

SEXUAL BROKENNES

By Alan Frow

Description. In August 2008, the United Nations General Assembly proposed a declaration on sexual orientation and gender identity which included a condemnation of violence, discrimination, or stigmatization based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Four years later in 2012, the declaration has still not been accepted, with 57 UN member nations still opposing it.¹ This declaration and the mixed response towards it, powerfully describes two global trends in attitudes towards homosexuality in the 21st Century. I would describe these trends on the one hand, as the intentional normalization of homosexuality, and on the other, as a polarization between communities who have arrived at different conclusions about the matter. Homosexuality is fast becoming the key unifying and dividing issue of our time, and may well be the defining ethical issue facing the Church in the 21st Century.

In North America, homosexuality is no longer a private matter. It is officially out of the closet, and a public stance carries with it powerful social, political and economic consequences. Businesses are boycotted or backed and politicians elected or rejected, depending on their attitudes towards homosexuality. The battle lines are not drawn so much between homosexuals and heterosexuals, as they are between those in favor of or opposed towards, homosexual marriage. Depending on the socio-political majority in any one constituency, an individual or organization may be championed or victimized by declaring a view on the issue. Below are some recent local examples of the intensely polarizing nature of the issue.

In April 2003 Homosexual rights groups and Democrats castigated Rick Santorum (Republican senator from Pennsylvania) for suggesting that a government condoning consensual homosexual relations would have to allow bigamy, polygamy, incest, and

¹ UN General Assembly, Statement on Human Rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, 18 December 2008

adultery. Conservative activists like Gary Bauer blasted Republican leaders for not defending Santorum.²

In 2008, California voted yes on Proposition 8 by a vote of 52% to 48%. The Bill sought to “Eliminate Rights of Same-Sex Couples to Marry,” declaring that, “only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California.” However, on August 4, 2010, United States District Court Judge Vaughan R. Walker overturned Proposition 8, ruling that it violated the United States Constitution.³ This, of course, caused an outcry from those whose votes had been overturned, and a sense of vindication among those who felt that they had been discriminated against on the basis of their sexual identity.

As recently as July, 2012, Chick-fil-a, a national fast-food chain, caused an uproar when its President, Dan T. Cathy told a Christian News Agency that the company supported the “biblical definition of the family unit.”⁴ The Franchise was boycotted by the gay rights community, denied business permits by Boston and Washington DC on the basis of Cathy’s remarks, yet experienced record sales because of the support of those who agreed with his remarks.

Although intense polarization does exist around the issue, there appears to be mounting pressure in North America towards the normalization of homosexuality as a valid orientation and life choice over the last decade. James R. Beck describes this in his 1997 book, *Homosexuals, Evangelicals and Social Science*. “American Society is under pressure to recognize gay marriages, to alter the standards of the Boy Scouts on this issue, and to drop all military bans on the service of practicing gays. Both the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association are

² Jones, David, 2003, *Egalitarianism and Homosexuality: Connected or Autonomous Ideologies?* JBMW, p 13

³ San Francisco Chronicle, August 4th, 2010

⁴New York Times, July 25th, 2012

under tremendous pressure to declare that any therapy with homosexual persons not designed to help them adjust to their orientation is unethical. Several states in the United States are in the throes of trying to decide what to do with initiatives dealing with homosexuality. “⁵ What appears to be a general drift towards normalization in the public sector, seems to have been a far more intentional drive in academic and political circles since well before the 21st Century.

One of the major academic proponents for the validation of same-sex attraction was Walter Kinsey, an academic whose research in the late 1940's dismissed the idea that people were completely homosexual or heterosexual. He argued that most had a mix of urges to a lesser or greater degree and should act upon these urges to find out what primary sexual identity one was. From his research, he developed the Kinsey Scale, which showed the various gradations that a person possessed between homosexual and heterosexual attraction. Kinsey wrote in *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948): “Males do not represent two discrete populations, heterosexual and homosexual. The world is not to be divided into sheep and goats...The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects.”⁶

Similarly, in his book, *Sexual behavior in the Human Female*, he writes: It is a characteristic of the human mind that tries to dichotomize in its classification of phenomena....Sexual behavior is either normal or abnormal, socially acceptable or unacceptable, heterosexual or homosexual; and many persons do not want to believe that there are gradations in these matters from one to the other extreme.”⁷

Kinsey's assumption was therefore that sexual orientation was only determined through sexual experimentation. Thus, decades before sexual orientation was normalized publicly in society, Kinsey normalized sexual experimentation privately. More recent

⁵ Beck, J.R Homosexuals, Evangelicals and Social Sciece, *JETS* 40:1 (March 1997) p. 83-97

⁶ Kinsey, W, 1948, *Sexual Behavior in the human Male*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN

⁷ Feinberg, J. S., & Feinberg, P. D. (1993). *Ethics for a Brave new world* (184–185). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

research on the connection between sexual identity and sexual experimentation bears this out most poignantly.

