulness of the cities was in part characterized by the sin of homosexual behavior. This does not mean everything in this story boils down to homosexuality or that God is judging these cities primarily because of their homosexual citizens, but homosexuality is part of the negative portrayal of these cities and the author goes out of his way to reveal this. Godlessness leads to overall cultural decay and same-sex eroticism is one way it manifests itself. Intent or ultimate causality is not mentioned and that is worth noting. It is also worth noting that this was an extreme situation, which involves excessive lust, but nonetheless same-sex behavior is cast in negative light.<sup>11</sup>

### **Leviticus 18:22, 20:13**

*22 You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.*

*13 If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.*

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<sup>10</sup> Please refer to the suggested readings in the bibliography for a more thorough and nuanced exegesis of these passages.

<sup>11</sup> Judges 19 should also be read like this.

These verses reside in contexts where sexual sin is mentioned in the greater context of the holiness codes of the Law of Moses. It is true that some of the codes are civil, some are ceremonial, some are typological, and they are at times all bunched together. But others, like those focusing on sex, are moral and thus eternally binding. These verses originally spoke to an audience that experienced many of these behaviors within the world of paganism. Sex and pagan worship were tied together. But the ultimate narrational point, the principle, is that all forms of idolatry, literal and spiritual, usually materialize in sexual sin. The point is that all forms of sex outside of the Genesis 1 paradigm<sup>12</sup> of gender, marriage, and sexuality are forbidden because they stem from spiritual decay. Also, had the author wanted the reader to restrict these prohibitions only to pagan worship scenarios, he would have told us. The Bible is clear and connections like those were made clear by the inspired authors when important. God was sovereignly aware that the Bible would need to speak and govern his people up to this modern age and beyond. These behavioral prohibitions are blunt and universal, and causality is not a contingency.

In Lev 20:13, note that the Law prohibits both parties from sexual actions and calls them both to account, so consent is in view. This is not just about rape or forced relationships. For the moral accountability to flow both ways, this must be a mutual arrangement.

As we noted in the previous section, none of the other prohibitions in these contexts are in question in a popular way, yet. No one questions the sinfulness of bestiality or incest. One can make a much stronger argument that polygamy is permissible because so many heroes of the OT were polygamists.

In the rest of the OT, every positive example of gender, marriage, and sexuality is the Genesis 1 paradigm. All other arrangements are put in negative light, explicitly or implicitly. If certain actions are to be limited to specific scenarios and only to those scenarios, the author would have made that clear in the wording of the command, positive examples, and in scenes with strong elements of suggestion.

## ***NEW TESTAMENT***

### **Romans 1:18-32**

*18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. 24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. 26 For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. 28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. 29 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil,*

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<sup>12</sup> Forthwith, the Genesis 1 paradigm will be defined as marital heterosexuality.

*covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.*

The revisionists want to read this passage in light of men and women who are actually heterosexual who act in homosexual ways due to paganism and/or people who engage in same-sex behavior out of excessive lust. But given the whole-Bible context, and the interpretive guideposts, that is simply too narrow an understanding. Paul is talking about the results of the Fall, one being the cursed condition of some individuals who give themselves sexually to their own gender, regardless of the specific ways that works its way out in their emotions, bio-chemistry, or other aspects of social conditioning. Sin is idolatry and one of the implications of idolatry is that the Creator-creature distinction is no longer valued or even seen. Thus, if that distinction breaks down, then its analogs in human relationships will break down. Sex is such a powerful analog that it is cursed quite visibly and dramatically, even to the degree that some people prefer sexuality with their own gender, which is unnatural according to this text and also a sign of God's judgment. Homosexuality, in other words, is idolatry writ large. The Genesis 1 paradigm is the only possible manifestation of true worship and adherence to the Creator-creature distinction.

### **1 Corinthians 6:9-10**

*9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

Paul used terms for homosexuality here that were unique and also evidenced his dependence on Leviticus 18 and 20. It is true that one term can refer to the younger and effeminate partner in a pederastic relationship and the other term is a Pauline term for general male-male sex. But given the whole-Bible context, and that Paul does not explicitly tie these terms to paganism or other cultural pressures alone, we should affirm Paul is being general and universal in his usage of these terms for homosexuality – just like he is with the other terms in this passage. He does not implicitly make room for some forms of drunkenness or some forms of greed. Thus, we should hold his view on same-sex eroticism in the same way.

One thing to note is that he is talking about active and unrepentant participation in these sins, not those who struggle with them or those who fall into them with remorse and desire to repent. That would contradict his teachings in 1 Corinthians itself, as well as his other writings. And, homosexual actions are put in a list with other things, like greed and swindling. We are held to account with the whole list.

