

A Position Paper on the Redefinition of Marriage and Human Sexuality

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Introduction

The sexual revolution that began in the 1960's, first in the USA and then throughout the rest of the Western world and beyond, introduced immense changes in the way the established moral values and basis of society should be considered and lived. Its main effect has been the constant increase of immorality, which has influenced attitudes towards free sex and promoted a movement that purposefully and publicly endorses and publicizes same-sex families and a homosexual lifestyle. Consequently, the very definition of marriage in the biblical understanding of a union between one husband and one wife as long as both live, has been challenged, thus calling for sound biblical and theological responses on behalf of the Church.

It is not difficult to summarize what the voices of these social changes say. Some of the strongest claims of homosexuals include assertions “that they are *made that way*... [and] that homosexuality is of *no harm* to the participants or to anyone else... [and] that, if it feels right to those involved, it is *nobody else's business*.”¹ The next similarly important assertion is “that homosexual relationships and heterosexual relationships are *equally valid*.”²

The main intent of this paper is not only informative concerning the biblically based position of the World Assemblies of God Fellowship, but in order to provide the foundation for this position, it also attempts to approach hermeneutically and theologically key biblical texts that relate to this sensitive subject. Major issues, such as God's original design for sex and marriage, human sexuality and same-sex marriage, the extent of God's grace and human responsibility, have been addressed taking into consideration the challenge of opposing arguments. Finally, the paper intends to provide assistance to Christian believers and leaders who are committed to live their lives and lead their Christian communities in accordance with the principles and standards of God's Word. It offers instructions that could be implemented when showing pastoral care and God's love to those who do not share these principles.

The Challenge of the Redefinition of Marriage and the Appeal for a Progressive Adjustment of Christian Theology

The emergence of alternate and biased exegetical interpretations within some circles in the Church has brought an additional aspect to the ongoing polemics. Fearing that the Church could find itself isolated and on the other side of history, these circles suggest alternatives and modifications of biblical theology. Their intention is to de-emphasize the importance of the biblical prohibition of homosexual relations or other forms of immorality.

One such new radical revision in defense of promoting same-sex families and gay and lesbian parenthood is the proposal for a new kind of ecclesiology called “progressive Christian communities.” This theological modification is done at the expense of the value

¹ Ann Lamont, “Homosexual Behavior vs. the Bible,” <https://answersingenesis.org/family/homosexuality/homosexual-behaviour-vs-the-bible/> (accessed November 13, 2015).

² Ibid.

of the Christian heterosexual family, which is (1) “God's design for human beings”³ and (2) “the institution that provides a structure to bring up children as Christians.”⁴ Sound biblical teaching upholds the truth that the values of the individual Christian family should not differ from the values of the Christ-centered Christian community. However, John Blevins’ revisionist interpretation only demonstrates the misunderstanding of this biblical viewpoint:

... the various patterns of relationships blessed and named and celebrated and supported in progressive Christian communities are precisely the manifestation of the kind of community that can help form us as Christians. Those manifestations are by no means perfect and complete but by their very breadth they have much to teach the narrow impoverishment of the nuclear family as the only structure of relationship God blesses. When gay and lesbian parents bring their children to these kinds of progressive communities, they are broadening their family to participate in what they hope to be the broader family of God. It is this family, not the isolated nuclear family of mommy, daddy and child, that can teach us something about the fullness of God's work of redemption in the world.⁵

The New Testament does not manifest such artificial theological and ethical differences between the Christian οἶκος (household) on one side and the Christian εκκλησια (church) on the other side. Given the context of the primitive church’s beginnings, in some scriptures these two terms even imply the same meaning.

Various other appeals have also been made for the change of the interpretation of the nature and mission of the Church. The redefinition of marriage has been compared to the abolition of slavery or the giving of equal rights to women. Liberals have argued that the recognition of homosexual marriage is in line with the progressive adjustment of Christian doctrine over the course of many years. Just as the Church previously discriminated against slaves and women, now the Church must repent of its previous attitudes and behaviour. Arguments have also been made that the church should see the acceptance of same-sex marriage as being part of the *missio dei*. In other words the large social changes that are occurring in society should be seen as being brought about by the purposes of God and, as a consequence, churches should welcome these changes. The grafting in of the Jews into the body of the Church as outlined in Romans 11 is seen as parallel to the grafting in of homosexuals to the Church. Consequently, it is argued that the changes being made should be welcomed theologically.

