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# An Understanding of the Biblical View on Homosexual Practice and Pastoral Care: Seventh- day Adventist Theological Seminary Position Paper

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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# **An Understanding of the Biblical View on Homosexual Practice and Pastoral Care**

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary Position Paper  
Voted on October 9, 2015

Marriage was divinely instituted in the Garden of Eden at Creation, and it is a special gift to humanity from a loving God from before the Fall. The design of our Creator for marriage was to satisfy the deepest human needs and longings for love, intimacy, joy, care, and appreciation. “The Bible opens and closes with marriage. Genesis presents marriage as the first institution ... while the last chapters of Revelation use marriage as a metaphor to portray the relationship between Christ and His people. Significantly, marriage is uniquely positioned at the end of the creation week to underscore God’s ideal for the human race.”<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, the sacredness, beauty and relevancy of marriage is diminished as never before in contemporary culture, society, and law, because the growing influence of a secular sexual ideology and practice have undermined biblical standards of sexual morality and family relations. Premarital sex, marital unfaithfulness, spousal abuse, promiscuity, pornography, cohabitation, and the “liberated” lifestyle of many married people have brought the institution of marriage into a deep crisis. Thus, God’s ideal for humanity has been perverted.

In addition, various alternate sexualities, including homosexuality, bisexuality, and the variety of transgender identities have become increasingly mainstream. Over the years, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has responded to society’s rapidly changing sexual landscape with a number of official statements and relevant publications.<sup>2</sup> These have re-affirmed God’s plan for sexual relations as being reserved for the relationship between one man and one woman in the covenant of marriage, a covenant that should not be terminated except for the death or unfaithfulness of one of the partners.

God calls His followers to an abundant and holy life. “God did not call us to impurity but holiness” (1Thess 4:7; Heb 14:14).<sup>3</sup> Jesus Christ died for sinners that “whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16 NIV). God’s glory is to embrace sinners and to invite them to follow Him. He desires each person to reflect His character by “attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13 NIV). His message to broken and fragile people is always redemptive. He summons us to holiness (1 Thess 4:3), so that our lives may flourish (John 10:10) and we may bring glory to Him in all spheres of life (1 Cor 10:31) including marriage and sexuality. Thus Scripture teaches us that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and that He lives in us (Col 1:16). He wants to be the Lord of our lives, marriages, and sexuality.

We, the Seminary faculty, bring this document before you not because we think that only homosexual practice is offensive to God and not heterosexual immorality, but because the issue of homosexuality and same-sex marriage has become a special focus of public attention in recent

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<sup>1</sup> Willie and Elaine Oliver, “An Introduction: The Beauty of Marriage,” in *Marriage: Biblical and Theological Aspects* (ed, Ekkehardt Mueller and Elias Brasil de Souza; Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald, 2015), 1.

<sup>2</sup> See official Church statements on marriage, homosexuality, and same-sex unions at <http://www.adventist.org/information/official-statements/statements/>.

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise noted, biblical citations are from the NRSV.

years. In response to the growing societal pressure for the Church to normalize homosexual behavior in terms of membership, leadership, employment, curriculum standards, and other areas, the Seminary faculty believes that it has a duty to clearly set forth the teachings of Scripture regarding these matters and provide a biblical perspective on this recent debate. Therefore, although much could be said on a range of issues relating to sexuality, this statement is limited to the issue of homosexual practice. It does not purport to answer all questions related to this challenging issue but seeks to lay out a biblically based position while demonstrating a respectful and caring attitude toward gay and lesbian persons<sup>4</sup> in order to help guide the Church's response to this delicate topic.

The intent of this document, which we humbly submit for thoughtful and prayerful study, is not to judge but to clearly set forth what Scripture teaches concerning homosexual practices and offer guidelines on how to interact with persons of same-sex orientation. Therefore, we urge the reader to pay careful attention to the pastoral section of this document. It must be remembered that we are all part of fallen humanity and that Christ came to die for all. It is the aim of this document to point each disciple of Christ to Him, the Source of all salvation, and to encourage every person to pray to God for guidance on how to deal with his or her specific struggles with sin.

### **What the Bible Teaches Concerning Sexuality and Marriage**

The opening chapter of the Bible portrays in lofty grandeur the creation of humankind (*ha'adam*):

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them (Gen 1:26–27).

The sexual distinction between male and female is a key feature of humanity. This is explicit in the phrase: "God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). Building on this divine design, Genesis presents the ideal of human sexuality as consisting of marriage between a man and a woman. Thus in the first chapter of Genesis "heterosexuality is at once proclaimed to be the order of creation."<sup>5</sup> Genesis 2:24 underlines a succinct theology of marriage: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (ESV). The "therefore" [Hebrew: *'al-ken*] connecting the creation of woman (v. 23) to the joining of marriage (v. 29) indicates that the relationship of Adam and Eve is upheld as the ideal pattern for all human sexual relationships.

The reference to "a man [*'ish*] . . . and . . . his wife [*'ishto*]" indicates that a marriage between a man and a woman is the Edenic model for all time. This unique heterosexual marital form involving the sexual union of a man and a woman constitutes the divine paradigm, the

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<sup>4</sup> This document does not use terms like LGBT or LGBTQ or LGBTQIA, because they are very broad in their scopes, and this study is limited to the issues related to homosexuality.

<sup>5</sup> Samuel H. Dresner, "Homosexuality and the Order of Creation," *Judaism* 40 (1991): 309.

“Creation order,” for humanity from the beginning. This paradigm means that marriage cannot consist of the sexual union between a man and another man or a woman and another woman. This Creation pattern of marriage between a man and a woman remains the norm throughout Scripture. Any deviation from this heterosexual norm is portrayed by the biblical writers as a distortion of the Creation norm (Rom 1:24–27). The importance of male/female relationship in raising children and organizing society is attested in almost all societies and cultures.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, marriage between a man and a woman is one of two institutions created by God for humanity before the entrance of sin. The other institution is the Sabbath established by God at the close of the Creation week (Gen 2:1–3).<sup>7</sup> The Bible reveals that both institutions, created by God and protected in His law (Exod 20:1–17), will come under special attack (Dan 7:25; Mal 4:5–6; 2 Pet 2–3; Rev 12:17; 14:6–8).<sup>8</sup> The Sabbath teaches the importance of cultivating relationships with God and one another, and marriage between a man and a woman lays a foundation for developing the holy image of God in healthy family relationships. The Bible reveals the universality of the heterosexual norm by holding non-Israelite nations accountable for violations of this teaching (Gen 18–19; Lev 18:24–30; Ezek 16:53–59; Jude 7).

### **Homosexual Practice versus Homosexual Orientation**

In this statement we differentiate between homosexuality as an orientation (propensity, inclination, condition, disposition) and homosexual practice, although we do not enter the debate over whether or how much of the orientation is inherited or acquired, since no Scripture passages directly address this point. All human beings after the Fall of Adam and Eve “have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). They are born with sinful natures and a bent toward evil. Our nature is marred and corrupted by sin from birth; it is damaged with inherited and cultivated tendencies toward sexual (and other kinds of) lust in both either heterosexual or homosexual persons. Yet, because of the atoning blood of Christ, those redeemed are not condemned and can receive victory over those tendencies and inclinations (see Gen 8:21; Ps 51:5; Rom 3:9–18; 7:13–24; 8:1–8; Eph 2:1–3; 1 John 1:8; 2:16; Rev 3:5).

Scripture condemns heterosexual immorality no less than homosexual practice and warns against any harboring of lustful thoughts and desires for such practices. While homosexuality is a distortion of the Edenic ideal, “there is no condemnation” for homosexually oriented persons as

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<sup>6</sup> Nicholas P. Miller, “Should Adventists Care About Protecting Traditional Marriage?” in *Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church* (ed. Roy Gane, Nicholas Miller, and Peter Swanson; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2012), 214–216.

