

# The Bible and Homosexuality

## Introduction

If it is true that one's morality often determines one's theology, we cannot assume this is only true for the pro-homosexual advocate,<sup>1</sup> but must also accept that those who have a heterosexual experience and bias can also come to their biblical conclusions as a result of their bias. Just as a homosexual bias will tend toward a particular reading of Scripture, this must be equally true regarding a heterosexual bias. It will therefore be necessary that the revisionist argument is heard without responding defensively too quickly.

I will use the term 'homosexual' throughout this paper, simply because this word literally means same-sex, and as such covers both male and female same-sex activity. I have resisted using the term 'gay' simply in order to keep the issue of sexual *activity* in the open—this is the area that the Bible addresses and therefore this will be the aspect that will need to be kept to the fore in this present debate. There are probably multiple factors that lead to a particular sexual orientation, but it is important to stress that, due to the complexities we are dealing with *factors* and not causes. There has been a tendency to use the term 'cause' and to talk of the cause / reason for a particular orientation, but in the case of homosexuality this is normally used in a way not implying direct cause and effect.<sup>2</sup> There are two uses of the word 'cause'; the first is that of cause and effect where a specific situation will result in a second one (e.g., I hit you and this causes pain); the second use is one where direct cause and effect are not involved, but a former situation contributes toward a second (e.g., poverty causes crime). I suggest that when the term 'cause' is used in discussions surrounding homosexuality that it is the second use of the word that is being drawn upon. Because of this we should rather be talking of *factors* that contribute toward homosexuality than of seeking to determine the causes for homosexuality.

Alongside a consideration of the biblical material on homosexuality there needs to be an acceptance that all of humanity is fallen, and therefore all our sexuality is fallen. A heterosexual person on looking at the biblical material on homosexuality should be challenged about their own sexuality recognising that every expression of sexuality is damaged and in need of healing.

In recent history there has been considerable advance in how the homosexual person has been viewed: marked first by the decriminalisation of the homosexual act; and second, within the church a pastoral response that has been less judgmental but has sought to see the homosexual as a person to be understood and related to lovingly and responsibly. These advances have now provoked a third issue: the acceptance of those living in homosexual partnership into membership (and ordination) of the church. For the revisionist this is seen as simply the logical conclusion of the ground gained under the first two issues.

The debate on homosexuality provokes discussion on other related issues and forces us to consider our views on, for example, 'what is marriage?' (with such sub-questions as 'can a homosexual 'union' ever be called marriage?', or 'what sexual practices are legitimate within heterosexual marriage?') and in particular 'what constitutes sinful sexual practice?'. It is important that we are fair and understand that the revisionist argument is not one that

<sup>1</sup> I will use the normal term 'revisionist' for those who exegete Scripture from this perspective.

<sup>2</sup> The 'discovery' of the gay gene might be said to cause homosexuality. However, if there is proven to be a 'gay' gene we would then understand that there is a genetic factor (not cause) involved in homosexual orientation.

advocates promiscuous same-sex relationships, nor is homosexuality promoted as a way of life for those who are heterosexual; the proposal is simply that those who are homosexual 'by nature' should be allowed to express their sexual orientation in a committed same-sex relationship within the context of the Gospel.<sup>3</sup>

This paper will be limited in scope but will seek to address, firstly, the key biblical texts and then suggest a theological basis which will simply clear the ground for further debate.

## 1. The Old Testament Texts

### 1.1 Narrative Texts: Sodom & Gibeah

D.S. Bailey argued that the verb 'know' (Gen. 19:5; Judg. 19:22) did not mean sexual knowledge but that the request was to 'get acquainted' with the men. This interpretation is very difficult in the light of Gen. 19:8 and Judg. 19:25 where the daughters are offered in their place. Sexual intent is most certainly part of the picture: the response to 'get to know the men' is responded to with *sexual* offers of women. However other aspects than simply same-sex behaviour is involved: that of a breach of ancient hospitality rules is certainly one aspect.<sup>4</sup> Further the type of homosexual behaviour is that of *gang rape* which would be as abhorrent to the revisionists as to any traditionalist.

Can we, however, go beyond the above condemnation of violent gang rape? From a narrative perspective a flood-judgment follows the unnatural relationships of Gen. 6 ('sons of God with daughters of men'); similarly the activity here (Gen. 19) is followed by a judgement of 'fire and sulphur'.<sup>5</sup> Seen against this background there is a natural (and perhaps even creational) judgement that results from the sexual sin committed by both the angels and the men of Sodom.

