

Position Paper

Where Do We Stand: Homosexuality and the Church?

Homosexuality and the Church:

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Homosexuality and the Church

1 Introduction

This Paper is written as part of a “series” of positional statements of my local Church on a range of social issues. We began to write position papers with the series name ‘Where Do We Stand’ in 2014. I have written such papers on ‘Off Shore Processing of Asylum Seekers’, ‘Euthanasia, Physician-Assisted Suicide, and Palliative Care’, and ‘Female Gamete Donation’.

Like some others, this is a Paper that is likely to divide the opinion of readers. Whilst few words on homosexual activity appear in the Scriptural text of this paper, these few words, found in six or seven passages of Scripture, are dividing the contemporary church into two main protagonist groups – traditionalist and revisionist. There is far too little love and compassion being expressed between the protagonist groups. As the Church strives to maintain a positive influence of love, compassion, moral guidance – a better way of living – in the world around it, the question needs to be asked, “Can the church survive this growing dissent from within?”

Given the background timing of the writing of this Paper, the Paper itself focuses on commentary by Paul on the matters of homosexuality and homoeroticism expressed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:7-20. Within that section of Scripture general exegesis will be provided around the importance of fleeing from sexual immorality. Verse 9 and verse 16, as they relate to the arguments on this broader matter of homosexuality in the church, will receive much closer exegetical attention, as will some of the related brief passages of Scripture – Old and New Testament.

Related discussion on matters of the egalitarianism of sin, and same sex marriage is included in this Paper. Finally I will provide some recommendations for the local church – recommendations that I hope, because a firm position is presented, can ease some of the tension between the protagonist divisions of thinkers on this matter. At the same time I hope that there is value in the resource provided to gently broach the issues of leading a church through this complex matter that seeks to divide the church.

2 The Risks of Writing on “Homosexuality in the Church”

There are several risks in even writing a small piece on this topic. It alienates people’s opinions; causes thinking and caring, compassionate people to be ostracized from others; can create division in families and churches; leaves parents stunned when their child tells them of the gay leanings. Some will ask, “Why do you want to begin to write about this?” And to lean to one side or the other puts distance between those that really do think about their faith. Tending to fall into either the traditionalist or revisionist sides of the greater debate on homosexuality, and the more focused but likely more traumatic discussion on homosexuality in the Church, writers often lose the company of colleagues. For example, scorn is heaped on the traditionalists who are too inflexible to adopt any semblance of change of view on Scripture as new scriptural interpretations of the Canon are discovered. And disdain is cast over the revisionists, of whom the traditionalists say, are reinterpreting Scripture to suit the arguments they wish to make. Sadly there seems to be evidence to support both major sides of these important discussions.

But write we must. Any believer of conviction should begin to understand Scripture, and sometimes the best way to understand something is to teach it. Research is clearly important, but as one distils their research down they find themselves in a position where they may have something to say. Ideally that can be written so that others can critique the record rather than just hearing the voice. This advice is as old as the Church itself with Paul's commendation of the Berean (Jewish) Christians in Acts 17:11, who studied Scriptures daily to ensure that what Paul was saying of them was true.

And we must continue to speak this truth, based on the Scripture that we have. The Church has found itself in somewhat precarious moral times, largely based on how it has dealt with specific sins and the culture around us over the past 2,000 years. For example, the manner in which the Church fostered the religious crusades about 900 years ago might, in part, be bearing sour fruit in the crusades across the Middle East today. The manner in which the Church has managed itself with respect to slavery, and speaking out against dictators before major world war crises, has caused significant detraction from Christians and unbelievers alike. Often, speaking the truth, even in love, can bring a disparaging and unkind response. The current reality is however that Christians of all persuasions already have quite diverse, sometimes very opposite views about a range of issues, which often bring heated debate amongst us:

- The role of women in church, particularly in church leadership;
- How we observe the Sabbath, and what day is the Sabbath anyway;
- The sacrament of Baptism;
- The nature and morality of war;
- Eschatological matters;
- Denominationalism;
- Divorce;

and I am sure, many more.

Perhaps it is the last item of my brief catalog of debatable issues that most accords with the subject text that we will shortly explore. That is because in most of the related scriptural texts around homosexuality and homoeroticism, we find the matter of divorce and its inclusion in catalogs of sorts that suggest that the purveyors of such action might find themselves short of the kingdom of God. Although for some I am sure unwilling participants, the notion of divorce is an almost commonplace accepted yet still sad outcome of a marriage that is, for whatever reason, not working. I shall return to the matter of marriage later in this paper.