<sup>7</sup> Ellen G. White also makes this parallel between marriage and the Sabbath, Eden’s twin institutions, indicating that we should advocate for them until the end of time. “Then [in Eden] marriage and Sabbath had their origin, twin institutions for the glory of God in the benefit of humanity . . . He enunciated the law of marriage for all the children of Adam to the close of time” (AH 340). “Marriage was from the creation constituted by God a divine ordinance. The marriage institution was made in Eden. The Sabbath of the fourth commandment was instituted in Eden . . . Then let this, God’s institution of marriage, stand before you as firm as the Sabbath . . .” (TSB 159).

<sup>8</sup> Ellen White declared that Romans 1:18–32, which details a descent into sensuality ending especially in homosexual behavior, as especially applicable to the last days. “A terrible picture of the condition of the world has been presented before me. Immorality abounds everywhere. Licentiousness is the special sin of this age. Never did vice lift its deformed head with such boldness as now. The people seem to be benumbed, and the lovers of virtue and true goodness are nearly discouraged by its boldness, strength and prevalence. I was referred to Romans 1:18–32, as a true description of the world previous to the second appearing of Christ” (CG 440).

long as they “are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1) and do not harbor or act upon their orientation and propensities. The same principle applies to those who struggle with heterosexual immorality (see Matt 5:27–28; Rom 6:1–23; 8:1–4; Col 3:1–10; James 1:14–15). Even as some individuals may experience a miraculous deliverance from sinful heterosexual and homosexual urges, others may have to wrestle with such tendencies all their lives (see Gal 5:16–25).<sup>9</sup> One is not culpable for these involuntary tendencies, but for acting upon them either in imagination or actual practice.<sup>10</sup>

In Matthew 19:12 Jesus refers to three specific categories of people: (1) eunuchs by birth; (2) eunuchs made by man; (3) eunuchs by personal choice. While this passage does not explicitly refer to homosexuality, it does reveal that the Bible recognizes that some sexual departure from the norm can be inherited, acquired, or chosen. In addition it demonstrates that Christ acknowledges that some persons choose sexual abstinence for the sake of the kingdom of God.

## Homosexual Practice in the Old Testament

### Homosexual Practice in Narratives of the Pentateuch (Genesis 19) and the Former Prophets (Judges 19)

The story of Lot and Sodom (Gen 19:1–11) is well known and is often considered a classic reference to the practice of homosexuality. It is suggested by some defenders of homosexual practice that the word *yada*‘ “to know” used in v. 5 does not refer to sexual activity, but simply means “get acquainted with.” However, in v. 8 the verb *yada*‘ is used in connection with Lot’s daughters and unmistakably refers to sexual intercourse. Modern interpreters acknowledge that contemplated homosexual activity along with issues of inhospitality (or xenophobia) is described in Genesis 19, but they also insist that the sexual issue is that of rape or violence.

Beyond the significance of the word *yada*‘, one must also recognize that in the overall movement of the narrative, this incident is used to characterize the depth of depravity in Sodom and Gomorrah. Thus, “[W]hat makes this instance of inhospitality so dastardly, what makes the name ‘Sodom’ a byword for inhumanity to visiting outsiders in later Jewish and Christian circles, is the specific form in which the inhospitality manifests itself: homosexual rape.”<sup>11</sup>

But the larger context of the later prophetic passages that refer to this narrative clearly indicates a sexual interpretation and a condemnation of homosexual practice and not simply homosexual rape (Ezek 16:43, 50; cf. Jude 6–7; 2 Pet 2:4, 6–8; these passages are examined in some detail below). One sees the same distaste for rape in the reprehensible actions in the story of the Levite and his concubine in Judges 19. That “text of terror” at the end of the book of

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<sup>9</sup> See the documentation, e.g., in Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse, *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church’s Moral Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 117–151; idem, “Ex-Gays? An Extended Longitudinal Study of Attempted Religiously Mediated Change in Sexual Orientation,” in *Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church* (ed. Roy E. Gane, Nicholas P. Miller, and H. Peter Swanson; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2012), 367–392; and the discussion below.

<sup>10</sup> For a similar distinction made between practice and orientation, see Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2001), 37–38; cf. Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 164–165; and Stanley J. Grenz, *Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 119–125.

<sup>11</sup> Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, 75–76.

Judges, portrays men of Gibeah, “base fellows,” making homosexual advances against a Levite who was a guest in a friend’s house. The narrator makes clear the contemporary perspective on this activity by recording the words of the master of the house to the would-be homosexual assailants: “No, my brothers, do not act so wickedly [*hip ‘il of ra ‘a*]. Since this man is my guest, do not do this vile [*nebalah*] thing. . . . but against this man do not do such a vile [*nebalah*] thing” (Judg 19:23–24).

The author of Judges gives his own summary of the outrage contemplated (homosexual rape) and committed (the rape of the concubine) at Gibeah in the words of those who were contemporaries of the event: “Has such a thing ever happened since the day that the Israelites came up from the land of Egypt until this day? Consider it, take counsel, and speak out” (Judg 19:30). The narrator also brackets this whole narrative complex (which comprises Judg 19–21) with a signal that the events depict a nation gone tragically awry. Judges 19–21 begins with the comment, “In those days, when there was no king in Israel” (Judg 19:1); and the concluding comment is even more to the point, about a nation who did not even consider the truths of God’s will: “In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes” (Judg 21:25).

### **Homosexual Practice in Pentateuchal Legislation: Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13**

The Mosaic Law strongly condemns all homosexual activity. In addition to the prohibition of male cult prostitutes (*qedeshim*) in Deuteronomy 23:17 (MT 18),<sup>12</sup> the basic legislation proscribing homosexual practice is found in Leviticus 18:22: “You shall not lie with a male [*zakar*] as with a woman; it is an abomination.” Some modern translations (e.g., KJV and NIV) render *zakar* as “man” or “mankind,” which could imply only an adult male, or the entire human species, but the meaning of this term is clearly “male,”<sup>13</sup> denoting all members of this gender regardless of age. Thus the use of this term is a prohibition of all male to male sexual relations.

Unlike ancient laws outside of the Bible relating to homosexual activity, *both* parties here are penalized, thus clearly including consensual male-male intercourse, not just homosexual rape: “The absoluteness of the prohibition is unlike anything else found in the ancient Near East or Greece—contexts that made accommodations depending on active role, consent, age or social

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<sup>12</sup> Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 91–105.

<sup>13</sup> Despite some recent suggestions that the Bible is ambivalent or unclear as to what constitute the specific identifying features of a male, the Hebrew Scriptures explicitly identify a male as one who has external male genitalia. See, e.g., Gen 17:10–11, where God Himself defines the marker of a male: “Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.” See also the numerous passages in the Former Prophets where most modern versions correctly translate “male” but the KJV accurately captures the literal Hebrew phraseology: one “who pisseth against the wall” (alluding to the urination of the male penis): 1 Sam 25:22, 34; 1 Kgs 14:10; 16:11; 21:21; 2 Kgs 9:8; cf. 2 Kgs 18:27; Isa 36:12. Note that this phrase occurs as part of the “Word of the Lord” in three of these passages: 1 Kgs 14:10; 21:21; 2 Kgs 9:8. There is no doubt in divine speech as to what is the identifying marker of being a male.

status of the passive partner (alien, slave, foreigner), and/or cultic association.”<sup>14</sup> “The language is devastatingly untechnical, leaving no room for ambiguity.”<sup>15</sup>

The Hebrew clause *lo’ tishkab* “you shall not lie” is a negative particle followed by the *qal* imperfect, expressing a permanent negative command. The phrase *mishkebeh ’isha* “the lying of a woman” is clearly a euphemism for sexual intercourse (cf. the male equivalent of this passage in Judg 21:11–12). Thus this passage is a permanent prohibition of all sexual intercourse of a man with another male (*zakar*). This would also prohibit pedophilia or pederasty since the term *zakar* refers to any male, and not just a grown man.