The use of the redefinition of marriage in support of ecclesiological corrections is also drawn from the wrong hermeneutical treatment of Luke 14:26 (“If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple”). This scripture is quoted with the purpose of removing the task of teaching discipleship from the individual family and making it solely a responsibility of the new kind of Christian community. Ignoring the fact that neither the immediate nor the remote context of Luke 14:26 support any of this, the following revisionist desire is artificially used for this new interpretation: “The

³ John Blevins, “Broadening the Family of God: Debating Same-sex Marriage and Queer Families in America,” *Theology & Sexuality* 12, no.1 (September 1, 2005): 79.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

metaphor of the nuclear family ... must be negated in order that we might glimpse the ways that it eclipses the demands and graces of Christian community and Christian relationships already occurring in a broad array of patterns and constructions.”⁶ The intensity of theological challenge that the church faces today is mirrored in Blevins’ concluding appeal:

As conservatives have doubled their discourses to support heterosexual marriage by condemning gay and lesbian relationships and by claiming to protect children, so too must queer responses multiply the sites from which to articulate critiques and offer alternatives. Those sites must include (at minimum) the academy, which can produce queer theological scholarship, and the Christian community, which can offer evidence of the continuing work of God among Christians who are bound together by various covenants not limited by the strict boundaries of an idolatrous, exclusionary heterosexuality.⁷

Such erosion of biblical and Christian ethical values necessitates a convincing hermeneutical and theological response. The relevant New Testament exhortation teaches us that the mistakes of the Corinthian church should not be repeated today and as Alex Montoya notes,

... we must also identify the attitudes which paralyzed the Corinthian church in its need to respond properly to the immorality it was facing. They were ignorant, deceived, arrogant, and apathetic to the moral corruption within the church. The church today has the same problem. It is ignorant of the biblical mandate, it is being deceived by both the Christian and secular thinkers, it is arrogant in its attitude toward God's Word and sin, and it is apathetic to the dangers it faces from the enemies of the gospel and of biblical marriage.⁸

Against the alternatives proposed by the redefinition of marriage, the biblical Christian theology of marriage remains the essential guideline for living healthy, ethical standards applicable both for the whole society and the individual person. It provides the basis for the definition and purpose of marriage as well as God’s norms for human sexuality.

The Roots and Essentials of Marriage

There is no doubt that “there is absolutely no affirmation of homosexual activity, same-sex marriage, or changes in sexual identity found anywhere in Scripture.”⁹ The witness of Scripture is strong enough to serve as an important factor against homosexual behavior and it should be the foundation in the church’s response to its assertions. The scriptural definition of marriage is the best defense for marriage. This definition is presented with clarity and force, and reveals purpose.

⁶ Ibid., 78-79.

⁷ Ibid., 80.

⁸ Alex D. Montoya, “The Church’s Response to Homosexuality,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 19, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 235.

⁹ “Homosexuality, Marriage, and Sexual Identity,” AG Position Paper, https://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Position_Papers/pp_4181_homosexuality.pdf (accessed November 13, 2015).

Genesis 1:27 represents one of the fundamental texts describing God's creation plan and the place and role of the man and the woman in it: "God created man [humanity] in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." This text reveals in an unequivocal way that the image of God is reflected in humanity through the two genders (male and female).¹⁰ However, this two-gender definition goes beyond bearing the image of the divine and points clearly to the biblical marriage description being the life-long union of one man and one woman. This heterosexual marriage union is blessed by God with the order to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28) and is explicitly defined as "one-flesh" union,¹¹ a term that includes "a multifaceted implication [such as] the physical sexual union itself, the children conceived in marriage, the spiritual and emotional relationship that it involves, as well as the new set of kinship relations established by the marriage."¹² This "one-flesh" union is achieved when "a man is united to his wife" (NIV) or "cleaves" to her (RSV) meaning that "marriage should be characterized by both passion and permanence,"¹³ two additional aspects which along with fruitfulness for procreation reveal God's original and enduring intention for marriage.