John Money of Johns Hopkins University, a well-known sex researcher, defined a homosexual as one who had six or more sexual experiences with members of the same sex. Using this as the definition, he found in 1988 that 13 percent of adult males were gay and about 7 percent of adult females were lesbians. However, at least 20.3 percent of American males had had a same-gender sex experience by the age of twenty-one, and 6.7 percent had that encounter by the age of twenty.⁸

Similarly, in the research data from the National Survey of Family Growth done between 2006 and 2008, about 7% of adult women and 8% of men identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual, but the proportion of individuals in the U.S. who have had same-gender sexual interactions at some point in their lives was significantly higher.⁹

A more recent study in the *Journal of Sex Research* also reveals a surprising upsurge in homosexual activity. According to the study, the percentage of U.S. women who say they recently had gay sex has increased 15 times from 1988 to 1998, with rates among American men doubling over the same ten-year period. The same study showed that more than half of Americans believe that gay sex is 'always wrong.'¹⁰

Of course, the media also plays a significant role in normalizing same-sex attraction and increasingly, sitcoms like *Will and Grace* and *Modern Family*, as well as the award winning drama, *Glee*, seek to break stereotypes and encourage viewers to identify and empathize with gay people. The Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation's latest report, states that "*Glee* is, without a doubt, one of the most inclusive shows on Fox and on television in general. What this show is doing is breaking those stereotypes,

⁸ Feinberg, J. S., & Feinberg, P. D. (1993). *Ethics for a Brave new world* (184–185). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

⁹ Chandra A, Mosher WD, Copen C, Sionean C. (2011) *National health statistics reports*; no 36. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.

¹⁰ *Journal of Sex Research* 2001;37:333-343.

especially with gay relationships.”¹¹ However, not everyone simply accepts this normalization blindly. There is significant push back from conservative groups who have accused "Glee" of pushing a pro-gay agenda. Bryan Fischer, director of Issue Analysis for Government and Public Policy at the American Family Association, has expressed concerns that the show is "glamorizing homosexual behavior,"¹² and viewer ratings for the show have dipped recently amidst these accusations of a pro-gay agenda.

It must be said though, that as much as media and politics play a significant role in the polarized views around homosexuality, the differing attitudes spring primarily from a conflicting view of Genetics. Homosexuals have long claimed that they are different not just in their behavior but in their genetic constitution. John Feinberg describes how homosexuals view their orientation in *Ethics for a Brave New World*. "They feel their sexual orientation is not a matter of choice or even formed through interaction with their social environment, but something they were born with."¹³

This claim is extremely important to homosexuals for at least two reasons. First, if homosexuality is something innate or constitutional, then homosexuals are no more responsible for their sexual orientation than for eye color or height. Attempts to get homosexuals to change their sexual orientation will also be useless. Second, this claim has political ramifications. If there is a biological basis for homosexuality, then there will be pressure to grant them minority-rights status. This is a special civil rights status that would protect them from discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation.

Simon LaVey, was one of the primary genetic researchers whose findings led to the conclusion that homosexual orientation was constitutional. He compared post-mortems between men who were known to be homosexual and who had died of HIV, and men assumed to be heterosexual. In his comparisons, he found that there was a significant difference in the size of the hypothalamus gland between homosexual and heterosexual men, concluding that this gland affected sexual orientation. Feinburg critiques these

¹¹ Barrick, Audrey, Christian Post, August 12, 2012

¹² Barrick, Audrey, Christian Post, August 12, 2012,

¹³ Feinberg, J. S., & Feinberg, P. D. (1993). *Ethics for a Brave new world* (186). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

conclusions, arguing that the group of men was too small to provide conclusive evidence (43), that the heterosexual men were presumed to be heterosexual and that the connection between the hypothalamus gland and sexual orientation was speculative at best. He also argues that all the homosexual men had died of AIDS and this could have enlarged the gland too.¹⁴

Other researchers such as G. Dornen concluded that sexual orientation is a hormonal issue. Feinberg argues that though there may be some evidence to support this notion, it is too simplistic a conclusion, seeing as homosexual men who have been injected with male hormones have not generally become heterosexual. He asserts that the issue is more complex, and includes social phenomena such as a dominant mother in the family (67% of homosexual men claim to have had a mother as a dominant parental figure), sexual abuse and previous sexual experience, which all play a significant factor in the statistics surrounding homosexual men.¹⁵

Feinberg's critique of these researchers' conclusions raises an important question about whether science has simply been used to support a predetermined position, thus further justifying an individual's claim to determine their own sexual identity. In so doing, he raises the larger issue of whether sexuality is designated to us or discovered by us.