Although the proscription in Leviticus 18 explicitly mentions only male homosexual relations, this prohibition applies also to lesbian relationships. The masculine singular in Hebrew often expresses gender inclusive situations, as for example, in the prohibitions of the seventh and tenth commandments of the Decalogue. And so, it is reasonable to conclude that the legislation in Leviticus 18 prohibits corresponding sexual offenses by females even when it addresses only men.

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 reveal the underlying characterization of homosexual practice from the divine perspective: God considers it *to’ebah* “abomination.” This is the term used twice (in the singular) specifically for homosexual practices, as noted above, and four more times in Leviticus 18 (in the plural) to summarize all of the sexually-related sins (including homosexuality) mentioned in this chapter (vv. 26, 27, 29, 30). These are the only occurrences of the term in the book of Leviticus. The basic meaning of *to’ebah* is an “abominable, detestable, offensive thing.” The fact that among the list of specific prohibitions of sexual acts in Leviticus 18, the word *to’ebah* is only mentioned with regard to homosexual intercourse, indicates the degree of offensiveness associated with homosexual activity. Indeed, in the entire Pentateuch the only forbidden sexual act to which the word *to’ebah* is specifically attached is homosexual intercourse. This, however, should not be taken to mean that God deals with the heterosexual immoralities mentioned in this chapter with any less severity.

Some have maintained that the term *to’ebah* only refers to Jewish ceremonial impurity, and therefore is linked to those practices of the heathen nations—ritual impurity and cultic prostitution—which would ceremonially defile the sanctuary. Particularly with regard to homosexual practice, it has been argued that this practice is condemned only because of its association with the idolatrous fertility cults and not because it is considered evil per se. Expressed in different terms, it is suggested that the condemnation of homosexual practice as “abomination” is based solely upon Israel’s particular cultic/ritual concerns and not upon universally applicable moral/ethical considerations. However, the wide-ranging usage of this term *to’ebah* in the Torah and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible reveals that its meaning goes far beyond ritual-cultic contexts and most often (if not exclusively) refers to a moral and not just ritual offense.<sup>16</sup>

It is true that the Levitical injunctions against homosexual practice are placed within the wider setting of the Canaanite abominations. But the deduction of some recent studies—“connected with pagan practice, therefore forbidden”—does not properly interpret the Scriptural

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<sup>14</sup> Robert A. J. Gagnon, “The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Key Issues,” in Dan O. Via and Robert A. Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003), 63–64.

<sup>15</sup> Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers* (NIVAC 3; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 321.

<sup>16</sup> See the careful analysis of the usages of this term in the Hebrew Bible in Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, 117–120.

context. The “pagan practice” argument is actually turned on its head when one realizes that since much of Israel’s cultic ritual *coincides* with pagan practice (sacrifices, feasts, blood rites, etc.), therefore where an objection is raised to a given pagan rite some reason *other* than its association with a pagan practice must be sought. The context of Leviticus 18 and 20 provides just such a reason. In Leviticus 18:24–30 and 20:22–23, God indicates that the sexual distortions described in previous verses (including homosexual practice) are defiling *in their very nature* and not just because they violate Israel’s cultic ritual. These sexual distortions generate moral impurity that is distinct from ritual impurity.<sup>17</sup> Because of such practices among the Canaanites—who did not have Israel’s cultic ritual—“the land became defiled; . . . and the land vomited out its inhabitants” (Lev 18:25). Just as the land vomited out the Canaanites, so God warns that it will vomit out Israel if she engages in such abomination (vv. 27–28). This punishment is summarized in Leviticus 18:20: “For whoever commits any of these abominations shall be cut off from their people.” Once again, it is important to remember that “these abominations” include immoralities of both a homosexual and a heterosexual nature.

That the legislation of Leviticus 18 comprises universal moral law, and not just ritual law pertaining only to Israel, is also evident from the fact that these laws are explicitly applied to the “stranger” or “resident alien” (*ger*) as well as to the native Israelite (v. 26). This applicability to the “stranger” becomes a decisive factor for the early NT Church in determining which laws beyond the Ten Commandments should be regarded as obligatory for Gentile Christians. In Acts 15:28–29, the four categories of prohibitions imposed upon Gentile Christians are precisely the same four, *in the same order*, as those listed in Leviticus 17–18 which are applicable to the stranger, with the final prohibition, *porneia*, summarizing the illicit sexual activities described in Leviticus 18.<sup>18</sup> Clearly the NT covenant community saw this reference to the “stranger” as an indication of the trans-temporal and trans-cultural nature of these laws, including the law prohibiting homosexual activity. (More on this below in our examination of the NT evidence.)

The rationale of the prohibitions in Leviticus 18—including homosexual practice—rests upon the foundational principles of Creation order in Genesis 1:27–28: the creation of all humanity in the image of God as “male and female”; the call for a man and his wife to become “one flesh,” and the command to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.” “These principles describe the order and structure of humanity in two relationships: to God and to society. All the laws of Leviticus 18 may be understood as violations of these principles.”<sup>19</sup> The heterosexual or

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<sup>17</sup> On this distinction, see Roy Gane, “Some Attempted Alternatives to Timeless Biblical Condemnation of Homosexual Acts,” in *Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church: Biblical, Counseling, and Religious Liberty Issues* (ed. Roy E. Gane, Nicholas P. Miller, and H. Peter Swanson; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2012), 165-6, 172.

<sup>18</sup> For details, see Jiří Moskala, *The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals in Leviticus 11: Their Nature, Theology, and Rationale (An Intertextual Study)* (Adventist Theological Society Dissertation Series 4; Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 2000), 377.

It is also very interesting to observe that the Scripture reading in the Synagogue on the Day of Atonement (in the afternoon) is taken from Lev 17–18; Amos 9, and the book of Jonah. These three portions of the Hebrew Bible have Gentiles in mind. The first two readings (Leviticus and Amos) are definitely reflected in Acts 15, and the church’s openness to non-Jews demonstrates familiarity and alignment with the main thought of the book of Jonah—the desire and compassion of God to save everyone.

<sup>19</sup> Wold, *Out of Order*, 130. See also Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, 136: “All the laws in Lev 18:6–23; 20:2–21 legislate against forms of sexual behavior that disrupt the created order set into motion by the God of Israel.”

homosexual activities proscribed in Leviticus 18 and 20 are portrayed as “abominations” because they violate the divine order of gender set forth in Genesis 1:27 and 2:24.

This connection with the Creation order is implicit in the refrain of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13: “with a male as with a woman.” Such phraseology intertextually links with both Genesis 1:27 and 2:24. The refrain in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 “is the best indication we have of what the primary concern was; namely, behaving toward another man as if he were a woman by making him the object of male sexual desires. That is an abomination, an abhorrent violation of divinely sanctioned boundaries—in this case, gender boundaries established at creation.”<sup>20</sup> The prohibition of homosexual relations is not an issue of gender status (male honor or hierarchy), as some would claim, but concerns “a distortion of gender itself, as created and ordered by God.”<sup>21</sup> Brevard S. Childs perceptively captures this biblical rationale, and the implication for today:

The recent attempt of some theologians to find a biblical opening, if not warrant, for the practice of homosexuality stands in striking disharmony with the Old Testament’s understanding of the relation of male and female. The theological issue goes far beyond the citing of occasional texts which condemn the practice (Lev 20:13). . . . The Old Testament views homosexuality as a distortion of creation which falls into the shadows outside the blessing.<sup>22</sup>

### **Homosexual Practice in the Latter Prophets: Ezekiel 16 and 18**

Ezekiel 16:48–50 alludes to the attempted homosexual activity of the men of Sodom recorded in Genesis 19 and compares this incident to the condition of Ezekiel’s Judean contemporaries. Some have argued that this prophetic passage has in view only the display of inhospitality, and not homosexual practice, in its mention of the sins of Sodom, but as with the case of the outrage at Gibeah, it is not a matter of “either-or” but “both-and.” Ezekiel does indeed highlight Sodom’s non-sexual offenses: “She and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy” (Ezek 16:49). But those who argue solely for non-sexual sins at issue here fail to read this passage in its wider context. In the very next verse (v. 50), mention is made of the “abomination” (ESV; *to ‘ebah*, singular) committed by Sodom, and this word

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<sup>20</sup> Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice* 135–136. Cf. David T. Steward, “Ancient Sexual Laws: Text and Intertext of Biblical Holiness Code and Hittite Laws” (PhD. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2000), 378, who concludes regarding all the laws of Leviticus 18: “All these possible sexual violations hark back to the beginning, to the era when God set in motion the ongoing re-creation of humankind.”