3 Paul's Ethics in 1 Corinthians

It is accepted that much of Paul's 1st Letter to the Church at Corinth contains advice to the church leaders about how they should conduct themselves in their personal and professional relationships, and how they should lead and model such behaviour to the church. Chapters 1 through 4 of 1 Corinthians focus on Paul's dichotomy of the groups of believers, that is, how believers are different to and superior to non believers in that there is no salvation outside of

Christ, and there is also no real wisdom, discernment or spiritual power outside that of God.¹ Chapters 5 through 8 of Paul's Letter focus in even more depth on this dichotomy, not only remind the Corinthians that there is indeed a difference in eternal fate of those that are not believers' but also a difference within the life of each Christ follower – the life that was before being en Christo and the life after becoming en Christo.²

This double dichotomy can be best seen in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 where the unrighteous (ἄδικοι) stand opposed to the righteous (sanctified) (ἅγιοι). These two groups stand in opposition based on their eschatological fate and the vice list that Paul uses to describe our status before Christ.

Not only do we have Paul commenting starkly on how we are meant to live as believers as opposed to what we may have been like before being en Christo, Paul's commentary covers a wide range of lifestyle issues – from how we regard goods and chattels (our possessions), to how we regard each other from a business and personal power perspective, to how we regard our bodies and the bodies of others from a sexual morality perspective, and to how we should consider marriage and singleness.

Lewis contends that Paul's ethical focus extends from chapter 5 of the Letter right through until its end at chapter 16, with Paul showing how the Corinthian Christians can learn from his consistent practice of "spiritual discernment by engaging in theo-ethical reasoning."³ In Lewis, Paul assesses the conduct of church members as they are participants in their broader culture, but continues to exhort members, right through until the end of this 1st Letter, to the "cruciform pattern"⁴ of Christ right through until the transformation from this physical life to the next spiritual life – from life through to resurrection life after death.

Can it be that both May and Lewis are inferentially arguing that as much as our repentant faith is a criterion for our salvation, so is the moral and ethical practice of lifestyle matters that we encounter within our broader cultural experience each and every day? Is this perhaps what the writer to the Hebrews was alluding to when writing (my paraphrase), "faith without works is dead"?⁵

If this significance placed on the practice of practical ethics is of such high importance then what impact does the emphasis of Paul's commentary to the Corinthian Christians have to us in the early 21st Century. I believe Paul would, in light of Thiselton's comments below, say that there is much at stake, for Thiselton suggests there are several similarities between the picture we have from Scripture of the Church at Corinth and the times in which they lived,

¹ Alistair S May, *The body for the Lord : sex and identity in 1 Corinthians 5-7* (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), p55.

² *ibid.*

³ John G. Lewis, *Looking for life : the role of 'theo-ethical reasoning' in Paul's religion* (London: T & T Clark International, 2005), p82.

⁴ *ibid.*, p83.

⁵ From James 2:14, "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has **faith** but does not have **works**? Can that **faith** save him?"

and ours. Thiselton lists the striking points of contact between the first century Corinthian Christians' circumstances and our own,⁶ being:

- 1 Status inconsistency;
- 2 Religious pluralism;
- 3 Cosmopolitan immigration and trade;
- 4 Priority of market forces; and
- 5 An emphasis on recognition or perception of honour and shame within a socially constructed world.

I would add just one further point of contact – a wide range of sexual promiscuity.

Paul's First Letter to the Corinthian Church stands in a distinctive position of relevance to our own times.

Our task, as was Paul's was to integrate our salvation, faith in Christ, theological understanding and ethics into a practical application in our home, our local church, and around us in society. Paul reminds us, it is not our role to judge those outside the church – but we can and must adjudicate within. But that does not mean we have to subscribe to the ethics of society around us, and Paul begs the question, I cannot judge outside – that is for God. But how do I influence the world so that it heads towards God. How do I integrate faith, salvation, theology and ethics in a practical manner to the world around me? That is the essence of this passage before us.