The normalization and polarization of which I have already made mention, has placed a great ethical dilemma upon the Church, which is called to be on mission to a culture which increasingly views its traditional views towards sexuality as antiquated, narrow and discriminatory. Gunther Haas, in his 1996 article on hermeneutics and homosexuality, describes this normalization as follows. "During the last 30 - 40 years, North American society has gradually come to accept, and provide legal protection for practicing homosexuals. Parallel to this, there has been a growing number of Christians arguing for the modification of the traditional Christian view on homosexuality. These

¹⁴ Feinberg, J. S., & Feinberg, P. D. (1993). *Ethics for a Brave new world* (186). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

¹⁵ Feinberg, J. S., & Feinberg, P. D. (1993). *Ethics for a Brave new world* (186). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

arguments involve the conclusion that the church should accept adult same-sex relations, usually of a monogamous nature.”¹⁶ A major proponent of the need for a modification of the Christian view of homosexuality, was William Webb, whose ‘Redemptive – Movement Hermeneutic’ argued for an ‘ultimate ethic’ beyond the isolated commands of the Old Testament and New Testament, but which remained faithful to the underlying ethic of scripture. This provided a framework for a re-interpretation of passages which Webb viewed as prohibitive and primitive, and included the Bible’s teaching on gender roles and homosexuality. The Redemptive – Movement Hermeneutic was embraced by many evangelical churches because it supported an Egalitarian view of gender roles and advanced the cause of Evangelical Feminism. Wayne Grudem, in his critique on Webb’s hermeneutic claims that although an Egalitarian view of gender roles does not automatically mean condoning homosexual practice, many churches and organizations which have begun by embracing evangelical feminism have often ended up by condoning homosexual practice.¹⁷

In 1975, D. Sherwin Bailey expressed Walter Kinsey’s theories in theological terms, developing the idea of *natural homosexuality* to describe a person who is born with a primarily homosexual orientation. He used the terms perversion and inversion to refer, respectively, to the “same-sex orientation of true homosexuals and to the same-sex urges of the heterosexual in a licentious search for sexual experiences.”¹⁸ He argued that the Biblical passages condemning homosexual behaviour, did so in a context where people were unaware of natural heterosexual orientation, yet who still pursued unnatural urges, thus being guilty of perversion. His contention was that contemporary society, in which many people are more aware of their homosexual orientation, would make homosexual behavior more akin to inversion than perversion. So began the

¹⁶ Haas, G, Hermeneutical Issues in the use of the bible to justify the acceptance of homosexual practice, Redeemer College, Ontario, Canada

¹⁷ Wayne Grudem, Gender Roles and Homosexuality, *JBMW* 8:2 (Fall 03) p. 6

¹⁸ Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition. Derrick Sherwin Bailey - Author. Archon Books. Hamden, CT. Publication year: 1975.

connection between sociology and theology on this matter, which raises the importance of evaluating homosexuality from a Biblical perspective.

Evaluation:

Before evaluating this issue from a Biblical perspective, it is necessary to ask what our perspective of the Bible is, for our perspective of the Bible will ultimately determine how we end up evaluating the ethical issues of our time. Unfortunately, the polarization around this issue seems as marked between the Church and society as it is within the Church, and this stems primarily from Christians' differing views of the Bible and culture.

Typically, Christians who uphold the timeless authority of the Scriptures, have tended to be simplistic and judgemental in applying timeless truth in timely ways to the ebb and flow of culture. We live in a complex world, and an oversimplistic approach to the complex issues surrounding same-sex attraction would be detrimental for the cause of Christ and ultimately, the mission of the Church.

Holding grace and truth in tension amidst this ethical issue is by no means a simple task, because the core identity of the LGBT community is formed around a practice which has been traditionally prohibited by the Church.. Engaging lovingly with this community is far more ethically complex than feeding the poor or helping victims of abuse, for instance. It involves engaging with those whose view of sexuality and morality not only conflicts with a traditional Christian world view, but also

distinct political ideology which views the Church as the victimizer of a cohesive community. Because of this, Christians' response to the LGBT community has either beento separate themselves or to sympathise.