Furthermore, God defines marriage by how he created Eve out of Adam. God states his intention in Genesis 2:18: "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."¹⁴ The Hebrew of "helper fit for him" is עֹזֵר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ. This literally means "a helper like in front of him or opposite him". This wording seems to indicate that Eve is created from Adam's body and is equal to him but is the complement of him or counterpart of him. In other words, Eve is equal to Adam but not exactly like Adam. She is his counterpart and it is in this complementary nature that she is Adam's helper. Importantly, the entire context of Eve's creation shows that God is creating her to be a wife for Adam (and therefore creating marriage itself) and that in the union of Adam and Eve, they become one flesh. This precludes all so-called homosexual marriages.

In the specific act of creating marriage, just as in the rest of God's creative acts, the Creator acted sovereignly by the power of His spoken word. God made a "differentiation within creation" when repeatedly "God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:10, 12, 17, 25). God is "sovereign over creation and therefore not identified with it."¹⁵ This observation is very important because "if there is a God who created the world with meaning and purpose, and sexuality and sex is part of that created world, then it follows that there is

¹⁰ John E. Goldingay et al., "Same-Sex Marriage and Anglican Theology: A View from the Traditionalists," *Anglican Theological Review* 93:24.

¹¹ Genesis 2:24, "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh."

¹² Goldingay et al., 25.

¹³ Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (Dallas: Word Books, 1987), 33, quoted in John E. Goldingay et al., 25.

¹⁴ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), Genesis 2:18.

¹⁵ "Pastoring LGBT Persons," Vineyard USA Position Paper, (August 2014), http://vineyardusa.org/site/files/PositionPaper-VineyardUSA-Pastoring_LGBT_Persons.pdf, 27 (accessed January 21, 2016).

meaning and purpose to this dimension of human existence.”¹⁶ Agreeing or disagreeing with this is crucial as is seen in the following set of questions:

The basic issue that the Western world is currently struggling with comes down to this: *do we human beings create the meaning and purpose of sex, or do we discover the meaning and purpose of sex?* Does sex have a meaning totally apart from what you and I think about it and our job is to discover that meaning? Or does sex simply mean whatever we want it to mean? Is there a design for sex given to us by God, or do we just make it up as we go?¹⁷

Biblical teaching confirms that God has created a design for sex in the “one-flesh” marriage union of man and woman. God’s intent for creating human sexuality is reflected in the objective order created by Him. Warning against sexual sin, the apostle Paul appeals to Christians: “Glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:20). Certainly, Paul “clearly has in mind the use of the body for sex, so the ultimate purpose of sex must be the glory of God. To enjoy sex for God’s glory is to enjoy it in the way God has determined.”¹⁸ It follows that the four purposes of sex defined by the Christian ethicist, Dennis Hollinger - “consummation of marriage, expression of love, procreation, and pleasure” – need to be “subordinate to the ultimate purpose of glorifying God.”¹⁹

To the objection that the formulations of God’s marriage creation pattern, which later provided the kinship and remarriage provisions for the Mosaic Law, belong to the old covenant, it should be responded that Jesus himself endorsed their validity in the new covenant. He directly quoted these two Old Testament texts (Genesis 1:27 and 2:24) when he used God’s creation plan for the marriage roles of the man and the woman against allowing divorce. His words, which included these quotations in the two New Testament parallel passages (Matthew 19:3-12 and Mark 10:2-12), prove the truth that, “the marriage ethics of the kingdom of God must be based not on a concession to human failure, but on the only pattern set out in God’s original creation of man and woman.”²⁰

Biblical Teaching on Violations of God’s Original Design for Marriage

Marriage has been given a very high degree of honor both in the Old and the New Testaments. It has been presented by the Old Testament prophets as a concept reflecting the covenant between God and His people Israel (Isaiah 54:4-5; Jeremiah 2:2; 3:20 and Hosea 2), while in the New Testament it is compared to the union of Christ with the Church (Ephesians 5:21-33). What additionally makes marriage considered a spiritual institution is the fact that the apostle Paul treats God’s original marriage design at creation within the framework of Christ’s redemptive relations with the Church. The union between Christ and the Church became the foundation for the union of man and woman in marriage. Sexual holiness is a state of mind and body under the lordship of Christ and God’s original plan for marriage aims at this understanding:

¹⁶ Dennis Hollinger, *The Meaning of Sex: Christian Ethics And The Moral Life* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 2009), 28, quoted in “Pastoring LGBT Persons,” 28.