The good news of this passage is what Paul says in v 11. Such WERE some of the Corinthians. In other words, they have been forgiven and bestowed with the Spirit to no longer live for such sins. They may struggle with them. They may even fall back into them from time to time. But the Spirit is winning and sanctifying and giving them pure desires to replace ungodly desires.

## **1 Timothy 1:8-10**

*8 Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, 9 understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, 10 the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine.*

Again, Paul lists homosexuality, using a broad term for male-male sex (but this includes lesbianism, given whole-Bible theology), among other sins for which the Law was written to define, confront, and restrain in those who are ungodly and sinful. Just as enslavers and liars are under the condemning light of the law without condition, so are those who practice same-sex eroticism. Like 1 Corinthians 6, Paul is speaking of those who are defined by and committed to these actions, not those who are believers who struggle with them and want to be faithful to turn away and repent from them.

### *A WORD ON JESUS AND HIS APPARENT SILENCE ON THE MATTER*

First, Jesus was an orthodox, Torah keeping Jew. He shared the thought-world of that community, so his view of gender, marriage, and sexuality was the Genesis 1 paradigm.

Second, Jesus never mentioned idolatry per se. But no one is arguing that idolatry is permissible as long as certain conditions apply. There are a lot of things not recorded in the gospels that Jesus did not directly refer to. But he certainly talked about sexual purity and the continued authority of the OT. So, when Jesus talks about fornication, as he does in Mark 7:20-23, he is assuming that his audience knows that fornication includes any form of sex outside the Genesis 1 paradigm.

Let us also remember that Jesus himself is the best example of the beauty and meaningfulness of celibacy. Jesus was a true man and thus was sexual, as hard as that may be for us to grasp. Of course his male sexuality was totally pure. But he was tempted, and yet he remained pure. His wife was to be the church, so he said *no* to individual women and said *yes* to the Father in submission to His will and *yes* to his beloved bride-to-be, the church. Jesus also taught that it is better not to be married if God's Word cannot be followed, like his teaching on divorce and remarriage in Matthew 19.

In other words, Jesus is in line with the rest of the Bible. We dare not make the red letters of the Bible any more inspired and relevant than the rest of the Bible. It is one unitary message.

### **A PASTORAL WAY FORWARD: THE PARADIGM OF THE WOMAN CAUGHT IN ADULTERY:**

I would like to suggest that the story in John (7:53-8:11) of a woman caught in adultery is a true and beautiful paradigm for approaching sinful people so that they turn to Christ and find new life in Him, not least people who experience same-sex attraction.<sup>13</sup>

## **John 7:53–8:11**

*53 They went each to his own house, 1 but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2 Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. 3 The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst 4 they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. 5 Now in the*

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<sup>13</sup> I realize that there is scholarly consensus that the earliest manuscripts of the Gospel of John do not have this text in them. But most evangelical scholars believe this text to be canonical and in line with Johannine and overall Biblical theology. I take it to be canonical and it most certainly expresses truths that we find in all of Scripture.

*Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” 6 This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. 7 And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” 8 And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. 9 But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. 10 Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” 11 She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.”*

#### Jesus condemns the hypocrisy and legalism behind truth without grace (8:1-6)

The scene begins as Jewish religious leaders bring a woman caught in sexual sin to be given her due penalty according to the Mosaic Law. To be fair, the Law of Moses did require that sexual sin be judged by capital punishment (Lev 20:10). However, immediately we encounter an inconsistency. Where is the man? In the OT Law, both parties were liable and were to be put to death. This was an unjust application of God’s just Law. The letter of the Law has not been followed because the spirit of the Law has not been appreciated. The man goes free; the weaker and more vulnerable woman is taken as a pawn in a chess match. Grace has no part in this story.

I believe as elders of the Chapel Hill Bible Church we are called to make sure that truth and grace are always paired. We never want to fudge on the teachings of Scripture, but we must always apply Scripture in a spirit of grace. If we must confront a sinner, it should never be about making a point, or done out of self-protection, or anything else outside the good of that sinner and the glory of God. Confrontation and rebuke is essential in healthy churches, but must be done out of love with redemptive purposes, not punitive.

#### Jesus levels the field (8:7)

As the story unfolds, we realize that these men are not out to obey the Law of God in order to protect the holiness of God’s image in his people, but they are out to make a point by using a woman’s life to manipulate Jesus. They are divorcing truth from grace *and* they are ignoring their own hypocrisy. Had they an awareness of their own lustful hearts, they would have seen themselves in this woman, and they certainly would have obeyed the word of God and brought the man also, in fact with a greater concern for his heart since he functioned in a more responsible and accountable role before God and in society.