Many prominent Christian leaders have made impassioned calls to Christians, on the basis of showing mercy and dignity to the LGBT community, to revise their stance on homosexual practice. One such leader is Nobel Peace Prize winner, Archbishop Desmond Tutu who compares the discrimination which the LGBT experiences to that of

Black South Africans under apartheid. “We struggled against apartheid in South Africa, supported by people the world over, because black people were being blamed and made to suffer for something we could do nothing about - our very skin. It is the same with sexual orientation. It is a given. I could not have fought against the discrimination of apartheid and not also fight against the discrimination that homosexuals endure, even in our churches and faith groups.”¹⁹

A sympathetic stance invariably means abandoning or revising the biblical passages which speak against homosexuality. There are some theologians who have simply dismissed scripture as antiquated and irrelevant in imposing moral norms upon individuals in general. An example of such a perspective is found in Gary David Comstock’s, *Gay Theology Without Apology*. His view of scripture is more as a resource for guidance than an authority, and he is willing to criticize it where it treats homosexuals badly.²⁰ Concerning Paul’s condemnations of homosexuality, Comstock says: “Those passages will be brought up and used against us again and again until Christians demand their removal from the biblical canon or, at the very least, formally discredit their authority to prescribe behavior.”²¹

Others, less daring than Comstock, argue that the writers of the bible were dismissive of homosexuality because of a limited social horizon. Robin Scroggs maintains that the only form of homosexuality of which Paul was aware, was *pederasty* – the consensual homo-sexual relationship between a man and a pre-pubescent boy. Since he did not have in mind loving, long-term relations between consenting adults, the condemnations in his letters do not apply to such contemporary relationships. He contends that, “Paul condemns only that specific form of pederasty which consisted of the enslaving of boys or youths for sexual purposes, and the use of these boys by adult males.”²² While we can concur with Scroggs that Paul may have been referring primarily to the practice of

¹⁹ Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Afrol News, April 2007

²⁰ Comstock, G, *Gay Theology without apology*, Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1993).

²¹ Comstock, G, *Gay Theology without apology*, Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1993).

²² Haas, G, *Hermeneutical Issues in the use of the bible to justify the acceptance of homosexual practice*, Redeemer College, Ontario, Canada

pederasty which was prevalent in Greco-Roman culture, Paul includes in his condemnation, the practice of women exchanging unnatural relations with women, which refers to a broader issue than that of pederasty. Even Scroggs admits surprise at this mention.

There are other scholars who do acknowledge the authority of scripture but challenge the interpretation of those passages which have traditionally been understood to point to the scriptures' condemnation of homosexuality. Let us evaluate the attempts of these scholars to re-interpret three of these passages.

GENESIS 19:1–11

The sin of Sodom and Gomorrah has traditionally been taken to be homosexuality, where the men of the region came to Lot's door to demand sex with the strangers who had come to visit him. This act angered God greatly and brought His fierce judgment, resulting in the destruction of a whole city. In fact, another name for homosexuality is 'sodomy' and this stems directly from the Genesis 19 passage. Of course this text has been challenged by numerous scholars, not the least of which is D. Sherwin Bailey in his book, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*.²³ Bailey argues that the Hebrew word *yada*, which is at the root of the men's demand for relations with the strangers, does not refer to sexual intercourse. His assertion is that the verb can mean simply to *know* a person and that the men were simply wanting to become acquainted with the strangers. Haas, in his critique of Bailey's reasoning, points out that the problem with this line of reasoning is God's judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah. If the request of the men were so innocent, then it would surely not have brought about the destruction of the whole the city.²⁴

Haas also challenges the common argument that God's judgment was not carried out

²³ *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*. Derrick Sherwin Bailey, Archon Books. Hamden, CT. 1975.

²⁴ Haas, G, *Hermeneutical Issues in the use of the bible to justify the acceptance of homosexual practice*, Redeemer College, Ontario, Canada

on the city because of homosexual sin but because it was rape. This argument builds towards the conclusion that God is only opposed to homosexual rape, but condones homosexuality if it is consensual. Haas argues that there is no sign in the passage that God would have condoned intercourse between the men of the city and the strangers if it had been consensual. It seems clear that both the notion of homosexual intercourse and the fact that there was a forced attempt to engage the men, “brought an outcry to God against the city”²⁵

While Haas does not acknowledge the fact that Lot was willing to give his daughters to be raped in exchange for his visitors, and that this would also have brought God’s fierce judgment on the city, his argument that a plain reading of the passage points to God’s condemnation of homosexuality, is more plausible than Bailey’s reasoning.

ROMANS1

When we turn to the New Testament we find that it too condemns homosexuality. Paul’s discourse in Romans 1:26-27 seems to be strongest in its condemnation, with Romans 1:26 dealing with lesbianism (female homosexual relations) and Romans 1:27 dealing with male homosexuality. Paul teaches that homosexual practices are evidences of God’s judgment upon those who have rejected his revelation, glorifying the creation rather than the Creator. He continues to explain that God gives people over to their desires so that they pursue *unnatural relations* with the same sex.