4 An Overview of Chapter 6 of Paul's First Epistle to the Church at Corinth

Before some deeper exegesis of the specific passage of this Letter related to homosexuality and homoeroticism, it is worthwhile giving an overview of the content of 1 Corinthians 6. This is a broad ranging, yet very contemporarily discussed and argued chapter of Scriptural text. Thiselton breaks the chapter down into two sizeable portions of focus, but really continuing the discussion from chapter 5, but excluded from this discussion:

- “A Warning against Manipulative and Grasping Behaviour”⁷ – 1 Corinthians 6:1-11; and
- Union with Christ Lived Out in the Body or “Public World”⁸ – 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

These are helpful section headings from Thiselton's shorter text. But within these sections there are hidden gems that belie the groupings of verses that Thiselton has commented upon. For example, verses 7 and 8 of this chapter relate to the discussion about the taking of litigation against a Christian brother / sister. Verses 9 through 11 really can stand on their own – these are the main subject verses that will follow in our discussion on homosexuality in the church. Yet they also stand as a bridge to the remainder of the sixth chapter with Paul's discussion on how our body is not ours – it belongs to Christ.

⁶ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians : a commentary on the Greek text*, The new international Greek Testament commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), p16-17.

⁷ Anthony C. Thiselton, *First Corinthians : a shorter exegetical and pastoral commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2006), p88.

⁸ *ibid.*, p92.

4.1 *Highlights from 1 Corinthians 6*

4.1.1 LITIGATION THAT SHAMES

- In verses 1 to 6 of 1 Corinthians 6 Paul challenges the Corinthian church leaders to guard against taking legal action against one another. This is particularly where the purpose is for self-edification by taking action against a poorer, weaker brother or sister, in order that they may be shamed for their action. Paul's view is that we should do all that we can to avoid litigation of another;
- There is no place for manipulation of people, or of the Gospel of Christ
- We should strive for mediation and reconciliation rather than confrontation and litigation;
- We should not be grabbing for what is not legitimately ours.

4.1.2 LAWSUITS AND DEFEAT

- In verses 7 to 8 of 1 Corinthians 6 Paul suggests that if and when we get involved in legal action with another Christian we have already lost. Paul is suggesting that we permit ourselves to concede to a weaker position in matters of a mercenary nature. Not only does this resound of "turning the other cheek" but also of it being the love of money that is the root of all evil. Essentially we should be relying on God to meet our needs and to rule our conscience and character.

4.1.3 LISTS AND CATALOGS

- In verses 9 to 11 of 1 Corinthians 6 Paul writes one of his lists (there are similar lists in 1 Corinthians 5:10-11, Romans 1:29-31, Galatians 5:19-21, and 1 Timothy 1:9-10) that describe the nature of the deception, those acts that will cause some from not seeing the kingdom of God. This includes acts of personal immorality, including sexual promiscuity and wrong doing against property and other people. This section will be discussed in more detail below;
- But these are not necessarily terminal conditions. Paul does remind his readers that some of the Corinthian church had once been like this but they have now been washed, sanctified and justified by God's grace. This is to say we do not always have to remain sexually immoral, devious, deceptive. A swindler, and so on. Provided that we abide in Christ, He can change if we are willing to be changed.

4.1.4 LIVE FOR CHRIST IN YOUR BODIES

- The English Standard Version provides the header "Flee Sexual Immorality" for this section of Scripture from 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. Paul is clearly writing to those he presumes are believers in Christ – those inside the church. These are the ones he can judge, advise, guide, and mentor. Believers, Paul writes, are to "Glorify God in your body". But these are not necessarily terminal conditions. Paul does remind his readers that some of the Corinthian church had once been like this but they have now been washed, sanctified and justified by God's grace.
- What Paul is writing is similar to the questions "Is something legal", and then "Is something right"? What believer's must adjudicate is whether the law, as a minimum benchmark of behaviour and character is the arbiter of our practice, or is Jesus' Gospel that arbiter. There are many things that we do each and every day that are no doubt OK. But might they be better? That is where our relationship with Jesus, and the presence of