Taking the story yet further back to that of the creation narratives themselves we discover that they are full of the theme of separation and distinction (light from darkness; night from day; dry land from the waters, etc.). With this overarching theme of the setting of boundaries and distinctions it is the crossing of boundaries that become the very denial of God's created order—this then opens up the question of whether same-sex relationships are seen to be a contradiction of creation itself. If this is so, it is not then simply gang rape that is the problem but the crossing of sexual boundaries, the boundaries as set in creation.<sup>6</sup> (The issue of creation

<sup>3</sup> The recent defence of this position was by Michael Vasey in *Strangers and Friends* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995). He was preceded by other writers such as D.S. Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Tradition* (London: Longmans, 1955) and, in particular, the influential work by John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University Press, 1980), which marked the turning point in the debate. Vasey would claim to write as an evangelical.

<sup>4</sup> NB: elsewhere in the OT the sin of Sodom is pride or insensitivity to the poor (Ezek. 16:49f.; Is. 3:9; the OT does not record the sin as that of homosexuality. Such claims are reserved for the NT (and the IT literature): Jude 7; 2 Pet. 2:6-10.

<sup>5</sup> Although we cannot reduce the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah to sexual sin the two passages are linked in Jude (Jude 6,7 'And the angels who did not keep... In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah...').

<sup>6</sup> Jude 7 suggests that there was an unnatural element to the sexual activity. This is suggested two ways: he uses the unusual compound *ekporneuein*, the use of the preposition *ek-* may well suggest that there is something unnatural taking place; secondly, they 'went after strange (different) flesh'. This of course could be that of angelic flesh, but as it was not known that the visitors were angels this is unlikely. The strange flesh then would imply men lusting after male sexual intercourse.

will be looked at later.)

## 1.2 Legal Texts: Leviticus 18:22; 20:13

Exegetically these texts are without question stating the detestable nature of homosexual practice, the issue remaining as to how we apply them to our situation today? A large piece in the armoury of the revisionists is to (rightly) deny the false division of the law into moral, ceremonial and civil—such a division would have been false to the Jew. Further these laws are part of a bigger picture, so the argument goes, and what is being forbidden is to be seen against the Canaanite cultic practice, so it is not same-sex relationships but the pagan and idolatrous contexts of the practice that is being condemned.

In response two points need to be noted:

1. Leviticus 18 forbids *all forms* of homosexual practice. The use of the Hebrew word *zakar* (male) indicates this. It is of mutual consent intercourse: both parties are punished with the comment that ‘their blood is to be on their own heads’ indicating an awareness of the situation; the verb is simply ‘lie’ not ‘seize and lie’ indicating that is not rape that is in mind. This condemnation is unlike Egypt where only pederasty was condemned (the Hebrew would have been *na’ar*: youth) or Mesopotamia where it was forcible homosexual relations that were forbidden.

2. The context rules out it being that of temple prostitution—we have here regulations for behaviour in *the household*.

The issue that is key in the discussion is how does this prohibition apply to those who live, not as Jews, but as under the new covenant—what then is the relationship of the law to the NT? If we cannot make the false distinction of ceremonial, civil and moral, neither can we simply ignore the texts in the same context that forbid, for example, intercourse with a woman during menstruation. A consistent approach and rationale will be needed otherwise our particular predetermined bias will guide us as to what laws we choose to uphold as eternal and what laws we conveniently lay on one side.

## 1.3 Old Testament summary

- The sins of Sodom and Gibeah include a sexual dimension to them, but these Scriptures *by themselves* do not condemn all forms of homosexual practice. The situation of committed gay relationships are certainly not covered by these texts.
- The Levitical prohibitions do provide a universal condemnation of homosexual practice between two consenting adults and, due to the contexts, cannot be reduced to that of temple / pagan male-prostitution. (Some might still want to argue as to whether committed same-sex relationships are outside the bounds of those Scriptures and obviously the question must remain as to whether the NT overturns the Levitical restrictions.)
- We are left with how these Scriptures should be applied in the light of the NT. (And also the question as to whether Paul used these Scriptures in his comments on homosexuality.)
- One important element that we have left out in the above examination of the OT is that of creation and the wider witness of the OT Scriptures on sexuality, marriage, family etc.

## 2. New Testament Scriptures

### 2.1 Romans 1:18-32 ‘against nature’

The debate in this passage is over the type of homosexuality that Paul is condemning. So the phrase *para phusin* (against nature) is interpreted by the revisionist as simply meaning that if a person who is heterosexual is involved in homosexual activity they are involved in something unnatural *to them*.<sup>7</sup> It is also argued that there are parallels to this in contemporary Graeco-Roman texts and that this simply reflects the Stoic wisdom of the day which is then subject to reinterpretation in our day. Under this interpretation ‘against nature’ means ‘unnatural’ in the sense that it is unconventional, being contrary to accepted social practice.<sup>8</sup> A third line of argument is that the homosexuality Paul is describing here is one that is specifically linked to idolatry for, as a first-century Jew, Paul could only have envisaged homosexuality that was embroiled in a pagan and idolatrous setting.<sup>9</sup> The text, it is argued, cannot therefore be used to speak to the committed same-sex relationships of the twentieth century.