As one might expect, the interpretation of this passage has also not gone unchallenged by scholars. An alternative interpretation is that Paul is not in fact condemning homosexuality *per se*, but only such acts that are connected with idolatry. A most common re-interpretation of this passage is again made by Bailey, and is known as the ‘abuse act.’²⁶ Bailey holds that Paul is only condemning certain unnatural homosexual acts, not homosexuality. In other words, for a person with homosexual orientation to pursue homosexual relations is completely natural and thus condoned, whereas, for a heterosexual person to pursue homosexual relations is unnatural lust and therefore

²⁵ Gen 19:11

²⁶ Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition. Derrick Sherwin Bailey - Author. Archon Books. Hamden, CT. Publication year: 1975.

condemned. Bailey uses *inversion* to describe condoned homosexual acts, and *perversion* to describe condemned homosexual acts. He also uses Paul's statement in Romans 1:27 that they *burned with lust for one another* as a key distinguishing factor. He argues that lust is wrong, but that if homosexual relations are from a basis of love devotion and commitment they are condoned as part of God's design for human sexuality.

Feinberg, in his critique of Bailey's reasoning, argues that the text does not say that God judges *lustful homosexual acts*, but that He judges *homosexual acts*. He asserts that Paul does not invite the reader to try and determine whether the act is done out of love or out of lust. Rather, he claims that a characteristic of homosexual practice is that of lust and promiscuity in that *God gave them over to their lusts*.

Dr. Gary Gromacki in his article, "Why Be Concerned about Same-Sex Marriage?" supports Feinberg's view, explaining that the Greek verb in Romans 1:28 translated "gave them up" (παρέδωκεν) describes a judicial act of God in which he judges sinful man for their rejection of his revelation by giving them up to their sinful lusts which include homosexuality and lesbianism.²⁷

Feinberg cites some research figures to support his claim that promiscuity and homosexuality are closely linked. While these findings are not decisive in Feinberg's argument, they are nevertheless illuminating.

"It is clear that homosexual men have traditionally been quite active sexually. In 1982 a study of fifty AIDS victims done by the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta discovered that the median number of lifetime sexual partners for these men was 1,100, some claiming as many as twenty thousand. The median number for a control group without the disease was 550. This study's findings are consistent with those of a 1978 survey of 685 gay men living in San Francisco. Psychologist Alan P. Bell and sociologist Martin S. Weinberg of the Kinsey Institute for Sex Research headed a study that showed that 15

²⁷ Dr. Gary Gromacki *JMAT* 9:2 (Fall 2005) p. 63 Why Be Concerned about Same-Sex Marriage?

percent of these men reported sex with between five hundred and one thousand partners, while more than 25 percent claimed more than a thousand partners. Lesbians showed a relatively lower rate of sexual activity. Better than 70 percent reported fewer than nine lifetime partners, 3 percent claimed to have had more than a hundred, and none more than five hundred. There is no question that AIDS has reduced promiscuity, but how much is not yet determined.”²⁸

While Feinberg’s citing of the above research data could be dismissed as inflammatory and creating stereotypes, they should not be ignored. What is fascinating is how difficult it is to find more recent data on homosexual promiscuity, and this would seem to be connected with a political agenda which seeks to portray homosexual unions as relationships which are as stable and committed as their heterosexual counterparts. Although Feinberg’s research data is dated, and while levels of promiscuity have apparently decreased with the spread of HIV and the recognition of homosexual marriage, the figures still tell the startling story of a community which is living with high levels of sexual brokenness from lust and promiscuity. Popular columnist and bi-sexual Robert Lopez describes this candidly in his recent article on being homosexual. “In the Bronx gay world, I cleaned out enough apartments of men who’d died of AIDS to understand that resistance to sexual temptation is central to any kind of humane society. Sex can be hurtful not only because of infectious diseases but also because it leaves us vulnerable and more likely to cling to people who don’t love us, mourn those who leave us, and not know how to escape those who need us but whom we don’t love. The left understands none of that. That’s why I am conservative.”²⁹

Beyond the research, both Gromacki and Feinberg’s clear and rational approach to a difficult passage reveals Bailey’s hermeneutical approach to be complex and lacking in integrity. Bailey’s reasoning, similar to that of other scholars who wish to re-interpret the

²⁸ Feinberg, J. S., & Feinberg, P. D. (1993). *Ethics for a Brave new world* (184–186). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

²⁹ The Public Discourse, Growing Up With Two Moms: The Untold Children’s View by Robert Oscar Lopez, August 6, 2012

Bible's passages about homosexuality, is so convoluted that it would require a highly educated scholar to understand what seems a challenging, but plainly written passage.