<sup>21</sup> Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, 142.

<sup>22</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1985), 194. Beyond the two main pointers toward universality and permanent normativity within the Levitical texts which we have already emphasized—the absolute, all-encompassing language and the grounding of the legislation in the Creation order—there are several other biblical indicators that the Levitical legislation concerning homosexual practice is trans-temporal and trans-cultural. First, the legislation proscribing homosexual activity is grouped with prohibitions of other sex acts that transcend the culture and setting of ancient Israel: incest, adultery, and bestiality. Second, homosexual intercourse is a “first-tier sexual offense,” grouped together with other sexual offenses that are punishable by death sentence (Lev 20:10–16). Third, the language of purity used to describe the sexual offenses in Leviticus 18 and 20, far from relegating these laws to the status of non-rational, pre-ethical, or mere ritual, actually buttresses the morality of the laws. “The conjunction of purity and prohibition often buttresses a moral judgment by focusing on the inherently degrading character of the act for participants and its destabilizing effects for the community” (Gagnon, “Key Issues,” 66).

“abomination” (*to ‘ebah*, singular) is the exact term used to describe homosexual practice in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.

Those who regard the sin of Sodom as non-sexual argue that the word “abomination” (*to ‘ebah*) in v. 50 simply refers to the social injustice described in v. 49. However, a careful look at this passage<sup>23</sup> reveals that the term *to ‘ebah* “abomination” (singular) in v. 50 speaks of an additional offense beyond the social injustice of v. 49, and the reference to *to ‘abot* “abominations” (plural) in v. 51 is a summary statement of all four sins of Sodom described in vv. 49–50. The parallel passage which confirms this interpretation is a similar list of vices in Ezekiel 18:10–13, where Ezekiel again uses *to ‘ebah* (singular) followed by *to ‘ebot* (plural). In this latter passage it is unmistakable that the use of the singular *to ‘ebah* “abomination” refers to an additional act separate and distinct from the oppression of the poor and the needy, and the plural *to ‘ebot* “abominations” is a summary referring to “all these abominations” (v. 13) of the previous list.

This usage of *to ‘ebah* in Ezekiel 18 provides a strong intertextual linkage with the precise grammatical usage of this term in singular and plural in Leviticus 18. In Leviticus 18 there is a list of various forbidden sexual relations (vv. 6–23), and the summary (vv. 26, 27, 29, 30) characterizes these as “abominations” (*to ‘ebot*, plural), while homosexual intercourse is singled out for special mention within this list as an “abomination” (*to ‘ebah*, singular) in 18:22 (cf. 20:13). The point is the same in both Leviticus 18 and Ezekiel 18: All of the preceding acts are “abominations,” but there is one specific act that is labeled “abomination” above the others: homosexual intercourse.

It may also be noted that the other two occurrences of *to ‘ebah* in the singular in Ezekiel (22:11; 33:26), like all the occurrences (both singular and plural) of *to ‘ebah* in Leviticus, refer to sexual sins. In sum, “the evidence indicates that the singular *tó ‘ēbâ* in Ezek 16:50 refers to the (attempted) commission of atrocious sexual immorality at Sodom, probably the homosexual intercourse proscribed in Lev 18:22; 20:13.”<sup>24</sup>

In addition to the linkage between the term “abomination” in Ezekiel and homosexual practice proscribed in Leviticus 18 and 20, one cannot ignore the dominant overtone of sexual immorality throughout Ezekiel 16 which lends further support to the interpretation that for Ezekiel Sodom’s sin included sexual immorality. Whatever the specific revolting sexual activity, God declares of Judah, “Because you have not remembered the days of your youth, but have enraged me with all these things; therefore, I have returned your deeds upon your head, . . . Have you not committed lewdness [*zimmah*] beyond all your abominations” (Ezek 16:43)? The word *zimmah* “lewdness, wickedness, depravity” in this passage is the very term used in Leviticus and also often in Ezekiel to refer to “premeditated sexual sins.”<sup>25</sup> As with the situation at Gibeah, the xenophobic inhospitality of the Sodomites was reflected in homosexual activity, the latter being referred to as abomination [*to ‘ebah*] and lewdness [*zimmah*].

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<sup>23</sup> Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, 80–85; cf. the brief synthesis in idem, “Key Issues,” 57–58.

<sup>24</sup> Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, 83–84.

<sup>25</sup> See Lev 18:17; 20:14; Judg 20:6; Ezek 16:27, 58; 22:9; 23:27, 29, 35, 44, 48; 24:13. Wold, *Out of Order*, 88, points out how the term “is applied to deliberate sin, and sometimes stands parallel to words for lust and harlotry in Ezekiel.”

## Homosexual Practice and the New Testament

### Homosexual Practice According to Jesus' Teachings and the Jerusalem Council

Jesus affirms the creation ideal of marriage between a man and a woman by quoting from Genesis 1:27 and 2:23: "But from the beginning of the creation, God made them *male* and *female*. For this reason a *man* shall leave his father and mother, and shall be joined to his *wife*, and the two [man and woman] shall become one flesh" (Mark 10:6–8; cf. Matt 19:5, emphasis supplied). Jesus' emphasis on the fact that "God made" this arrangement "from the beginning of creation," shows His acceptance of the prescriptive nature of the Creation texts, and affirms that heterosexual relations as divinely ordained in Genesis 1 and 2 remain normative in NT times.

Jesus' pronouncements against *porneia* (Matt 5:32; 15:19; 19:9; Mark 7:21), when viewed against the OT background, include same-sex intercourse as well as other heterosexual practices (Matt 10:15; 11:23–24; Mark 6:11; Luke 10:12; 17:29). The nature of *porneia* (without qualifiers) as used by Jesus and the various NT writers has been the subject of considerable debate, but the OT provides the key to its identification. Especially significant is its usage (again without qualifiers) in Acts 15:28–29, where, as we saw, intertextual allusions to Leviticus 17 and 18 are unmistakable.

Acts 15 lists four prohibitions for Gentile Christians given by the Jerusalem Council: "That you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality [*porneia*]" (v. 29). Particularly striking is that this is the same list, *in the same order*, as the four major legal prohibitions explicitly stated to be applicable to the stranger/alien as well as to native Israelites in Leviticus 17 and 18. These OT chapters forbid: (1) sacrificing to demons/idols (Lev 17:7–9); (2) eating blood (Lev 17:10–12); (3) eating anything that has not been immediately drained of its blood (Lev 17:13–16); and (4) various immoral sexual practices (Lev 18). In this clear case of intertextuality, the Jerusalem Council undoubtedly concluded that what should be prohibited to Gentile Christians were those very practices forbidden to the uncircumcised alien in Leviticus 17 and 18.