To give the text above the substantial revision that is required necessitates a removal from a *creation context* which does seem somewhat difficult. For Paul is using a framework of creation and universal fall as his background (see, for example, 1:20 ever since creation...’). The core problem, according to Paul’s analysis, is the failure to acknowledge the *Creator*. Rejection of this knowledge of God leads to moral disorder, resulting in three sets of sins: the religious sin of worshipping *creatures* (23-25); the sexual sin of passion for the wrong *creatures* (26-27); and the social sins that affect the relationships with other human *creatures* (29-31). The ‘exchange’<sup>10</sup> and ‘against nature’ is set against this background.

Further this is the only biblical text that includes lesbianism and it is highly unusual among ancient texts in discussing the two together. This immediately suggests that Paul is thinking a) wider than specific homosexual acts and b), he is not interested in the debates of his day about the appropriateness of the social status distinctions (or ‘power relations’) between the insertive and receptive partners in male intercourse. His comments are not toward the type of sexual behaviour nor the power relationships of the participants but to all forms of same-sex relationships.

### 2.2 1 Corinthians 6:9 & 1 Timothy 1:10

These texts are taken together for they introduce a key element of the debate: the meaning of the word *arsenokoites*. (NIV text as below):

1 Corinthians 6:9-20 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes (*malakoi*) nor homosexual offenders (*arsenokoitai*)<sup>10</sup> nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.<sup>11</sup> And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God...<sup>13</sup> The body is not meant for

<sup>7</sup> McNeill *The Church and the Homosexual* (Kansas City: Sheed, Andrews and McMeel, 1976), 55f. Given that Paul would not have been working with an orientation model this approach is not at all likely.

<sup>8</sup> V. P. Furnish *The Moral Teaching of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), 72-77. This approach demands that a creation framework is removed.

<sup>9</sup> Furnish, 25-29.

<sup>10</sup> 1:23 the glory of God; 1:25 the truth about God; 1:26 natural intercourse.

sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.<sup>14</sup>By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.<sup>15</sup>Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never!<sup>16</sup> Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.”<sup>17</sup> But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.<sup>18</sup> Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.<sup>19</sup> Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;<sup>20</sup> you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.

1 Tim. 1:9-11 We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers,<sup>10</sup> for adulterers and perverts (*arsenkoitais*), for slave traders and liars and perjurers — and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine<sup>d</sup> that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

The revisionist approach to the text is to suggest that the homosexuality condemned is either a) that which is connected with idolatrous cults and temple prostitution or b) homosexuality expressed as pederasty. So Boswell, having defined *arsenkoitai* as male prostitutes, concludes that Paul would probably not disapprove of ‘gay inclination’, ‘gay relationships’, ‘enduring love between persons of the same gender’ or ‘same-sex eroticism’.<sup>11</sup>

David F. Wright<sup>12</sup> has advanced a sustained argument for Paul having coined the word himself<sup>13</sup> from the LXX (his normal ‘Bible’) with the juxtaposition of *arsen* and *koite* in Lev. 20:13<sup>14</sup>. If so, by referring to this passage he is showing that (as a Jew) he not only accepts the validity of the OT laws on sexual morality but also considers (as a Christian) that they are contrary to ‘the sound teaching that conforms to the glorious gospel’ (1 Tim. 1:11). Further, unless it can be shown otherwise, the term he uses is a general one: it would appear that it is all forms of homosexuality that he condemns. Paul could have used other terms: *paiderastes* (lover of boys), *paidophthoros* (corruptor of boys) but chose a general one, perhaps inventing a compound from *arsen* (meaning male) and *koite* (meaning bed).

Clearly for Paul sexual expression within the God-set boundaries was important, for the believer’s body had been bought with a price and they were now to honour God with their bodies. Again we face the same issue: although Paul uses a general word that condemns homosexuality the argument remains as to whether Paul would have condemned the homosexuality that is expressed within the committed relationship. In other words, can homosexual activity between two loving, committed people ever be an acceptable response to the God who has bought us?

<sup>11</sup> Boswell, 112,116f.

<sup>12</sup> Wright expresses this in numerous articles, e.g., ‘Homosexuals or Prostitutes? The Meaning of *Arsenkoitai*’ in *Vigiliae Christianae* 38, 1984; ‘Homosexuality’ in *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993); ‘Homosexuality: The Relevance of the Bible’ in *Evangelical Quarterly*, Vol. LXI. No. 4, 1989.

<sup>13</sup> There are 179 words that Paul uses for which we have no pre-Christian reference in Greek literature. There are 175 words that occur only in the LXX and Paul, with 31 of those being used only once by Paul. Five of those 31 are combinations of two words similar to the pattern *arsenkoites*. (Source: James B. De Young, ‘The Source and Meaning of the translation ‘Homosexuals’ in Biblical Studies’ in *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 1995.)