There are numerous other passages dealing with homosexuality which have caused scholarly debate, but I will deal with just one more. It is the 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 passage, in which Paul provides a list of people who will not inherit the kingdom of God because of their sins. In this list he includes sodomites and homosexual offenders. Here the debate centers around the root words. The debate involves the interpretation of the Greek terms *arsenokoitai* commonly understood to mean homosexual offender and, *malakos*, commonly understood to mean sodomite, with the latter term also found in I Tim. 1:10. Pro-homosexual scholars argue that the meanings of the root word *arsenokoitai*, in fact means *self-indulgent*, and the root word *malakos* means *male prostitute*. Here again, they contend for certain kinds of homosexuality which should be condoned. Someone who is selling their body for homosexual sex or is simply trying to indulge every urge with multiple partners would not inherit the kingdom of God, while those in committed, loving constitutional homosexual relationships would inherit the kingdom. John Boswell in his book, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* argues that it is gratuitous to apply the sin of self-indulgent promiscuity only to homosexuals and that it also condemns heterosexual promiscuity. David Wright critiques Boswell's approach, pointing out that the compound word *arsenokoites* refers to those who sleep with males, and denotes "'male homosexual activity' without qualification."²³ He also surveys the use of the word *arsenokoites* in patristic literature and finds that the church fathers from Eusebius to Chrysostom use this term to condemn male homosexual activity.

One of the guiding principles of interpreting scripture is that of the 'clarity of scripture'. This is the principle that the Bible can be read and understood generally by every believer. That is not to say that there are not some passages which are either difficult to understand or obey, or even that Bible scholars are not helpful in understanding the Bible. It simply means that God did not intend for the Bible only to be understood by a

²³. David F. Wright, "Translating *arsenokoitai* I Cor. 6:9; I Tim. 1:10), *Vigiliae Christianae* 41 (December 1987): 398.

separate class of scholar. In this sense, a plain reading of scripture is normally the correct one.

The problem with scholars who seek either to dismiss or to re-interpret the Biblical passages that deal with homosexuality, is that they generally possess a higher view of culture and context than they have of scripture. As culture and context advance, scripture retreats. The authority of the somewhat 'primitive' scripture therefore diminishes in the face of an evolving context. While an understanding of the context of the Bible's audience is important, context should not always be used to dismiss or diminish difficult passages. If context is *king*, then any moral injunction can be rendered invalid by a change of social horizon. Here the creation stands in judgment over its Creator, rejecting the imposition of any moral absolute upon its own freedom. It is like a man standing on the branch of a tree, sawing down the trunk of that tree. Eventually when he succeeds in his quest, he finds that he has cut off the very trunk he was standing on. In this sense, when he calls in to question the eternal authority of the scriptures on an ethical issue, he calls into question the very authority upon which the believer's eternal salvation rested in the first place.

Therefore, having given close attention to both the grammar and original context of the relevant passages, and holding the authority of the Scripture as a timeless voice to our changing world, I believe that the Bible still prohibits all homosexual practice as a sin.

Counsel

As followers of Christ, we are afforded an opportunity to engage both this issue, and the LGBT community with grace and truth, and a refusal to apply simplistic remedies to complex maladies. This is a community that has suffered much abuse from inside and outside the Church, and we have an opportunity to guard their dignity and serve them patiently, without condoning homosexual practice itself. Jesus' protection of the woman caught in adultery who was about to be stoned by her accusers in John 8, was not based upon His agreement with her lifestyle. It was based upon the image of God, however distorted, that He recognized in her and that gave her intrinsic dignity. This

meant that Jesus was able to engage her, protect her and counsel her towards righteousness in the same encounter.

The danger for those with a Biblical world view is that we are generally seen by our culture as protectors of a moral code, rather than protectors of real people. This has often meant that we appear to be absorbed with the erosion of a set of family values, while seeming ignorant about the complex array of factors playing into the LGBT community. A wise man once said, "If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail." This has often been characteristic of the Christian community's simplistic and militaristic stance towards this community.

An example of this approach is Alex D. Montoya's article on *Homosexuality and the Church*. His counsel brought with four-fold tidyness, made even more user-friendly by its alliteration. He claims that the Church must Condemn the sin of homosexuality, Convert the homosexual, Confront error and Cleanse itself.³⁰ Conspicuous in its absence, is any sensible engagement with the LGBT community, or process of restoration once a homosexual does, in fact, repent. His simplistic approach appears to be purely academic with little or no pastoral experience to deepen and broaden his counsel.

James Beck gives more wholistic counsel in his article, "Evangelicals, homosexuality and social science," drawing perspective from both academics and practitioners who are currently engaged in ministry with the LGBT community. He cites Leann Payne's ministry and approach as a helpful one. In her popular book, *The Broken Image*, she urges homosexuals to practice listening prayer that responds to God's voice through scripture as well as silence. He also mentions the work of Moberly, whose approach is to gender match patient and therapist in an attempt to restore a healthy, non-sexual, relationship which may have been previously missing in the patient's life.