¹⁷ “Pastoring LGBT Persons,” 28.

¹⁸ Denny Burk, “Hot and Holy: Why the Ultimate Purpose of Sex is Bringing Glory to God,” interview by Lisa Velthouse, *Christianity Today* 57, no 8 (October 2013): 69.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ “Pastoring LGBT Persons,” 28.

When Jesus and Paul talk about marriage and sexuality they appeal to the Old Testament. But they don't point to the polygamist kings of Israel - not even David or Solomon – or to polygamist patriarchs like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Instead, they look back to the monogamous union, before the Fall, of Adam and Eve. That's what they present as the norm of human sexuality and marriage. Paul writes in Ephesians 5 that Adam and Eve's marriage (and every other marriage after it) is meant by God to be an icon of another marriage: Jesus' marriage to his bride, the church. So marriage is fundamentally about the glory of God, because it's meant to depict the gospel. It tells a bigger story: husbands loving their wives as Christ loved the church, and wives relating to their husbands as the church relates to Christ.²¹

Given such elevated presentation and attention, Scripture also clearly indicates the outcome of sinful practices that would try to replace God's creative pattern for the family and human sexuality. The sin of adultery was hateful to God in the Old Testament and multiple scriptures witness that it was severely condemned and punished (Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 18:20; 20:10; Deuteronomy 5:18; 22:22-27). The New Testament also deals resolutely with the sexual unfaithfulness of a husband or wife in thought and act. Thus, the sin of adultery is listed in all the sins of the flesh (Mark 7:19-23; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-21). Similarly, it should be asserted that, "wherever homosexuality is mentioned in the Bible it is condemned."²² In the Old Testament it was defined as "abomination" and a "detestable act" that is under God's judgment (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13). It should be noted that, "the characterization of sin as abomination appears to have special reference to God's attitude toward sin and its effect upon him."²³ The practices defined as abomination in the Bible "virtually nauseate God."²⁴ The sin classified as abomination is "not simply something that God peevishly objects to but something that produces revulsion in him."²⁵ In the New Testament homosexuality is considered a sin "against nature (Romans 1:27), which excludes one from the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)."²⁶ Addressing the believers in Corinth, the apostle Paul considered adultery and homosexuality as something that belonged to their sinful past, which had nothing to do with their present status as God's redeemed children because they were "washed," "sanctified," and "justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11). There is no difference between the Old Testament definition of adultery and homosexuality as sin and the New Testament stance towards it.

As with any other violation of God's standards for holiness, His good will, and intentions for our physical and spiritual wellbeing, there is no reason to minimize or slacken the biblical warning and God's prohibition concerning homosexual practices despite the various attempts in this direction. Regretfully, the current ongoing change of the conjugal conception of marriage into a consent-based view of marriage aims exactly at this. While

²¹ Burk, 69.

²² Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism* (Oak Grove, MN.: Winston Press, 1980), vol. 2, 1027.

²³ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 575.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ McBrien, 1027.

the first one upholds the biblical pattern of comprehensive and exclusive union of heart, mind and body between a husband and wife with the perspective to become a father and mother to any children that they conceive, the second one embraces “loving relationships between consenting adults.”²⁷ This new understanding of marriage is “gender blind and not based on the sexual differences between man and woman.” The focus is placed on the care about the sexual desires and love lives of consenting adults. In fact, it is probably not wrong to assume that “the redefinition of marriage won’t stop here,” because “if we reduce marriage to be just about someone you love, and see male-female aspect as irrational or arbitrary, what’s magical about the number two?”²⁸