<sup>14</sup> *Arsen* is male and *koite* Greek for bed. The compound word that Paul uses would then be a general word meaning ‘men who sleep with other men’.

## 2.3 New Testament summary

- Within Paul’s day he condemns all forms of homosexuality—he does not restrict this to pederasty nor to cult prostitution.
- He uses a creation backdrop, OT law and the nature of the Gospel to argue his point.
- What remains is the issue of also including within the prohibition same sex committed relationships (and so-called homosexual marriage). To answer this issue we have to go beyond the proof-texts and their exegesis.

## 3. Theological Issues

### 3.1 The relationship of the Old and the New

The relationship of the law to the gospel is a complex one, as is evidenced by Paul’s use of it. Fundamentally the law is a boundary marker for the (Jewish) people of God, the Spirit becoming such for the NT people. However, resolving the relationship is not as simple as suggesting that the law has passed away. Although the law does not reveal the will of God (that being reserved for Jesus as the ‘image of the invisible God’) neither can we simply relegate it to the pre-Christian period in the sense that it is now of no consequence.

There have been two opposite (and simplistic) approaches to the relationship between the two testaments: a) that only what the NT repeats of the OT is applicable, or b) that everything continues except for what the NT repeals. This does not do justice to the NT Christian who understood that ‘all [OT] Scripture was inspired by God’ and was ‘useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness’ (2 Tim. 3:16). The better way to take it is rather more complex: that ***all of the OT applies to the Christian, but none of it applies directly apart from its fulfilment in Christ***. Making this statement does not simplify the matter, indeed the task of hermeneutics is further complicated, but it does then allow us, as it did for Paul, to consider the enduring value of the OT’s moral code. We cannot assume the restrictions of Leviticus have been done away with unless they can be clearly shown to have been fulfilled in Christ in a similar way to the dietary laws.<sup>15</sup>

Paul’s use of the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17-26) shows that he accepted the validity of those texts for the (Gentile) Christians of his day, some of whom came from an active homosexual background (1 Cor. 6:11).

Although Paul perhaps did not know of the homosexuality of our day (the so-called committed gay relationships) his condemnation was general, and there seems no good reason for suggesting that he would not have been equally condemning of their activity.<sup>16</sup> In order to hold to the revisionist position other aspects are brought in which we will now briefly consider.

### 3.2 Oppression, inclusiveness and fidelity

The argument is advanced that the Gospel liberates and for the church to oppress the

<sup>15</sup> This will not be an easy decision to make, but if Paul could refer to the Levitical passage in an enduring sense, and we can show how the Levitical restrictions are not simply cultic but rooted in a creation ethic, we will be more than justified in suggesting their ongoing applicability.

<sup>16</sup> Until the late nineteenth century there was no class of people known as ‘homosexuals’; rather homosexuality was an act which people participated in.

homosexual is to resist the very message of the Gospel; such people must be included when they are demonstrating the (Christian) virtue of fidelity.

Such arguments need to be heard (let us remember the former oppression of slaves and of women)<sup>17</sup> but none of the above can be made absolutes when divorced from the doctrines of God, creation and redemption. The liberation of the Gospel is one which liberates the believer from the power of sin in order that they can become all they were created to be. It is not a liberation to express oneself in whatever way one finds personally 'liberating'. This raises the issue of what forms of sexual expression tell the story of a humanity that is made 'in the image of God'.

### 3.3 Creation and 'the image of God'

Two complementary passages in Genesis deal with the creation of humanity as male and female. The first (1:26-31) indicates that the image of God is revealed, not in the human abilities of will, emotion and mind, but in the complementarity of the gender differences. At the heart of the passage is the command to 'be fruitful and to multiply', which only heterosexual activity is capable of fulfilling. Through this multiplication a culture is to be formed that is to reflect God's intent: indeed the kingdom rule of God is to be expressed. It is in their togetherness as male and female that they are blessed and the passage concludes with, 'And God saw all he had made and it was very good' (1:31). Certainly the difference and complementarity of the genders is essential for humanity to be in the image of God; perhaps also a) the ability to reproduce<sup>18</sup> and, b) appropriate cultural relationships<sup>19</sup> are essential elements that must be in place in order for humanity to be in the image of God.

The second passage (2:15-25) indicates that there was an inner restlessness in the man until the woman was formed. The man recognised her as the answer to his deepest needs and the sexual unity of the two (2:24) are fully approved of with the words, 'the man and the woman were naked and were not ashamed' (2:25).