³⁰ Montoya, Alex, (Fall 2000) p. 155 Homosexuality And The Church, *MSJ* 11:2

He also describes the cost of departure from homosexual practice, which involves the breaking of ties with a lifestyle and sub-culture. This is something that the heterosexual community do not always understand. He describes how the LGBT community view themselves as a biological, social and political tribe, and how many first engage with it, not so much out of sexual need, but from a need for acceptance. To disengage from homosexual practice, he explains, “You would have to change your friendships, your pattern of making friends, your thought and fantasy life, your patterns of leisure time, and your habits. You would have to suppress powerful impulses and encourage the emergence of weak and underdeveloped heterosexual responses and impulses. If you failed to make a complete change, you would have to learn the discipline of celibacy after many years of noncelibate behavior. Change is not impossible, but it nearly always is very difficult.”³¹

In recent years, some sectors of the evangelical church have become far more thoughtful in engaging the LGBT community and helping practically with those who are suffering with HIV. This has helped those who had previously viewed Christians merely as judgemental guardians of a moral code. Bono, outspoken lead singer of the rock band U2, and philanthropic founder of the One campaign, voiced this sentiment at the Willow Creek Leadership Summit in 2006. “Christ won’t let the church walk away from the AIDS crisis. Christians have typically been involved in charity and feeding the homeless, but in recent years, something dreadful happened – the Church started to wake up and do something about the AIDS crisis and it has renewed my respect for the church.”³² So it would seem that those who love the truth of the Scriptures are called by those Scriptures to, “love mercy, act justly and walk humbly”³³ with God,” and with those in the LGBT community.

³¹ Beck, J, *Homosexuals, Evangelicals and Social Science*, *JETS* 40:1 (March 1997) p. 97

³² Christianity Today, August 14th 2006, Bono: Christ Won't Let the Church Walk Away from AIDS Crisis, www.christianitytoday.com

³³ Micah 6:8

This may include a humble admission that we have tended, both as individuals and churches, to classify homosexuality as a more serious sin than others. It may be a wise exercise to look at the other less visible, less socially stigmatized sins listed in Romans 1, such as slander, gossip, envy and arrogance and acknowledge that Paul placed them alongside the sin of homosexuality.

It is true that Paul does say that sexual sin is unique in that a person who sins sexually, sins against his or her own body, and that homosexual practice goes against the *very nature of things*. However, he does not classify homosexual sin as worse than heterosexual sin.

As a pastor in Southern California, a state which possesses a high incidence of homosexuality, I have been intentional in trying to engage both the issue and the LGBT community with grace and truth. Below is a five-part approach I have used to address and redeem the issue of homosexuality.

1. Defend truth and repent of Judgmentalism

Firstly, I have spoken very openly from the pulpit, defending what I believe to be a Biblical position on homosexual practice as a sin, but have also warned our congregation against classifying this sin as worse than others. I have publicly apologized to the LGBT community for the simplistic and judgmental attitudes of the Christian community.

Perhaps most helpful, from a pastoral point of view, has been my attempt to teach on the difference between homosexual orientation and homosexual practice. From the sociology of Kinsey, to the theology of Bailey, to the political and media pressure to capitulate on an apparently primitive stance, our people have been bombarded with the notion that orientation must play itself out in experimentation. At its core, this notion is the refusal to acknowledge that God is a Designer who has a design for sexuality. Rather, man is the Discoverer, who has a right to discover every urge and capability of his body. We place great trust in our own orientation. It is Eden replayed. "Did God

really say you are not to eat of the fruit?" Man takes the place of God as arbiter of the knowledge of good and evil.

2. Provide a Theology for Sexual Disorientation and Redemption

Secondly, I have tried to help people see that the result of Adam's sin was the fallenness, or disorientation of every part of God's creation, which includes our sexuality. Sin caused sexual disorientation in every human being. My aim has been to help people to see that what we call *orientation* is often *disorientation*. For some, it is disorientation towards objectifying the opposite sex in lust. For others, it may be the struggle to remain faithful to a husband or wife. For others it may be towards paedophilia. And for others it may be disorientation towards people of the same sex. The point is that a high view of God as the Designer, and the Bible as the Design handbook, means that we do not place great confidence in our sexual orientation, knowing that it is disorientated, like a compass that has fallen hard on the ground and is now a number of degrees off. This acknowledges the very real pressure experienced by those who live with same-sex attraction, without giving orientation the final say.