We also must acknowledge that we are sinners. As leaders in this church, we are not used of God in other people’s lives because we are perfect. No, we are fellow sinners helping other sinners come clean before God, ready to repent, equipped to walk in growing obedience. There must be a humility that attends our ministry to protect and promote the holiness of God in our church. We are part of the problem and our greatest concern must be our own sanctification. We must be vigilant in working to get the logs out of our own eyes. This awareness of our sin, and the humility that accompanies that, will enable us to apply the commands of God with grace, fairness, and with pastoral sensitivity. Our zeal will be for God’s righteousness, not our own.

#### Jesus alone is the perfectly righteous man (8:8-9)

Notice that all the hypocritical religious men leave, whether heartfelt or simply embarrassed. They now feel the weight of the Law upon their own souls. The legalistic, self-righteous, shallow, and

manipulative test they tried to put over on Jesus failed. But one man is left. We often forget to focus on this part of the story. One man is left. It is Jesus. Jesus has the moral capital to stay. He is the righteous man who has the moral capital to judge. It is just Jesus and the woman now.

A church that is aware of the fact that everyone is a sinner should not use that truth to justify permissiveness or any lack of concern for sin. Jesus points out sinners but then purposely stays put as the true sinless man. He cares about purity. The issue is being clear about who has the right to judge as the Judge. We must care about sin but present Jesus as the One who cares most. We must bring people before the light and judgment of God's Word, and thus have people confronted with the Living Judge himself. Judgmentalism is when we take judgment in our own hands. But godly elder shepherds must regularly show people what they look like in the mirror of God's truth. We admit to our own sin, we show Christ as the righteous judge, and we bring people to him.

#### Jesus forgives and true forgiveness shows itself in true repentance and growth (8:10-11)

Jesus condemns the hypocrisy and legalism of the religious leaders, he levels the playing field, he stands alone as the only righteous and true judge, and then, in a great gospel twist, he extends mercy to this woman and calls her to true life. He calls her to the life of sinning less and less (the present imperative has an ongoing force to it, rather than a punctiliar force that the English translation seems to suggest). You see, sin is taken seriously by Jesus. He wants it to be gone in this woman. He condemns the sin he saw in the religious leaders but he also agrees with the Law that her sin is detestable, too. It is just that all sin is taken seriously, not just fornication. The law is kept, but in the way it was intended to be, justly, righteously, and with mercy as the high note. He wants her to feel the weight of the Law's accusations, but he wants her to feel it for the right reasons – not to please people, but to feel the displeasure of God. Only when we feel that displeasure do we then sense our need of grace. Jesus created the ecosystem for grace to be embraced. The bad news was delivered, then the good news was proclaimed.

This must be our paradigm as elders. We need to take all sin seriously. One of our roles is to guard the life and doctrine of our church and we must do that diligently. But we cannot focus on some sins and ignore others. Sexual sin, including same-sex behavior, must stand condemned before God's Word, but so should greed, impatience, excessive lusts with material goods, jealousy, insecurity, pride, rudeness, bigotry, and heterosexual fornication. But the high note must be mercy and the call to true life.

As a working paradigm, then, we must call the entire body of CHBC to own their sin. We are to be people who deal with logs in our own eyes before we point out specks in our brothers' eyes. If some folks are hypocrites and legalists, then that is as condemnable and damnable as the licentious and irreligious person. But when honest and broken sinners come with nothing in their hands, we remind them of Jesus' mercy and grace, and as a necessary and immediate consequence, we call them to a life of Spirit-empowered, growing, tangible repentance and holiness. Our policies and procedures must be shaped within this paradigm.