#### 3.3.1 Trinitarian theology and the 'image of God'

The trinitarian view of God also leads us to the appropriateness of heterosexual expression. A strict monotheistic view yields a divine unitary being who is therefore non-relational within itself. This would mean that God is dependent on creation in order to express love as love necessitates a self-giving element; the creation of humanity would be a necessity in order for God to be love, for it would be we humans that would enable God to be love. God would then need creation rather than creation being dependent upon God. Humanity likewise, if made in the image of that God, would be essentially undifferentiated, unitary and all alike. Gender difference in that case would be simply a necessary biological fact needed for reproduction, having nothing to do with the image of God.<sup>20</sup> Therefore gender would have no essential

<sup>17</sup> The 'intra-canonical' dialogue on slavery and on women when listened to within the cultural context of its day both seem to lead us toward a libertarian and egalitarian approach; on homosexuality there are no cross currents of thought. All the evidence points in one direction and in Paul the critique is not one of bringing 'freedom' to the cultural expressions but of further tightening the cultural norms.

<sup>18</sup> Childless couples is not a denial of this suggestion. Perhaps childlessness is a continual reminder that we live in a fallen, but not evil, world. Childlessness is not then an indication of any personal sin or a sign that such people are under a curse.

<sup>19</sup> This will be looked at below under 3.4 Human Bonding.

<sup>20</sup> This would seem to be the case with the animals. They are made according to their own kind or species, but humans are not delineated according to species but according to gender. Human sexuality

connection with the nature of love (the image of God), there would be no difference in hetero-relationships of love and homo-relationships of love.

Whereas a trinitarian view (a complex being with differentiated internal relationships) leads us in another direction. The Christian view of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one single divinity with internal self-differentiation into three 'persons' opens the opportunity for a new form of love. This is not simply a reciprocal love between parties who are like (homo-) each other. Rather this love is complementary with the parties actually depending upon one another for their own completeness: so in the Godhead each 'person' is actually constituted by relating in love with the two other different (hetero-) yet equal partners in the Godhead.<sup>21</sup> There is a mutual interweaving in love. Under this view sexuality is not simply for procreation, but is reflective of the divine being.<sup>22</sup> Love then is love for the other (and in the creation narrative, not just the other person, but the 'otherness' as defined in gender terms).

The creation narrative tells us that the incompleteness of the man is not made up through the creation of another man but the creation of the woman as an equal complementary being. This then gives meaning to the creation of humanity in the image of God: with the creation of humanity as male and female we have reflected the internal differentiation that would be absent in homosexual relationships. The mystery of marriage is not that of two people coming together, but of two hetero-people coming together. It is the complementary relationships within heterosexual humanity that is then likened to the complementary relationships within the Trinity. As the differentiated parties (male and female) come together the 'two become one flesh' thus reflecting the divine image.

Although human sexuality is not simply a fact of biology (as with the animals) it is also true that the future of the human race is dependent biologically on the two genders. This ability to create community is intrinsic within the creation narratives and the sterility of homosexual activity can only be seen as a very denial of the image of God.

### 3.4 Human Bonding

The ability to create culture is another aspect that is, either intrinsic to humanity being in the image of God or results from being in that image: either way culture and community making is a key role for humanity and another feature which sets humanity apart from the animal world. The anthropologist, Peter J. Wilson,<sup>23</sup> distinguishes two kinds of distinctively human bonding: the *primary* bond, between a mother and her child, which due to the length of dependency is exceptionally intense, and the *pair* bond, between mate and mate, which is also intense, inasmuch as mating is a continuing possibility not limited to seasons of 'heat'.<sup>24</sup> This sexual bonding opens up the possibility of unfaithfulness and in particular the exploitation of women through rape when patriarchal rights are insisted on. By restricting the male sexual

is more than the biological ability to reproduce.

<sup>21</sup> There is a 'homo-ness' to the Godhead as there is to humanity, in that sense men and women are 'homo-(sapiens)'; there is also a 'hetero-ness' in the Godhead which is imaged in humanity gender-wise.

<sup>22</sup> The Catholic approach understands sexual intercourse to be for procreation, hence sexual expression that denies this is sinful: practices such as masturbation, oral and anal sex, contraception as well as homosexuality, are a denial of the purposes of God in creation. Non-Catholic Christians have tended to emphasise the pleasure element (a 'celebration' of sex approach) which, by itself, does not provide an argument against homosexual practise.

<sup>23</sup> *Man the Promising Primate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

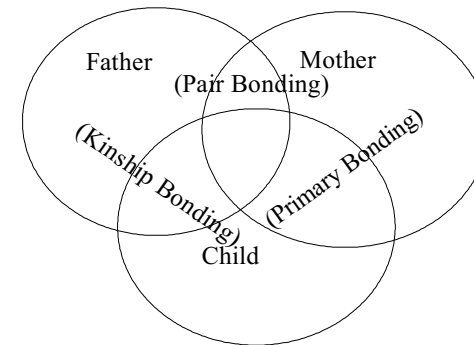
<sup>24</sup> A clear distinction from the animal world, and also a corrective to limiting the sex act to procreation.

expression to the mate, OT law is bringing a protection to women and to society as this particular bond is deepened.