- Holy Spirit in our life brings out the fruitful evidence. Is the fruit from the list in Galatians 5:22-26, or is it Galatians 5:19-21, or for that matter 1 Corinthians 6:9-10;
- Paul notes that with respect to sexual immorality, every other sin is a sin **outside** of my own body. But sexual immorality is a sin **against my own body**. If I am a follower of Christ, and I understand that my body is the temple of the Holy Spirit within me, then any sexual immorality on my part is grieving the Holy Spirit. It is worth the effort to get this right before God, not just lawfully right according to the marriage vows I took with my wife almost 35 years ago. In the eyes of the law in Australia, it is not unlawful to have an affair of the heart and body outside of marriage. But it is not right for any Christ follower to partake in – it is sin.
 - Paul’s commentary about joining with a prostitute, whilst speaking of heterosexual intimacy outside of marriage, can equally be applied to homosexual intercourse. Paul is writing to heterosexual males, to not engage with prostitutes, who, at the time of writing, were the 1,000 or so temple prostitutes engaged in the sexual and fertility rites of the pagan temples at Corinth. Heterosexual activity is clear from what Paul is writing. But the inference is that any immoral sexual relationship and activity outside of marriage defiles our body. As our body is not our own, Paul is saying that such actions, outside of the Biblical, covenantal marriage relationship is damaging to not only our body, but our relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

5 How is Homosexuality Described in the Bible?

Out of a total of approximately 31,000 verses⁹ written in the Bible as most Protestants know it to be, very few actually talk about homosexuality. So, as DeYoung asks, “*What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?*”¹⁰ There are perhaps eight passages that both traditionalists and revisionists refer to, usually in response to each other in varying degrees of dismissiveness, when discussing homosexuality and homoeroticism, what God has to say about it, how we should respond in the Church, and so on.

Four main texts are cited for discussion from the Old Testament:

- The story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19;
- Gibeah’s crime in Judges 19; and
- The law about a man lying with another man as with a woman in Leviticus 18:22 and in Leviticus 20:13.

There is a further four passages for discussion from the New Testament:

- Jesus’ comments on sexual morality and what defiles a person in Mark 7;
- Paul’s commentary on God’s wrath on unrighteousness in Romans 1:18-32;
- Paul’s comments on who will and will not be inheritors of the kingdom of God in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; and
- Paul describing for whom the law is laid down in 1 Timothy 1:8-11.

⁹ David P. Gushee et al., *Changing Our Mind: A call from America’s leading evangelical ethics scholar for full acceptance of LGBT Christians in the Church* (David Crumm Media, LLC, 2014).

¹⁰ Kevin DeYoung, *What does the Bible really teach about homosexuality?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015).

There are some further comments in both the Epistles of 2 Peter 1 and Jude referring back to the Story of Sodom and Gomorrah and the enormity of God's wrath on unbelievers at Judgment Day.

It seems that Jesus does not ever speak directly about homosexuality. Whilst He does speak about marriage and sexual immorality in, for example, Matthew 19 and Mark 7 (noted above), in essence the Bible is not a book about homosexuality. It is a collection of books, a library if you will, about the Gospel of Jesus Christ, God's plan of redemption for this world having fallen into sin at some time shortly after its creation.

With the exception of the reference in both Genesis 19 and Judges 19 to mob violence and serious perversion of same sex attraction into gang male rape and violence, and given that the perfect creation of man and women has been tainted by sin, the issue of homosexuality is considered amongst societal and communal law and behaviour as modeled on God's and Christ's rescue plan for humanity. And that is where the narratives from Genesis 19 and Judges 19 come into play. They describe just how far the mob violence describes the immorality and decay of humanity. They describe just how far these men have allowed themselves to veer away from natural sexual patterns and desires to those desires that are against the nature of creation. They describe just how far God allows us what we desire, and how deeply we can get life wrong – and ultimately pay the penalty for that. The story of Sodom, Gomorrah, and Gibeah is not about the sin of homosexuality. The sin of those cities is about judgment for how far that sin has caused them to fall away from God's natural order of creation.

The two brief references to homosexuality as a sin worthy of death as recorded in Leviticus 18 and 20 make for interesting reading. Like Paul's catalog, his list of defiling characteristics listed in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, the Leviticus references to homosexual lifestyle are amongst a lengthier catalog of sins that draw the tag "abomination".