## **PRINCIPLES FOR THE MINISTRY AND POLICY CULTURE OF CHBC:**

1. We will keep the main thing the main thing. We will preach Christ from all the Scriptures so that our people are built into the image of Christ, as individuals and as a church, equipped for every good work.
2. We should be committed to our vision and mission, which is to be transformed by the Gospel: our church, our cities, and the whole world. The three pillars of this are the message of the Gospel, the community of the Gospel, and the mission of the Gospel. The mission of the gospel is to reach the lost with the message of Jesus Christ and that means we must have non-Christians in our community, who benefit from our ministry. We should have non-Christians in our midst, and many will be living lives not in step with the gospel yet.
3. We will need to be comfortable with the presence of men and women who are living in gay relationships who do not yet have convicting beliefs about Scripture and the indwelling presence of the Spirit that call them to repentance and faith. We should be thankful they are curious and want to be among us. We should serve them and earnestly and lovingly present Christ to them through Biblical teaching and living.
4. We also want newly converted Christians with us. We should be glad to teach them the basics of the faith and to mentor them in discipleship relationships. Conversion does not mean immediate conviction and right doctrine on all matters. Some of these folks, while genuinely converted, may not be aware or ready to give every part of their life to the Lordship of Christ. Some will still live in such a way that is not pleasing to God in sexual matters. We will have couples that are cohabitating and we may even have folks who are in gay relationships. Our ministry must be to love them and continue to teach them what Biblical discipleship looks like, and this will include calling them to repent of all Biblically defined sin in their lives. We cannot call them to be perfect or even to simply rework their desires, but we can call them to resist temptation and not act on those desires by Spirit-empowered obedience.
5. Our goal is for every person at the Bible church to be in full and committed pursuit of Jesus Christ, which is evidenced in Spirit-empowered maturation, commitment to the body, and a life of cultural renewal and evangelistic mission. All that we do must serve that purpose.
6. As it pertains to involvement, we should categorize different levels with different standards for each. Attendance, logistical service, and leadership service can be three general categories we have in mind. Unbelievers and new believers are invited to attend and at some point even to logistical service, which would include any activity that truly helps the mission of the church but does not involve their life and doctrine as a model or source of truth (making coffee, helping set up rooms, lighting, etc.). Each ministry will need to think through pertinent issues and qualifiers so that they can make wise and contextual decisions when faced with a situation. But when it comes to leadership service, where one's life and doctrine matter, we must restrict those places to Christians who are repenting and growing and do not have any area of their life that is purposely and actively out of step with Biblical holiness. Someone who is acting on same-sex desires would be someone who is not living within that standard. But a man or woman who is attracted to their own gender but resisting temptation and committed to only having sex within a Genesis 1 paradigm would be within the standards to be part of our leadership service teams.
7. As it pertains to membership, we should adhere to the current constitution and bylaws with regard to membership, according to the original intended meaning of those documents. The first clause of the Covenant of Fellowship states that members in good standing are repenting, growing believers.

That should continue to be our standard for membership.<sup>14</sup> Non-Christians and Christians who embrace an area of principled sin would not meet those criteria. Thus, a person who is engaging in sex outside of the Biblical context, on principle, should not be invited to membership or should have their membership put in question in a Biblical church discipline procedure. People who have same-sex attraction but are committed to celibacy or the Genesis 1 paradigm would be wholeheartedly invited to membership and encouraged in their membership.

8. This means that membership will continue to be a high calling, not a lowest common denominator reality. In other words, our definition of membership will be tighter and more exclusive than the Bible's definition of conversion. That is appropriate and is the pattern for the vast majority of evangelical churches, based on what membership means for decision-making and leadership.
9. The membership process is designed to have conversation be the starting point, rather than a fixed decision based on a quick assessment of a person's spiritual state, beliefs, and lifestyle. The conversations must be pastoral, Biblical, loving, and lead to truth and grace. If done well, the vast majority of these conversations should end with a peaceful and clear decision to either invite said parties to membership or to suspend the membership process until conversion and/or repentance occur by gospel teaching and modeling. If said party cannot continue with us and will leave over a disagreement about lifestyle, we can be at peace that the process was biblical, loving, and godly.
10. In terms of the administration of official ecclesial duties that confer blessing and moral validity, elders, pastors, and ministers should be unified around these truths which should bind us in terms of what we condone and how that will play out in the administration of our duties. Therefore, we will prohibit our leaders and staff from officiating the marriage of two gay people or any other ecclesial act that would condone and offer God's blessing on active and unrepentant sin.
11. It should be our hope to honor Jesus Christ, to make the gospel central, to be faithful to the Bible, to be consistent, just, and wise in applying the Bible, and for sinners to be saved, not only in status but also from the power and presence of sin. We will not focus on homosexuality nor will we ignore or redefine the Scripture's teaching on same-sex behavior.
12. If we have members of the congregation who themselves are living in the Genesis 1 paradigm but are not convinced that the Genesis 1 paradigm is the only option for people with seemingly inherent homosexual desires, at the very least we must ask them to continue to wrestle with their views through Biblical study and dialogue with leadership, and that they not lobby for their view or try and argue for their position to sway a consensus in a divisive fashion. We should ask that they respect our church's hermeneutical and theological convictions.
13. There is a lot more to be said, but these are some working parameters. There will be nuanced differences of belief when it comes to the nature of homosexual desire, and latitude must be given, even among our elders, but we should be resolute that sex should only be defined by the Genesis 1 paradigm, an act of love and profound typology between a husband and wife in a lifelong covenant, which embodies the image of God, the Creator-creature distinction, and the glorious intimacy between the Redeemer and His redeemed ones.
14. In all things our tone must be that of the Savior – compassionate, whole-hearted, truth oriented, gracious, merciful, and Spirit filled.

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<sup>14</sup> Covenant of Fellowship. Article IV. Section A. "To endeavor to please God in every way, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and pursuing together a manner of life consistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God."