The parallel of the fourth prohibition in each passage is unambiguous: what Acts 15 labels *porneia* are those immoral sexual practices included in Leviticus 18. These activities may be summarized in general as illicit sexual intercourse including incest, adultery, homosexual practices, and bestiality. Various scholars have recognized this intertextual connection.<sup>26</sup> The correlation between Acts 15 and Leviticus 17 and 18 provides a solid foundation for determining what the early Church understood by the term *porneia*. "No first-century Jew could have spoken of *porneiai* (sexual immoralities) without having in mind the list of forbidden sexual offenses in Leviticus 18 and 20, particularly incest, adultery, same-sex intercourse, and bestiality."<sup>27</sup> Thus Jesus' denunciation of *porneia* includes all forms of sexual immorality including homosexual practice.

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<sup>26</sup> See especially H. Reisser, "*porneuō*," in *NIDNTT* (1975), 1:497–501; F. Hauck and S. Schulz, "πόρνη, πόρνος, πόρνεία, πόρνεύω, έκπορνεύω," *TDNT*, 6:579–595; and Terrance Callan, "The Background of the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25)," *CBQ* 55 (1993): 284–297.

<sup>27</sup> Gagnon, "Key Issues," 72.

## Homosexual Practice and the Pauline Epistles

The apostle Paul specifically denounces homosexual lust and practice in three passages: Romans 1:24–27; 1 Corinthians 6:9–11; and 1 Timothy 1:10. Each of these passages must be interpreted according to the OT context to which it alludes.

Paul’s entire discussion in Romans 1 reveals that the OT Scriptures are his source of ultimate authority for normative social behavior. It has been argued that Romans 1:24–27 only speaks of “exploitive forms of homoerotic behavior: pederasty (love of boys), sex with slaves, prostitution, and/or homoeroticism in the context of idolatrous cults, so we cannot know what Paul would have thought about committed adult relationships.”<sup>28</sup>

Others have set forth a misogyny argument, claiming that Paul was opposed to same-sex intercourse because he feared that homoerotic unions would upset the hierarchical dominance of men over women.<sup>29</sup> Still others have argued that Paul had no concept of a homosexual orientation—a relatively fixed and congenitally based disposition—so we cannot know what Paul would have thought about same-sex intercourse between two people exclusively oriented toward the same sex.<sup>30</sup>

However, against all of these positions, Romans 1:18–27 contains strong intertextual echoes with the creation account in Genesis 1:26–30. In the Genesis passage, God begins by making “humans” in God’s “likeness” and “image”—“male” and “female”—and then proceeds to give them dominion over the “birds,” the “cattle,” and “creeping” things. In sum, Adam and Eve were to worship God, in whose image they are made, and to have dominion over the animals.

In Romans, an inversion of this pattern is revealed. Paul begins by referencing the “creation of the world,” and the power and divinity of God seen through “what has been made,” but then reflects how the story has changed. Humans now remake the glory of God into an “image” and “likeness” of “corruptible man,” as well as of “birds,” “animals,” and “creeping” things. The human then ends up worshipping these very creatures that humans were meant to have dominion over, and abandons the natural use of the “male” and the “female.” The inversion is complete, instead of having dominion over the beasts, humans now worship and serve “the creature rather than the Creator.” They remake the image of God, in which both male and female were fashioned, into an intensification of either masculinity or femininity (Rom 1:20–25).<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> This is the position, for example, of Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality: Contextual Background for Contemporary Debate* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1983), passim, and Dale B. Martin, “Arsenokoites and Malakos, Meanings and Consequences,” in *Biblical Ethics and Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture* (ed. Robert Brawley; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox), 117–136), as summarized by Gagnon, “Key Issues,” 74. For further discussion, see idem, *Homosexual Practice*, 347–361.

<sup>29</sup> This is the view of, e.g., Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago Series on Sexuality, History, and Society; Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), passim, and David E. Fredrickson, “Natural and Unnatural Use in Romans 1:24–27: Paul and the Philosophic Critique of Eros,” in *Homosexuality, Science, and the Plain Sense of Scripture* (ed. David Balch; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 197–241, as summarized by Gagnon, “Key Issues,” 75. For extended critique, see idem, *Homosexual Practice*, 361–380.

<sup>30</sup> This is the position, for example, of Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998), 103–113.

<sup>31</sup> See Richard B. Hays, *Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1996), 386; Gagnon, “Key Issues,” 77–78. There is also evidence that Rom 1:18–32 is intertextually alluding to the OT Sodom

Paul's concern in this passage is with the image of God according to Genesis Creation order, which humans have corrupted with idolatry and ensuing heterosexual and homosexual immoralities. Paul is distressed, because these departures from original design cannot reflect God's glory.

Romans includes language declaring that the relationships at issue are characterized by mutuality, rather than exploitation. The phrase "men . . . burned in their desire toward one another [*allēlous*]" uses the Greek term *allēlous*, which indicates a mutuality, a shared experience of desire. Moreover, the reference to "women exchange[ing] the natural function for that which is unnatural," also reveals a concern with elements beyond exploitation or dominance. Lesbian relationships were especially known in ancient times for their lack of hierarchy, domination, or prostitution.<sup>32</sup> Paul speaks of those who "exchanged natural [*physikēn*] intercourse for unnatural [*para physin*]" (Rom 1:26). But the word "natural" (*physikos*) here does not refer to what is natural to the person who practices it. Rather, it means what is according to the nature of things as God created it, and "unnatural" is that which is "against nature" as God ordained it from the beginning as the immediate context speaks of God's "creation of the world" (Rom. 1:20, 26). Indeed, even in the larger Greco-Roman world, homosexual conduct of any sort was understood as being against nature.<sup>33</sup> It is only the modern conception of "nature" that means whatever the human desires. Paul, conversely, held that human nature, being fallen and sinful, would be expected to have desires against God's created order, commandments, and plans for humanity (cf. Rom 5:15–20; 7:7–23). However, Paul also teaches that an escape from "the body of death" and a new victorious life are given through the "Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 7:24; 8:1).<sup>34</sup>

Further, in the vice list of 1 Corinthians 6:9, Paul mentions the *malakoi* (lit. "soft men"), which likely alludes to men who are lain with as a man lies with a woman (see Lev 18:22 and 20:13).<sup>35</sup> First Corinthians 6:9 also refers to the *arsenokoitai* "men lying with males," and this term appears again in Paul's vice list of 1 Timothy 1:10. Against those who see a Greco-Roman background behind Paul's condemnation (and thus limit this term to something less than all same-sex intercourse), it cannot be overemphasized that this term never appears in the secular Greek of Paul's day, but only in Jewish-Christian literature. The compound term points to the background of the LXX translators in their rendering of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, as they combined the words male (*arsēn*) and lying (*koitē*), corresponding to the Hebrew terms *zakar* (male) and *mishkab* (lying), to denote "homosexual intercourse." The undeniable intertextual

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tradition. See esp. Philip F. Esler, "The Sodom Tradition in Romans 1:18-32," *BTB* 34 (2004): 4–16.

<sup>32</sup> Robert A. J. Gagnon, "The Scriptural Case for a Male-Female Prerequisite for Sexual Relations: A Critique of the Arguments of Two Adventist Scholars," in *Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church* (ed. Roy E. Gane, Nicholas P. Miller, and H. Peter Swanson; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2012), 112–114.

<sup>33</sup> E.g., "Pleasure in mating is due to nature when male unites with female, but against nature when male unites with male or female with female." Plato, *Laws* 636c.

<sup>34</sup> "Were nature to be defined in the first instance by proclivities and impulses, Paul would have had to declare "natural" the sinful life since Paul understood sin to be an innate impulse, running through the members of the human body, passed on by an ancestor (Adam), and never entirely within human control (see Rom. 5:12–20; 7:7–23). Linking the existence of congenitally (or at least biologically) influenced impulses to morality is thus fatally flawed." Gagnon, "The Scriptural Case for a Male-Female Prerequisite for Sexual Relations," 119.