Various exegetical efforts have been made in relation to the above-cited biblical texts with the goal to lessen the intensity of forbidding same-gender sexual relations and open the door for the acceptance of homosexual marriage theologically. The liberal opinion upholds the argument that Leviticus 18:22²⁹ and 20:13³⁰ present ritual purity law and not a fundamental moral principle. However, the text unambiguously shows that the act in general is forbidden and there is nothing in it that suggests that the motivation behind the act such as any exploitative sexual relations or prostitution is what is central. Additionally, Jesus’ assertion of God’s creation plan for marriage only confirms the moral validity of these texts.³¹

Revisionists explain God’s disapproval of same-sex relationships in the New Testament by His prohibition over the abuse of power in unequal relationships known as pederasty. This type of controversial erotic relationship that was both idealized and criticized was widely known in ancient Greek culture. Thus, the focus of liberal thought is on the sexual exploitation and domination of the adolescent male by the adult partner and the lack of mutual consensual bond between the two. The sexual abuse of this ancient homoerotic practice has been projected over to Romans 1:27³² as an explanation and at the same time as justification for consensual same-sex relations.³³ However, this kind of interpretation could not stand the test of a sound hermeneutical study of the whole biblical section of Romans 1:18-32 in which the prohibition for same-sex relationships is found. The goal of the apostle Paul was not to single out homosexual practice as a special type of sin. The context contained in this section points to the sin of idolatry put against the proof of God’s existence as the Creator, and reveals the willful act of the whole of humanity to turn away from Him. By “creating their objects of worship” instead of God, men have

²⁷ Ryan T. Anderson, “Defending Marriage by Defining Marriage,” interview by Alton J. Pelowski, January 8, 2013, <http://www.kofc.org/en/columbia/detail/marriage-interview.html>, 1-2 (accessed November 21, 2015).

²⁸ Ibid., 2.

²⁹ “You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination.”

³⁰ “If *there is* a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their blood guiltiness is upon them.”

³¹ Goldingay et al., 26.

³² “... in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.”

³³ Multiple historical documents and Ancient Greek studies provide an abundance of information about pederasty practices during different periods of Greek history and culture.

fallen under condemnation resulting in “refusal to honor God and render him thanks.”³⁴ Because man “has put something else in the place which can only properly belong to God, man’s natural relationships have become perverted.”³⁵ Human history has often witnessed the fact that, “in turning from God and things spiritual, men naturally sink into the sensual.”³⁶ One such expression of this universal human failure occurs when Paul says that, “their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts . . .” (Romans 1:26-27). The act of exchanging “the natural (Greek: φυσικὴν) function for that which is unnatural (Greek: παρὰ φύσιν)” implies an exchange of what is “in accordance with the intention of the Creator” for what is “contrary to the intention of the Creator.”³⁷ Paul makes a similar appeal to nature (Greek: ἡ φύσις αὐτῆ) in 1 Corinthians 11:14 which could be translated “the very way God has made it.”³⁸ Undoubtedly, for Paul the concept of nature in these cases “denotes that order which is manifest in God’s creation and which men have no excuse for failing to recognize and respect.”³⁹ Otherwise, the sinful pattern of life revealed in Romans 1:26-27 leads ultimately to self-destruction. In line with this thought it should be observed that in this passage,

the Pauline phrase “God gave them up” occurs three times, indicating that the condition fallen human beings find themselves in is a natural consequence of turning from God. Contrary to the idea that God sends further punishment on those who disobey, the picture here in Romans is that the misuse of sexuality itself is a kind of punishment for abandoning the ways of the true God, rather than a specific punishment for the misuse.⁴⁰

God’s decision reveals a “deliberate act of judgment” but also of mercy because “throughout the time of their God-forsakenness God is still concerned with them and dealing with them.”⁴¹

The spiritual degradation that results from this sin is additionally defined in the New Testament in relation to the central key subject of Jesus’ ministry and mission, namely the kingdom of God. This topic is also quite present in the letter of 1 Corinthians where the apostle Paul gives a list of vices that reflects qualities of character that will hinder people of such character to inherit the kingdom of God. His question and answer do not contain any ambiguity: “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of

³⁴ Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament, A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1996), 384, quoted in Goldingay et al., 27.

³⁵ Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), vol. 2, 570.

³⁶ Charles Hodge, *Romans, The Geneva Series of Commentaries* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Trust, 1989), 41.

³⁷ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans in The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), vol. 1, 125.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 125-126.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁴⁰ Goldingay et al., 27.