These two bonds, suggested by Wilson, open up the possibility to a third unique bond which is of the adult male being bonded to the female's offspring.<sup>25</sup> This third bonding is that of fatherhood. The father being only organically related to the offspring by the brief act of conception, the possibility of this relationship (father / child) is of a different kind to the other two bonds. The mother and child relationship is naturally intense; the mate to mate is a sexual bond and through ongoing faithfulness leads to a genuine unity; the father to child relationship does not fit either of the above two types of bonds. For this bond to take place the woman has to welcome the father into the intense mother-child bond, while the father has to willingly respond to enable the bond to develop. To admit this third type of bond is to acknowledge the possibility of its extension, to the idea of kinship relationships, of brotherhood and sisterhood, and ultimately of community. Perhaps this is why it is said of God as Father that 'all families on earth derive their identity from him' (Eph. 3:14) in the ultimate sense that all communities must define themselves in relation to the self-giving God of Creation. The self-giving, willing acceptance of this type of bond becomes the defining element in human community, and of course the church. In line with Jesus' teaching we do not have the right to call anyone 'father' as all other relationships must be defined in relation to the God he revealed as 'Father'.

Although I am not suggesting that these three type of bonds are a reflection of the Trinity, in the sense that we look for a mother, a father and an offspring within the Trinity,<sup>26</sup> there is a sense in which these three bonds become the defining set of relationships for society.<sup>27</sup> If so then there will be certain relationships that will be a denial of this relational aspect of being created in the image of God. Under such a model the sexual would only be appropriate for the pair bonding, sex with one's offspring, for instance would be wrong. This understanding of fatherhood would be much more in line with Jesus' revelation of God as 'Father' and would encourage close, intimate, but non-sexual relationships among God's community, whether within the genders themselves or across the gender divide.

**Illustration of human (cultural) bondings:**



Here then is a model that outlines the building block for all community and restricts the sexual activity to be between heterosexual mates. By so doing the *future* of the community is protected; by demanding active self-giving fatherhood the *nature* of that community is protected; and by suggesting that this third type of bond is one in which all parties can participate in we have a basis for a loving, non-sexually orientated, community.

The family model (above) is not that of the nuclear family which is set to exclude all others, but it is the basis (the household) upon which community centres. Marriage is then of the bridegroom (ex-male child) leaving this intense bond in order to cleave to the bride (ex-female child). Given this picture the familiar relationships are extended and the life of the community extended, in line with the command 'honour your father and mother so that your days may be long in the land'. The leaving of one household is not to form another independent household but to fit within an existing one and to see it extended, with each stage of the extension being that of a male being bonded to the female as one flesh. Other sexual relationships do not then contain this forward-looking dimension, and as each time the community is extended new kinship bonds are formed (the church being called to model this kinship element to the wider community). If children are born they are seen as a blessing from God, but the key point in our discussions is that the sexual bond is restricted to the marriage relationship.

**3.5 Creation: the body**

The centrality of the body and of bodily activities is a key element in the debate. Both license and legalism have always flourished in a Gnostic type of environment which elevated the spiritual above the material. The Christian faith has always been this-worldly and creation-affirming. In an environment which is increasingly new age, we can expect one of two responses: anything goes or a hard line denial of sexual expression. The Christian faith must be seen **as affirming sexual activity within creation boundaries**

With a faith that has at its heart the incarnation and a Gospel which centred on three facts as to what happened to Christ's body (1 Cor. 15:3,4) it is not surprising that the body and what is done with it is important. So we will be judged according to deeds done in the body (2 Cor. 5:10) and therefore need to glorify God with our bodies (2 Cor. 6:20). Bonnington states that 'The debate is about bodily acts because God is as concerned with what we do with our

<sup>25</sup> Suggested by James McClendon Jr. *Systematic Theology: Ethics*, Vol. I, 93f.  
<sup>26</sup> Humanity is in the image of God, We cannot define God by saying 'humanity' with a loud voice!  
<sup>27</sup> I am also not suggesting that in every case there is an intense bond between mother and child, but that this intense bond is 'natural'. This is why 'even if a mother should forget her child', Yahweh (likened to a mother) would not forget her (?) child. Given the nature of fatherhood and motherhood as defined above, God is a Father, not because he is male, but because of the type of relationship this implies, and s/he can be likened to a mother. Again not all pair bonds are intense, but surely this was God's intention with the 'two becoming one flesh'.

bodies as he is with our attitudes and how we think.<sup>28</sup> Such an approach is a major challenge to our dualism that tends to put attitudes and ways we think on a higher plane than 'what we do with our bodies'.