As I have taught this, preaching Christ as the Redeemer of our sexual disorientation, I have seen two things take place in our community. Firstly, people with homosexual orientation feel a sense of belonging in a community that acknowledges the need for redemption from sexual disorientation, whether that be homosexual or heterosexual disorientation. Secondly, orientation no longer has the final say. If a heterosexual man who struggles with orientation towards pornography can repent and experience redemption, then so can a homosexual who struggles with orientation towards people of the same sex.

3. Give public testimony of Sexual Redemption

It may be true that homosexual disorientation is more difficult to break free from than other sexual disorientation, but our experience is that even this differs from person to person. In our community, there are two men whom God has redeemed from active homosexual lifestyles, who are now very happily married and are leaders in the church

with their wives. Both of these men repented wholeheartedly, and were married to their respective wives within a few years of their repentance. Both have spoken publicly in the church about God's redemptive work in their lives, the satisfying gift of sexual intimacy with their wives, and yet have admitted to an ongoing vulnerability in the area of homosexuality. It is a complex issue. One man likened it to being an alcoholic. "I may be dry, but I should probably never go near a bar again." This honest, yet hopeful use of testimony has been the third part of my approach towards addressing homosexuality. When those who are struggling with same-sex attraction, hear the stories of those who are further on in their redemptive journey, it empowers them towards hope, honesty, self-control and patience. Along with this, we have a regular *sexual purity group*, which is designed around the idea of relational accountability, and this uses both theology and testimony as tools in the healing process.

There are some in our community who have repented of homosexual practice, who are now single and celibate, but have struggled to find faith for a heterosexual relationship. The aim in walking with a homosexual towards wholeness is not heterosexuality, it is holiness. Jesus is the one who redeems and re-orientates, and a re-orientation towards heterosexuality can sometimes take years, and may in some cases, never take place. If Paul remained celibate for the sake of the Gospel, we need to recognize that some who walk away from homosexuality may do the same.

4.Partner with Specialists

Fourth, I have found that partnering with some programs specifically designed to help those who are sexually broken to come to a place of holiness and freedom, has also been helpful. One such program is *Living Waters*, an in-depth, Christ-centered program for people seeking healing in areas of sexual and relational brokenness.

³⁴Although I believe that wholeness must ultimately be walked out in normal Christian community, it is sometimes necessary for people to engage in more intense affinity groups aimed to accelerate the healing process.

³⁴ www.livingwaters.com

We have a relationship with a Christian Rehabilitation Center for sexual addiction called *Pure Life*³⁵, which has helped many people make a clean break from the negative life cycles associated with sexual addiction.

We also have a close partnership with a local marriage and family therapist who specializes in sexual addiction, and whom we have increasingly used for counsel and referral.

Unfortunately, there have been some people in our community who have publicly acknowledged the Biblical injunction that homosexual practice is sinful, and publicly repented of their sin, but who after years of struggling against temptation, give in to the very real feelings of attraction which they have tried to fight. Because we are a community who have been outspoken in both our belief about homosexuality, and our conviction that God can redeem it, they do not remain in the community. We will try to reach out to them in grace and truth, but the shame associated with being unable to live up to their convictions. This of course, brings great sadness to all of us, but particularly to those who have walked away from this lifestyle and are have seen the destructive effects of it.

5. Teach a Complementarian View of Men and Women

The fifth part of my approach is more pro-active, in affirming the equal value, yet diverse nature of men and women. It is not my purpose to give an in depth explanation of a complementarian view of gender, but it is rooted in the Biblical account of Creation, where God created man, both male and female in His image, yet gave Eve the role of being Adam's helper.³⁶ It is my view that a husband and wife, united in their diversity, are image bearers of the diverse unity of the Triune God. The Egalitarian view of gender emphasizes not only the equal value of men and women, but also their equal roles, arguing that gender differences in role were a result of a fallen culture. Wayne Grudem in his paper on 'Gender Equality and Homosexuality' explores the connection between Egalitarians' evangelical feminism and Homosexuality. "Although an egalitarian

³⁵ www.purelife.com

³⁶ Genesis 1-3

view of gender roles does not constitute a *de facto* endorsement of homosexuality, a review of the historical record reveals that some Christian organizations that have initially adopted the tenets of evangelical feminism have later moved on to embrace homosexuality.”³⁷ I too, believe that confusion over sexual identity, leads to the tolerance of homosexual tendencies and eventually to the justification of homosexual practice. If God is only glorified in equality, not in diversity, then why could God not be glorified in the union of two males or two females? In this sense, the idea of same sex union becomes less problematic.

In affirming the equal value, yet diverse roles of men and women, and the glory which God receives when male and female live in united diversity, our aim is to engender a community culture which glorifies our Creator and Redeemer through our sexuality.

³⁷ Grudem, W, 2003, Gender Roles and Homosexuality, *JBMW* 8:2 p. 6

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