⁴¹ Cranfield, 121.

God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate (*malakoi*), nor homosexuals (*arsenokoitai*), nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Truly, this is not just a simple list of vices “but a theological chain linking the will of God in creation to the qualities of character expected in the coming kingdom, clarified by reference to the Decalogue.”⁴² Both the letter and the spirit of this text seem to be totally in line with the stern same-gender sexual relationship prohibition (whether in marriage or outside of it) found in the Old Testament. As both terms are included in Paul’s argument, the one referring “generically to men who lie with other men as with a woman” (*arsenokoitai*), and the one referring to “the passive partner in gay sexual relationships” (*malakoi*), any suggestions to relate them to the Hellenistic Greek practice of pederasty remain groundless.⁴³

The missionary efforts of the first church resulted in establishing churches in contexts characterized by sexual immorality and homosexual behavior belonging to the sinful culture around them. Therefore, the fact that the apostle Paul listed this vice along with the rest of the sinful practices like theft and adultery that were prohibited by the Decalogue seems to be quite significant. Another clear example for this is 1 Timothy 1:9-10 where the same term *arsenokoitai* is used again: “...law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious... and immoral men and homosexuals (*arsenokoitai*) and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching.”

Two separate Old Testament stories present a similar development. Each one of them, Genesis 19:4-5 and Judges 19:20-24, tells of perverse men obsessed with the desire to have sexual relationships with male guest(s) that had received hospitality by local households. In each story, first in Sodom and then at Gibeah, an effort is made to avoid such an “outrageous thing”⁴⁴ by an exchange offer with very close female family members. The very notion for such a costly exchange that would dishonor a dear family member indicates how detestable the demand of the wicked men waiting outside must have been for each of the two fathers. These two biblical narrative texts undoubtedly consider homosexuality a serious offence and the very brief New Testament allusion to the first story only confirms this: “... Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire” (Jude 5-7).⁴⁵

⁴² David Field, “Homosexuality,” *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 451-452, quoted in Goldingay et al., 28.

⁴³ Goldingay et al., 27.

⁴⁴ Judges 19:24

⁴⁵ Liberal scholars have tried to weaken the condemning force of these texts by picking on the words of Jesus in the Gospels accusing the city of Sodom not for the sin of homosexuality but for the prosperity that led to injustice (Luke 17:28-29), an accusation which is also found in some Old Testament prophetic texts (e.g. Ezekiel 16:49). However, it should be noted that the very next verse (Ezekiel 16:50) defines the sin of Sodom as “abomination,” which is totally in line with the previously discussed definition of the homosexual sin found in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. Additionally, if we take into consideration that in order to point out the suddenness of the punishment Jesus used verbs in a generic way to describe prosperity that leads to self-sufficiency (His description in

Even though the argument against homosexual behavior does not depend critically on these two narrative texts, which are concerned with the importance of hospitality over the value of honor, it would be unjust to disconnect the spirit and the message of these texts from the rest of the apparently more explicit scriptures. We accept them all as essential, and linked together they speak hermeneutically to the subject. They provide the obvious conclusion that any violation of God's original design for marriage (a lifelong and faithful union between one man and one woman), first defined in the Book of Genesis and later confirmed by Jesus and used by the apostle Paul as the foundation for theological-ethical exhortation, results in God's stern prohibition and words of judgment both in the Old and the New Testament. This biblical truth is the one that determines the foundation of the World Assemblies of God Fellowship position.

God's Sovereignty Over the Definition of Sin and His Provision for Forgiveness

The biblical record and human history disclose the fact that God's glory has been manifested by His divine attributes. The revelation of His holiness makes us encounter His majesty and also discover His expectations from us as His creation. This is the reason why God's holiness requires definition of sin and the Scripture repeatedly communicates this message either in its narrative, prophetic, epistolary or apocalyptic genres. However, as this message has often been neglected, all humanity falls "short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

What God has defined as sin in the Bible remains sin. Being our Creator, His definitions of sin are objective reality and could not be subjectively altered by any human being. His definitions of sin affect equally both heterosexuals and those that have homosexual conduct. The prohibition for committing the sin of adultery found in the Decalogue and addressed towards heterosexuals is to be observed with the same force and carefulness as the prohibition for committing the sin of having same sex-relationships found in the Levitical Code and addressed to those who are inclined towards such acts. God's general definition for the consequences of sin is clear: "The wages of sin is death ..." (Romans 6:23). There is no worse consequence than spiritual death, which breaks relationship with God and does not allow one to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus himself upheld the gravity of breaking God's sovereign characterization of what is sin and pointed out that at the end of time "The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:40-42).