Modern society follows the Greek interests in the body which were health, strength and beauty; the biblical (and Jewish) interests were ethical, eschatological and theological. Because the body is God's creation the deeds must reflect divine intentions; because we are his people indwelt by the Holy Spirit our behaviour must reflect his holiness; and because our bodies will be redeemed we are to live in a way that makes us fit for the rewards of the coming kingdom.<sup>29</sup>

Given the emphasis on the body it is not surprising that Paul says of sexual intercourse with a prostitute that not only do the two become one but that Christ himself is implicated in that act (1 Cor. 6:15-20; joined to the prostitute in such an act?). Although marriage must be more than sexual intercourse Paul's use of the Genesis 2:24 text indicates that sexual intercourse is at the heart of marriage, and by suggesting that Christ himself is involved indicates the necessity that all sexual activity must be governed by our redemption. Fornication is to be shunned in order to entrust ourselves fully to God in our bodily existence, as God has surrendered himself fully to us in the body of his son on the cross. 'You were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.'

### 3.6 Marriage & celibacy

The tenor of Scripture is twofold: heterosexual marriage and celibacy are the two options placed before humanity as sexual beings. There would appear to be no counter streams—unlike the situation we find on women or slavery.

The marriage pattern flows out of the second creation narrative, which Jesus indicated as authoritative through his use of the phrase 'as at the beginning'. In the Christian context this is given a further significance as an image of the Christ-church relationship. As at the beginning the male leaves the home of the parents in order to seek a bride.

Consistently then sexual intercourse is to be confined to the heterosexual marriage relationship, where within the framework of intimacy and commitment it takes place. The level of sexual activity should not be separated from those elements. This is not because God is against sex, but does indicate that the sexual act is to be protected within the marriage relationship. Sexual intercourse outside of this boundary is to be understood as sin.<sup>30</sup> The other option then for the believer is one of celibacy. Marriage being rooted in creation purposes and a picture of the Christ-church relationship, while celibacy speaks of another era, the new age, when 'at the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage' (Matt. 22:30).

Throughout the OT and the NT it is the heterosexual covenant relationship, as seen in Genesis 1 and 2, that is consistently emphasised. For the revisionist position to stand there would need to be demonstrated a similar positive affirmation of homosexuality (not simply same-sex friendships) as a controlling model for God's relationship with the universe and

<sup>28</sup> *Homosexuality and the Bible*, (Cambridge: Grove Biblical Booklets 1, 1996), 6.

<sup>29</sup> For an expansion on these themes see Chapter 1, 'Being Biblical' in Bonnington and Fyall.

<sup>30</sup> Given that humans are sexual beings, a major question that is raised by these definitions is what sexual expression is permissible between two non-married people. The term 'genital activity' is often used, but even this has its limitations as sexual attraction and expression occurs before genital activity in a relationship.

humankind—none is forthcoming in Scripture.

Further for homosexual marriage to be a possibility is to reduce marriage to a human invention, and if a human invention then we are free to change it, redefine it and discard it. However the creation narratives, endorsed by numerous Scriptures do not allow us that choice—marriage is a divine, not human, invention and as such is the fundamental social institution by which we unite our lives in family and kinship relationships.<sup>31</sup>

## 4. Conclusions

Having acknowledged the difficulty, and hermeneutical inadequacy, of simply proof-texting the following conclusions can be reached based on the texts:

- All forms of homosexual activity are condemned in both testaments. The condemnation cannot be reduced to pederasty nor to cult prostitution.
- Creation purposes, the image of God and the nature of the Gospel all speak with one voice: there are no contrary voices within Scripture, leaving us to conclude that:
- Heterosexual intercourse is endorsed within marriage; the other option is celibacy.

Once we move beyond the texts to a theology of creation we can understand that:

- Human relationships are to reflect the divine image and in a unique way the male-female relationship of marriage is to mirror the image of God. Only in this union can the creation mandate be fulfilled—homosexual unions remain a denial of the life- and future-affirming word of God's creation.
- The use of the body is a central theme and must be so in a Gospel with the incarnation at the centre. The redemption of our bodies, although future, mean that the activities of the body now must speak of that redemption and of what is to come.

Broadening out the discussion from simply that of homosexuality, to the bigger issue of sexuality, we can suggest that:

- We cannot condemn a person for their sexual orientation,<sup>32</sup> nor
- can we assume that a person who is heterosexual in orientation needs no healing in their sexuality, for all sexuality is fallen. Indeed one's orientation can be seen as one part of one's sexuality, and further one's sexuality is but one aspect of what it means to be a person. The goal for all people is to be healed so that we are conformed to the image of eschatological humanity as revealed in Christ. This journey, then, will never come to an

<sup>31</sup> This paragraph is adapted from Charles Colson & Nancy Pearcey, 'Why Not Gay Marriage', in *Christianity Today* (October 28, 1996), 104. In using the term 'family' as the fundamental institution, I am not advocating what is typically the exclusive family of the Western world, but an inclusive model. Also I am not intending to give and negative comments on the situation in which many lone-parents find themselves. Such people (and their corresponding social units) need to be drawn into the wider community: perhaps in this way the gay community has presented a challenge that needs to be responded to in its advocacy of close relationships outside of heterosexual marriage and its immediate offspring. (This does not mean that we need necessarily also approve of the sexual practice.)