<sup>35</sup> For support of this interpretation, and critique of alternative views, see esp. Hays, *Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 382–383; and Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, 306–312.

link between Paul's use of *arsenokoitai* (1 Cor 6:9 and 1 Tim 1:10) and Leviticus 18 and 20, indicates that Paul is primarily referring to the OT Levitical background which forbids all same-sex intercourse and not just issues of exploitation or orientation.

### **Homosexual Practice and the General Epistles: Jude 6–7; 2 Peter 2:4, 6–8**

Two passages in the General Epistles refer to the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah and condemn these two cities for sexual sin and not just for xenophobic inhospitality or failure to provide social justice. Jude warns that “certain intruders have stolen in” to the Church, “who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness [*aselgeia*]” (v. 4). Jude gives three examples of groups of sinners in the OT times who did not escape divine judgment, and the third and climactic example is that of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and their surrounding cities, who “indulged in sexual immorality [*ekporneusasai*] and pursued unnatural lust [*sarkos heteras*]” (v. 7). The reference to “unnatural lust” alludes to homosexual practice in Sodom and Jude's overall description certainly portrays the sins of these cities as sexual in nature and not just related to matters of hospitality and social justice.<sup>36</sup>

The second epistle of Peter likewise warns of false teachers who would arise in the Church, just as false prophets arose in ancient Israel (2 Pet 2:1–3). Peter, like Jude, utilizes three OT examples of groups of sinners who did not escape divine judgment, reserving his third and climactic example for the experience of Sodom and Gomorrah (vv. 6–10). Peter uses similar language as did Jude to describe the wickedness of these cities, specifically singling out their sexual sins. Peter speaks of Lot who was “greatly distressed by the licentiousness [*aselgeia*] of the lawless” (v. 7) and “was tormented in his righteous soul by their lawless deeds [*anomois ergois*] that he saw and heard” (v. 8). In applying these OT examples to the current situation in the first-century Church, Peter especially singles out the sexually-related sins, “especially those who indulge their flesh in depraved lust [*tous opisō sarkos en epithumia miasmou poreuomenous*]” (v. 10), a fitting description of the attempted homosexual rape in Genesis 19 as well as the sexual immorality of Peter's day. Both Peter and Jude thus connect the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah with sexual immorality and not just xenophobic inhospitality or social injustice, in harmony with what we have seen in the OT material.

### **Summary of Biblical Teachings on Homosexual Practice**

Our examination of the relevant passages throughout the Bible, the authoritative norm for Christian life and teaching, has revealed the following three points. First, Scripture teaches a uniform and explicit condemnation of homosexual practice. Not only is there unequivocal condemnation of homosexual practice throughout the OT and NT, but numerous lines of evidence connected to the Levitical legislation and NT references to this legislation (Acts 15) point to the universal (trans-cultural) and permanent (trans-temporal) nature of the prohibitions against all types of homosexual activity. Ekkehardt Mueller states: “The study of the Pauline passages dealing with homosexuality shows that homosexuality is not limited to violent and

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<sup>36</sup> See especially the discussion in James B. DeYoung, *Homosexuality: Contemporary Claims Examined in Light of the Bible and Other Ancient Literature and Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2000), 221–222, who summarizes parallels with extra-biblical intertestamental Jewish literature.

promiscuous activity; nor is it restricted to pederasty. All homosexual activity is against the Creation order and against divine law and is, therefore, a sin that needs to be repented of, forgiven, and given up.”<sup>37</sup>

After surveying the evidence of both OT and NT, NT scholar Richard Hays summarizes well the biblical witness concerning homosexual practice:

Though only a few biblical texts speak of homoerotic activity, all that do mention it express unqualified disapproval. . . . The biblical witness against homosexual practices is univocal. . . . Scripture offers no loopholes or exception clauses that might allow for the acceptance of homosexual practices under some circumstances. Despite the efforts of some recent interpreters to explain away the evidence, the Bible remains unambiguous and univocal in its condemnation of homosexual conduct.<sup>38</sup>

It should be emphasized, however, that the biblical materials condemn homosexual *practice*, but there is no castigation of innate homosexual *orientation* per se.

Second, Scripture condemns all forms of sexual immorality, whether homosexual or heterosexual. The anthropology set forth in the Hebrew Bible assumes that after the Fall all humans have a sinful nature or proclivity. To be sure, the implication of the seventh commandment and tenth commandment is that even the thoughts are to be kept pure, and sexual temptations arising from the fallen nature/orientation are to be resisted—both heterosexual and homosexual (e.g., Matt 5:27–30). Thus one sees that in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10, Paul clusters homosexual activities together with other immoral individuals: “Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers (ESV).” Then he adds, “none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.” At the same time, Paul teaches the possibility that homosexuals can also experience renewal like the rest of the group. He writes, “And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11). For those who struggle with heterosexual and homosexual immorality, divine power is available through Christ to enable us to live above sinful tendencies and nature.

Third, Scripture upholds the loving marriage between a man and a woman as the only context in which sexual intercourse may be practiced. Although the OT allows polygamy and divorce, and the NT, divorce under extreme circumstances (Mat 5:32; 1 Cor 7:15), these are concessions and never part of God’s Edenic ideal (Mark 10:5). In the case of homosexual practice, Scripture allows no such concessions.

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<sup>37</sup> Ekkehardt Mueller, *Homosexuality, Scripture, and the Church* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010), 29.

<sup>38</sup> Richard B. Hays, “The Biblical Witness Concerning Homosexuality,” in *Staying the Course: Supporting the Church’s Position on Homosexuality* (ed. Maxie D. Dunnam and H. Newton Malony; Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2003), 73, 78. Cf. idem, “Awaiting the Redemption of Our Bodies: The Witness of Scripture Concerning Homosexuality,” in *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate* (ed. Jeffrey S. Siker; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 3–17.

## **A Pastoral Approach to Distortions of the Edenic Ideal of Marriage in Light of the Grace of God**

Throughout the Bible, God unequivocally upholds the Creation plan for male and female (Gen 1:26) and the ideal of marriage between a man and a woman (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:8). Divine judgment is pronounced against those who depart from this norm and that includes homosexual practice. These judgments are expressed against peoples and nations that do not have access to the oracles of God, and thus should be viewed as part of God's guidance for humanity generally and not just for the covenant community (Gen 18–19; Lev 18:24–30; Ezek 16:53–59; Jude 7). This means that Christians have a responsibility to underline in their witnessing the protection and promotion of the divinely instituted importance of heterosexual marriage and of motherhood and fatherhood to the raising and development of children.<sup>39</sup> Such efforts should be made in the spirit of love and care for all members of the community, but we should resist, in the spirit of Christ, calls to give up on traditional marriage, which was instituted at Creation, as a vital pillar of social organization.<sup>40</sup>

At the same time, the grace of God is revealed in the OT portrayals of these sexual and family distortions. Homosexual practice is presented as part of the Canaanite abominations condemned in Leviticus 18 and 20. Yet, these Canaanites, with their abominable practices, were given 400 years of probation (Gen 15:16), with many opportunities to learn of the true God and the universal standards of morality and holiness, and many did join God's covenant people. Witness also the grace of God to Sodom: Abraham was divinely directed to rescue Lot and the inhabitants of Sodom from the hands of the four invading kings (Gen 14) and possibly some of these rescued individuals were part of the crowd that attempted the homosexual rape at Lot's house (Gen 19). Furthermore, God would have spared the whole city, including the homosexual practitioners if there had been even ten righteous persons in Sodom (Gen 18:32).