Secondly, God's glory has also been revealed by His divine attribute of love. He cares for His creation and the apostle Peter reveals that God is "not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). This is what had happened to some Corinthian believers whose former life was one of sexual immorality that included

Luke 17:28-29 of the prosperity of Lot's time is similar to the one given for Noah's time) and if we also consider the apostle Peter's description of the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah in 2 Peter 2:6, it becomes clear that the sin of homosexuality in Sodom was not overlooked in the New Testament. Similarly, liberal thought believes that these two stories do not speak to the subject because they refer to rape and not to sexual relations by consent. However, this is not supported by any element in the two texts or by the New Testament scriptures referring to these two stories.

adultery and homosexuality, greediness, idolatry, drunkenness, slander and lies. The Corinthian believers could not be called God's children and continue in these practices. This thought is quite significant if we take into consideration current theological revisions that are in favor of homosexual behavior for people who claim to profess faith in Christ. God's forgiveness produced radical transformation in the Corinthian believers and the apostle Paul reminded them of this important fact: "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" (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Their conversion experience confirms the biblical revelation that Jesus "became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (Hebrews 5:9).

As with all other sins mentioned in the Bible, God's provision for all those who commit sexual acts outside of His established pattern for marriage ("adultery, fornication, incest, bestiality, pornography, prostitution, voyeurism, pedophilia, exhibitionism, sodomy, polygamy, polyamory, or same-sex sexual acts"⁴⁶) is found nowhere else but in "the efficacy of the death and resurrection of Christ,"⁴⁷ who though was sinless became "sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). The result of the above-mentioned sinful practices is spiritual death, and the biblical promise is that "the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, will cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God" (Hebrews 9:14).

The mission of the church should be in line with God's vision for the world. God's love demonstrated in Christ is intended to reach all humanity and it embraces homosexuals with the same intensity and compassion as the rest of the human race who struggle with the consequences of the Fall. The task of the church is to preach Jesus' message of love and welcome. Without affirming sinful behavior Jesus never stopped loving those who were marginalized by their society and offered them His forgiveness and acceptance.

Man's Responsibility Towards God's Moral Principles and Provision

The gospel message communicates God's forgiveness and cleansing for everyone who repents and turns away from his or her sins and this includes the sin of homosexuality. God's forgiveness is always accompanied by God's enablement of the individual person to live a life that is pleasing to Him. This biblical truth includes both knowledge and experience: "For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin because anyone who has died has been set free from sin" (Romans 6:6-7). This and many other similar biblical teachings relate also to believers that struggle with same-sex sexual attractions. Temptation itself is not to be considered sin but it "can be resisted and overcome (1 Corinthians 10:13; Hebrews 12:1-6)."⁴⁸ Living in the context of spiritual freedom acquired in Christ, each believer has the responsibility to refrain from all sexually immoral acts including same-sex conduct.

⁴⁶ "Homosexuality, Marriage, and Sexual Identity," AG Position Paper, 5. The Scriptural support given for the list of these sinful sexual acts includes Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 18:7-23; 20:10-21; Deuteronomy 5:18; Matthew 5:27-28; 15:19; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-13; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 4:17-19; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:3 and Hebrews 13:4.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 6.

In many countries of the world same-sex relationships are not only approved but also encouraged by the secular media and educational system as never before. This in turn gives birth to an increase of same-sex desires and attraction considered by modern society to be normal. Same-sex attraction is viewed as a justifiable reason to begin same-sex relationships. However, not only biblical but also secular ethical norms recognize that the concept of attraction is not to be left limitless especially when attraction to someone or something becomes abnormal or dangerous. The biblical teaching is clear that same-sex attraction must be avoided.