<sup>32</sup> By orientation we are not defining this according to some inner nature, but according to dispositional capacity for attraction and arousal by a member of the opposite (heterosexual orientation) or same gender (homosexual orientation).

end prior to the new creation.

- Far from denying those of homosexual orientation same-sex affection there is a great need for that expression—indeed not just for those of a particular orientation. It is not simply that same-sex affection can be given but that the church must lead the way in modelling such relationships.
- The final conclusion I suggest is that a response to Christ is a process. Our pain is not simply that we live in a fallen world, but that the church is also full of fallen people. Even the new birth brings us into contact with the reality of ‘the already but not yet’ tension. How we handle that tension will need to be resolved at a community of faith level.

## 5. Other issues that are raised

- The need for definitions in the discussion. What do we mean by ‘sexual’ and ‘non-sexual’. Is the term ‘genital acts’ a sufficient definition, particularly as a relationship can be sexual before the sex act has taken place?
- A greater appreciation of sexual-orientation seems to be important. The category of ‘homosexual’ is a late-nineteenth century invention. Prior to that period it was simply a description of sexual activity. It seems to me that the current model to work from is of a continuum—in this sense few can be described as simply homosexual or heterosexual, but that we are looking at a scale of dispositional capacities for sexual arousal. Given this model what same-sex relationships are possible—can any of them have a sexual element to them? Or, to put it more provocatively, are there any relationships that are non-sexual, given that we are sexual beings?
- Some work also would be beneficial on the issues of male/femaleness and masculinity/femininity. It would seem to me that God is both masculine and feminine but neither male nor female, whereas humanity is either male or female but both masculine and feminine. If this is so does the church have something to say into the more important debate as to what it means to be a male and what it means to be a female?
- The different type of bonds (particularly the kinship bond) should encourage the church to explore what it means to be a radical community that is ‘neither male and female’ and where males do not look at women (or indeed other men and women at other women) ‘to lust after them’.
- There also needs to be an emphasis on the other sins that Paul mentions alongside homosexuality, sins such as greed, envy, deceit and malice (Rom. 1:29ff).
- The apologetic issue is a big one—we might be clear on the authority of Scripture and accept that God has placed order within our universe but we then face the issue of how we communicate our values in the context of a post-Christian and post-modern world.
- Within the church we too face an issue—to what extent would we want to make this issue a defining issue for orthodoxy (or perhaps orthopraxy). To what extent will we allow faith to be a journey or will we make demands of people prior to a full expression of faith before we encourage those struggling with their sexuality into the wider family of God.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> This also demands that we acknowledge that if one is heterosexual we cannot assume one’s sexuality is not fallen. All sexuality is fallen, all sexuality can be redeemed.

- It seems to me that the church is a community of disciples, so the requirement of ‘members’ must be that they are willing to walk with other travellers on the road toward wholeness (defined according to personhood, not sexual orientation). The church then needs to be in the world, so must be willing to have continual contact with those who do not share her values. The church cannot rest back asking for those who are committed to a homosexual lifestyle (or indeed that of selfishness, greed, materialism, or any such other sin) to move ground and come to it, rather it is the church who must move ground in order to establish a bridge of communication and love. In other words there is a non-judgemental attitude toward those outside the community of faith, while loving discipline is exercised toward those inside.
- Finally, I suggest that at some stage it might well be right and necessary for the church to make an apology to the gay community for the persecution that has come to it, at times in the name of Christianity. By so doing I am not suggesting that truth is compromised, but that a similar model is used as is currently being employed with the Islamic community. We can make apology, even defend those who are not with us, without ever endorsing their practices and beliefs.

## Addendum

I was once asked what would convince me to take a view that differs from the perspective outlined in this paper. My response was that if there was a practising homosexual community that espoused biblical beliefs and gave clear evidence that the fruit of the Spirit was being manifested among them, then I might have to reconsider. That fruit would need to be clearly manifested (and not just some claim to manifest ‘love’) and maintained over a period of time—then we might have to consider whether indeed the Holy Spirit had cleansed their hearts through faith.<sup>34</sup> Until that is forthcoming there seems to be no basis on which to consider an alternative to the position outlined in this paper.

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<sup>34</sup> We cannot afford to be self-righteous here, for the statement ‘by their fruit you will know them’ needs also to be applied to the evangelical church.