According to Ezekiel 16, Judah had multiplied abominations more than Sodom (v. 51), including the abomination of homosexual practice. Just two chapters after the allegory of Ezekiel

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<sup>39</sup> The Adventist Church has already recognized in a formal statement the propriety of church members and institutions acting to protect the civil institution of traditional marriage in a careful and compassionate manner. "While Seventh-day Adventist institutions and members may appropriately advocate for preserving the unique and God-given institution of heterosexual marriage in their societies and legal codes, it is the position of the Church to treat those practicing homosexual or alternative sexual behaviors with the redemptive love taught and lived by Jesus." From "Responding to Changing Cultural Attitudes Regarding Homosexual and Other Alternative Sexual Practices" voted Spring Meeting 2014. Cited on September 30, 2015. Online: <https://www.adventist.org/en/%20information/official-statements/guidelines/article/go/0/responding-to-changing-cultural-attitudes-regarding-homosexual-and-other-alternative-sexual-practice/>.

<sup>40</sup> Ellen White recognized the civil importance of marriage when she approvingly quoted historian Sir Francis Scott's observation regarding the assault on marriage undertaken in the French Revolution: "Intimately connected with these laws affecting religion, was that which reduced the union of marriage—the most sacred engagement which human beings can form, and the permanence of which leads most strongly to the consolidation of society—to the state of a mere civil contract of a transitory character, which any two persons might engage in and cast loose at pleasure. If fiends had set themselves to discover a mode of most effectually destroying whatever is venerable, graceful, or permanent in domestic life . . . they could not have invented a more effectual plan than the degradation of marriage" (GC 270). Ellen White's involvement in temperance reform and the advocacy of laws against alcohol can be seen as a model and template for public engagement by Adventists in the marriage question. Her remarks regarding the marriage and Sabbath, two institutions from before the existence of sin in the world, indicate we should advocate for them until the end of time.

16, God bares his heart, revealing his gracious attitude toward Judah: “‘Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone,’ says the Lord GOD. ‘Turn, then, and live’” (Ezek 18:31–32). According to Ezekiel 37, God promises a spiritual resurrection from the dead for people who return from Babylonian exile, and in this context, he also promises power to keep his statutes. He even takes responsibility for Israel’s obedience: “I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances” (Ezek 36:27). Over every distorted practice and abhorrent abomination, to which we as humans are susceptible. God’s forgiving and empowering grace still prevails and gives power for a new life.

Also, after condemning homosexual practices in Romans 1:26–27, Paul states in Romans 2:1: “Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things.” Thomas Schmidt has provided wise admonition for us today: “We must express our disapproval of homosexual practice in the context of our own sexual fallenness.”<sup>41</sup>

We must emulate the blended justice and grace of God as we continue to uphold the Scriptural vision of holiness and morality. When applying redemptive discipline we must emphasize God’s provision of forgiveness and His promised empowerment to bring about behavioral change in the lives of those who struggle against homosexual, or any other kinds of immoral sexual practices. In sum, we must show the face of God depicted in the Bible, who is “infinitely knowing, intimately caring, invincibly loving.”<sup>42</sup>

While being faithful to biblical teaching about homosexuality, we must also seek earnestly to understand and empathize with the struggles and challenges that face those who struggle with sexual immorality. This applies equally to gay and lesbian persons. In order to understand them, we must seek them out and listen carefully to their stories. Many have been deeply hurt emotionally by their heterosexual brothers and sisters.<sup>43</sup> We must also be sensitive to the reality of high rates of homelessness and suicide among gay youth. Jesus mingled with and ministered to all who were outcasts (Matt 9:11; Luke 5:30; 15:2). As Christians who are called to love as Jesus loved, we too must be concerned with the real needs of gay youth. Many homosexuals have been bullied, beaten, or even killed in various parts of the world. Gay persons have not felt welcome in some churches and have often been the victims of gossip and crude jokes. Some have been expelled from our Christian schools when they revealed their attraction to the same sex. Most, if not all, have heard sermons that condemn homosexuals as persons, failing to distinguish between homosexual attraction or orientation and the practice of homosexuality. All persons, including practicing homosexuals, should be made to feel welcome to attend our churches while non-practicing gay persons should be welcomed into membership and church office. All should receive spiritual care from the Church (Gal 6:1).

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<sup>41</sup> Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow?* 172. Schmidt (169–175) has provided a very balanced position on the appropriate stance of today’s Church and Synagogue toward homosexuality, a position that upholds both the biblical standard and divine grace.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 175. See also, Grenz, *Welcoming but Not Affirming*, passim.

<sup>43</sup> The negative experiences of gays and lesbians described in this whole section are well documented in the research of René D. Drumm. For details see her dissertation entitled “Becoming Gay and Lesbian: Identity Construction Among Seventh-Day Adventist Homosexuals” (PhD diss., Texas Woman’s University, 1998).

We stand against any antipathy toward homosexuals as well as any cultural biases that fuel a lack of Christ-like love toward them. These kinds of attitudes need to be repented of and the Church needs to provide more intentional ministries directed toward gay and lesbian persons (Matt 9:13; John 3:17). We should be aware of how easily we might fall into self-righteous judgmentalism. Such examination might lead us to a greater sensitivity to the following questions that many gay and lesbian persons wrestle with:

1. “Did God make me this way and if so, why?” While a discussion of the etiology of homosexuality is beyond the scope of this statement, most researchers state that many factors contribute to same-sex attraction and homosexual orientation.<sup>44</sup> Some persons describe their attraction to the same sex as being among their earliest memories and contend that they would not have chosen the painful experience of being gay or lesbian. Simplistic answers to the “why” question should be avoided but we should be clear that all evil in this world is a consequence of the Fall into sin (Rom 3:20, 25).
2. “If God made me this way, can He change me?” Recent literature denies the possibility that gay and lesbian persons can be changed, and even claims that change attempts are harmful.<sup>45</sup> Other important studies show that there are occasional reliable testimonies of such change among those that seek for faith-based counseling.<sup>46</sup> However, does change mean that all same-sex attraction disappears? Some who are now in monogamous heterosexual marriages report that they still experience homosexual attractions, but that they choose not to act on them.<sup>47</sup> Others have pled with God to change them and have submitted to therapy with the goal of change but have not been changed.<sup>48</sup> They have accepted their same-sex attraction as their life-long reality, and have chosen a life of celibacy. Working through this process, whatever the result, can be extremely difficult. As Christians, love would dictate that we are supportive, within the framework of biblical standards, of people as they work to sort out this matter in their lives and that we affirm their identity as persons for whom Christ died.
3. “If I accept myself as a gay or lesbian person, do I have a place in the Church?” We are a Church made up of sinners saved by grace with love as its foundation (Matt 22:36–40) and such love should be shown equally to all members. Gay and lesbian members who choose to, and remain abstinent should be given the opportunity to participate in all church activities including leadership positions in the Church. Those

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<sup>44</sup> Robert Crooks and Karla Baur, *Our Sexuality* (12<sup>th</sup> ed.; Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning 2014), 254–257.

<sup>45</sup> American Psychological Association, “Answers to Your Questions About Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality” (April 4, 2005).

<sup>46</sup> Jones and Yarhouse. “Ex-Gays?” 367–392.

<sup>47</sup> Winston King, “‘Born that Way’ and Redeemed by Love,” in *Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church*. (ed. Roy E. Gane, Nicholas P. Miller, and H. Peter Swanson; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2012), 485–495.

<sup>48</sup> Daneen Akers and Stephen Eyer, directors and producers, “Seventh-Gay Adventists,” documentary film (Filmmakers Library, 2012).

who struggle with temptation to sin should be treated the same way as other members who struggle with sexual sin (Matt 18:4; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31; 19:10). We strongly affirm that homosexual persons have a place in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

There are two main misconceptions about gay and lesbian persons that need to be unpacked:

1. “They are sinners, therefore, they must not love God.” In reality, some gay and lesbian persons passionately love God. According to statistician George Barna, a good number of gays “consider themselves to be Christian, and claim to have some type of meaningful personal commitment to Jesus Christ.”<sup>49</sup> They may have vibrant spiritual lives, have wrestled with God about their sexual identity, and have drawn close to Him despite their struggles. We should reflect the compassion of Jesus Christ who never condemned a struggling person but helped everyone to live a life of holiness (John 8:1–11).
2. “They don’t want to be part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.” Although it is true that many SDA gay and lesbian persons have been hurt by the Church and that some have chosen to leave as a result, many love the Church and want to be a part of its fabric. Many have grown up in the Church, participated in Pathfinders, and attended Adventist schools, and the beliefs and culture of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are a part of them. They want and need a home in which they can be welcomed and accepted even though their sexual orientation is different.