Nowhere do the numerous New Testament moral and ethical exhortations allow for helplessness and defeat before sexually immoral drives and acts. Believers are restored through Christ in the image of God (Ephesians 4:23-24; Colossians 3:10) and are inhabited by the Holy Spirit (John 14:17; 1 Corinthians 6:19). It is because they have the power to make godly moral choices that the apostle Paul exhorts them to “glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:20). The biblical teaching does not agree with revisionist acceptance of homosexual behavior, which asserts that people can’t help it and therefore it should be considered normal. While showing love, respect, and compassion is an obligation of the church, this kind of view does an enormous disservice to those who practice and/or witness homosexual orientation or behavior. Christians have witnessed deliverance from the bondage of homosexual and heterosexual sin when repentance has been followed by obedient faith. This kind of commitment to God’s plan of salvation releases the effectiveness of the renewing power of the Holy Spirit and the person becomes a “new creation” in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). Moral control over the self is one of the characteristics of the Christian life: “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God” (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5).

All throughout human history, since sin entered this world and affected the human race, people have objected to God’s moral standards for life and conduct. Both His natural disclosure through nature and His divine revelation in His Son, Jesus Christ, have also been rejected (Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 1:18). Those who live in defiance against God’s divine authority would tend to disagree with the biblical principles discussed and presented in this document being moral imperatives. However, Christians have the role to be ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20) and the responsibility to share with unbelievers God’s moral values. This should be done remembering that, “as Christians we have received God’s mercy while helpless, ungodly and hostile to God (Romans 3:23; 5:6, 10),”⁴⁹ and the message should include “forgiveness, cleansing, restoration, and power for godly living for all who repent and believe the Gospel (John 1:12; 3:16; Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Philippians 2:13).”⁵⁰

⁴⁹ “Homosexuals and the Christian Fellowship,” Conservative Congregational Christian Conference Position Paper, <http://www.cccusa.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Homosexuals.pdf> (accessed February 5, 2016).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Conclusion

The definition of marriage is determined by God, and that definition is demonstrated and illustrated in the origin of marriage, which in turn serves as the foundation for building the theology of marriage and family. Biblical teaching provides the understanding that marriage is much more than an agreement by a male and female to become partners. The marriage creation story between the man and the woman presents marriage as an institution created sovereignly by God. It implies a commitment of the partners to God and to one another. This institution survived the fall of man. The testimony of Scripture does not consider marriage as involving only human relationships but sees it tightly linked to God. In the Old Testament marriage is perceived under the creatorship of God and in the New Testament it is additionally presented to be under the lordship of Christ. Every other form of marriage that aims at remaining independent from God causes distortion of the Creator's original intent because of sin and this view has been consistently maintained throughout the whole Bible.

The church of Jesus Christ has to be an example to the rapidly changing world around us. One of our major responsibilities is to live out biblical truth about marriage and human sexuality. The Christian family should be defined by a life-long exclusive relationship between a faithful husband and a faithful wife. Luther considered "married life and parenthood as a vocation, an antidote to human egocentricity, [and] a gift of God, though it has been corrupted by sin."⁵¹ Knowing that we live in a fallen world, we should be reminded that, "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Romans 5:20). The church has the responsibility to be the conduit of proclamation of God's grace and hope for all who struggle with broken families or homosexual temptations, orientation, and conduct, and who desire to align their lives with God's declared intent for marriage design and sexuality. Our task as ambassadors for Christ is to appeal for reconciliation with God on His behalf (2 Corinthians 5:20) and welcome people to "experience the peace and joy that stems from the forgiveness of sin through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ."⁵² We believe the biblical truth that, "marriage is to be held in honor by all" (Hebrews 13:4), and affirm that, "human society can be stable and happy only where the marriage bond is honored and upheld."⁵³

⁵¹ Peinilla Paienmalm, "The Calling to Parenthood and Parenting: Reflections on Luther's View of Men, Women, and Vocation," in "Sexuality and Marriage in Luther's Theology," *Lutherjahrbuch*, Seminarberichte/Reports, (January 1 2009), 237.

⁵² "Homosexuality, Marriage, and Sexual Identity," AG Position Paper, 7.

⁵³ Kynes, 203.

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