Love demands that we continue to learn about homosexuality and that we compassionately reflect God’s love for gay persons. Love also demands that we support them when we see them being treated unfairly. “The Lord gives righteousness and justice to all who are treated unfairly” (Ps 103:6). As the Church continues to wrestle with this issue, we want to do so in good faith exhibited in practical action.

We cannot ignore the needs of families who are faced with the reality of a spouse, child, or other relative who is same-sex attracted. Family members find themselves conflicted between their love for their family member and their Scriptural beliefs. They don’t know what to do to provide the best help. The Church should be always ready to help those who experience deep emotions such as pain, guilt, and shame, and be prepared to sincerely talk to them about their struggles (Gal 6:2).

### **Additional Remarks with Biblical and Ellen G. White Quotations**

What distinguishes Christians is the quality of love they extend, without partiality, to everyone they meet and especially to those who are rejected and mistreated. “Our neighbor is every soul who is wounded and bruised by the adversary. Our neighbor is everyone who is the property of God” (DA 503).

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<sup>49</sup> The Barna Group, “Spiritual Profile of Homosexual Adults Provides Surprising Insights” (June 20, 2009). Cited September 20, 2015. Online: <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/13-culture/282-spiritual-profile-of-homosexual-adults-provides-surprising-insights>.

However sincere love may appear, it is not love if it stands silently watching a blind man walk toward a precipice. Love runs! Love shouts a warning! Love leads him safely away from peril. Just so “All should feel that they are their brother's keeper, that they are in a great degree responsible for the souls of those around them” (1T 368).

The tenderest regard must be evident in those who seek to minister to individuals who are entangled in any kind of sin. “Brothers and sisters, if a person gets trapped by wrongdoing, those of you who are spiritual should help that person turn away from doing wrong. Do it in a gentle way” (Galatians 6:1 God’s Word Translation).

Jesus understands the inherited predispositions, the in-utero environment, the developmental processes, the birth experiences, and the subsequent environmental influences that shape the life of every person that comes into the world. “The relations between God and each soul are as distinct and full as though there were not another soul upon the earth to share His watchcare, not another soul for whom He gave His beloved Son” (SC 100).

That being so, God’s sons and daughters are to treat their brothers and sisters and all people with the same loving respect and concern for their well-being that Jesus exemplified when He was on earth. This means that, as they are prompted to do so by the Holy Spirit, they must come close to each person in order to understand well the life story of that individual and to speak words given to them by the Comforter.

Inspired by the example of the Friend of sinful humanity (SC 119), His followers must make the Church a winsome, welcoming place where His love is extended to all and where everyone can learn to observe all things that He commanded His disciples to do (Matt 29:20).

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus magnified and clarified heaven’s counsel that was designed to promote and protect the well-being of earth’s children. Included were His teachings about guarding one’s mind against sexual impropriety. The same kind of encouragement to live lives of purity must be given to young and older people with same-sex, bi-sex, and opposite-sex, sexual attraction.

Regardless of what the temptations may be, when people recognize that they are being tempted to perform sexual acts that are inconsistent with Scriptural teachings, they need to claim Heaven’s empowerment to resist those temptations. “Remember that the temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you will not give in to it” (1 Cor 10:13 New Living Translation).

Recognizing that sin blinds the eyes and confuses the understanding, Jesus found it necessary, when all other attempts had failed, to issue sharp rebukes to the hard-hearted scribes and Pharisees in the hopes that they would turn from their stubborn sinfulness (Matt 23: 13–37).

There are times when the Church must also raise its prophetic voice against sins of every kind that lead to eternal destruction. “Shout out loud. Do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Tell my people that they have refused to obey me. Tell the family of Jacob how much they have sinned” (Isa 58:1 New International Reader’s Version). “Don't you know that people who are unjust won't inherit God's kingdom? Don't be deceived. Those who are sexually immoral, those who worship false gods, adulterers, both participants in same-sex intercourse, thieves, the greedy, drunks, abusive people, and swindlers won't inherit God's kingdom. That is what some of you used to be! But you were washed clean, you were made holy to God, and you

were made right with God in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:9–11, Common English Bible).

When the Church denounces sin both within the Church and in secular society, it must do so with caution and humility. “Christ sometimes reprovved with severity, and in some cases it may be necessary for us to do so; but we should consider that while Christ knew the exact condition of the ones he rebuked, and just the amount of reproof they could bear, and what was necessary to correct their course of wrong, he also knew just how to pity the erring, comfort the unfortunate, and encourage the weak. He knew just how to keep souls from despondency and to inspire them with hope, because he was acquainted with the exact motives and peculiar trials of every mind. He could not make a mistake. But *we* may misjudge motives; *we* may be deceived by appearances; we may think we are doing right to reprove wrong, and go too far, censure too severely, and wound where we wished to heal; or we may exercise sympathy unwisely, and counteract, in our ignorance, reproof that is merited and timely. *Our* judgment may be wrong; but Jesus was too wise to err. He reprovved with pity, and loved with a divine love those whom He rebuked” (4T 66; emphases original).

“The Saviour never suppressed the truth, but He uttered it always in love. In His intercourse with others, He exercised the greatest tact, and He was always kind and thoughtful. He was never rude, never needlessly spoke a severe word, never gave unnecessary pain to a sensitive soul. He did not censure human weakness. He fearlessly denounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity, but tears were in His voice as He uttered His scathing rebukes. He never made truth cruel, but ever manifested a deep tenderness for humanity. Every soul was precious in His sight. He bore Himself with divine dignity; yet He bowed with the tenderest compassion and regard to every member of the family of God. He saw in all, souls whom it was His mission to save” (GW 117).

“Every one that will submit to be ransomed, Jesus will rescue from the pit of corruption, and from the briers of sin. . . . The soul, bruised and wounded and ready to perish, he encircles in his arms of love, and joyfully bears it to the haven of safety” (GCB, December 1, 1895).

“Whenever there is a soul converted and brought to Jesus Christ, a thrill of joy is felt in heaven. A soul is saved, a precious soul snatched from Satan's grasp. . . . The lost is found, the dead in trespasses and sins is alive” (RH, March 21, 1893). “All heaven rejoices over the weak, faulty human soul that gives itself to Jesus, and in his strength lives a life of purity” (ST, October 22, 1896).

### **The Call to Holiness**

The intent of this document is to call everyone, whether heterosexual, homosexual, married, or single, to conform to God's ideal of holiness. At the heart of this call to holiness lies the call to sexual purity. In our age of casual sex and all types of promiscuity and immorality, it is easy to think of sexual intercourse as a matter of private decisions and preferences. But this is not how Scripture thinks about sex. Paul plainly teaches that our bodies are individually temples of the Holy Spirit and that we are not our own but bought with a price. Therefore we must glorify God in our bodies (1 Cor 6:19–20; 10:31). Because our bodies belong to God, we may not do with them as we please. Rather, we must be conformed to the image of the Son of God (Rom 8:29). This call to holiness is extended to all of Christ's followers. It is the contention of this document

that such holiness is possible only when we use our bodies in conformity with God's creation ideal for which we were created as male and female. We prayerfully release this document in the hope that through its service many who struggle with their sexuality will come to embrace the divine ideal of holiness and sexual purity as their Christian calling. May our gracious God give us His Spirit (Ezek 36:25–27; Rom 8:4, 14), who provides victory over sin and power to live in harmony with His will through our Lord Jesus Christ.