Much of this is made by those revisionists who would have us consider that this is part of the (old) Law, and that Jesus has indeed done away with the depth of indignation that once was held against homosexuality, and that Paul really was referring to something else when he wrote his letters to the Corinthian Church, the Roman Church, and to his protégé Timothy. Well, it might have been something else, but I am not sure that the evidence for something else really stands the test. There is no question that Jesus rewrote the levitical code on food with Mark adding in parentheses to Mark 7:19, "Thus he declared all foods clean."¹¹ Jesus explains that it is not what food goes into a man that causes him to be defiled. Food enters our stomach, not our heart. Character, integrity, soul, and spirit are related to what comes out of us – from our heart. It is what comes out of us that defiles us. Jesus immediately restates some of the levitical laws of defilement that he (Jesus) still believes it worthy of our understanding that makes us unclean before God. They are to do with both people and things. They are clearly articulated. This is not Levitical Law being restated. This is law fulfilled through Jesus. These are the quintessential elements of how God has always wanted us to love and honour people – His creation, and of Whom we are image bearers.

¹¹ From Mark 7:19, in the English Standard Version, 2001, Crossway.

Paul understood this. Indeed I find it fascinating that while he was resident in Corinth, ministering with the Corinthian Church for a while, he was writing his Epistle to the Roman Church. He might well have also been writing to Timothy about the matter of homosexuality at this same time (1 Timothy). Paul was so focused on such a range of matters about sexual practice and immorality, including same sex practices, that all three Letters are possibly written contemporaneously. I get the strong sense that homosexual practice, gender identity, and sexual immorality were actually major problem areas for the Church. Paul understood that the call of Christ and the Gospel of Christ means we need to repent of the wrong we have in our lives, and, if we are going to be inheritors of the kingdom of God, move to change our lives around to a lifestyle worthy of Christ. Is it perhaps Paul's experience of his time living in Corinth that inspires his commentary on God's wrath on the unrighteous in his Letter to the Church at Rome?

Accordingly, at least for the Church at Corinth, Paul spends (what we know as several chapters worth of writing) much time and effort on practical and sexual ethics, including sexual immorality, marriage, and right living. Surely this is at the heart of the Gospel of Christ – if we are *en Christo* we will strive to change to be more like Him.

I want to write the following without it being construed as being Pharisaical – that is certainly not my intention. If it has that appearance then I humbly apologise to readers who may be personally hurt by what I am writing. I am not personally attracted to people of the same gender as me. I am thankful for that. I cannot begin to imagine the struggle that gender identity brings. I have my own, separate, struggles in life. But I do know several people whose genetic disposition, environment, or whatever factors, or none, have what we know as “same sex attraction”, sometimes abbreviated to SSA.

These folks have endured, in some instances, years of abuse, hatred, disdain, and ignorance, sometimes the butt of unimaginably nasty humour – even from within the church where they comfortably worship. For a selection of those people they have selected themselves out of the church and gone their own way. For some, into a lifestyle that I find difficult to condone. For some others however, they have grappled with what Scripture says about sexual immorality, have self identified with a lifestyle change that has needed to occur, and moved to curb their homosexual affinity and desires without falling into that area of immorality. It has been incredibly tough, but they have done it. Some, like Wesley Hill¹², have gone on to marry; some, like Sam Allberry¹³, have chosen to remain single. In a review of Grenz's *Welcoming But Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality*¹⁴, Wright not so much challenges by Grenz's argument that all forms of homosexuality is sin, so much as wishing that Grenz would qualify whether simple same sex attraction is a sin as compared with homosexual intercourse. He writes, “But Grenz is clear in regarding even a propensity to or preference for homoeroticism as in some sense an aspect of human fallenness: ‘our fallen disposition is sinful in that it is foundational to our sinning’ (120). He might have made more

¹² Wesley Hill, *Washed and waiting : reflections on Christian faithfulness and homosexuality* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2010).

¹³ Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-gay?: And Other Questions about Homosexuality, the Bible and Same-sex Attraction* (Good Book Company, 2013).

¹⁴ Stanley J. Grenz, *Welcoming But Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).

of this issue, because in most evangelical evaluations of homosexuality a distinction between orientation (or some such term) and behaviour is fundamental.¹⁵

6 The Egalitarianism of Sin

Having said that, it is often making the difficult choices to live a lifestyle that honours Jesus Christ that, whilst it might bring us some pain, at times in the short term, is worth the greater blessing at the end of the age. Imagine, hypothetically of course, that my greatest desire is to get ownership of my dream car – my Seminary lecturer’s Ute! On the surface no-one might ever know, except that I talk about this, I boast that one day it will be mine. Not only that but behind the backs of my lecturer and Seminary colleagues, I scheme to bring about circumstances where he surely must lose the right to own and drive that Ute. I arrange with WA Police to book him for speeding, for loitering as he drives along the Kwinana Freeway, for various misdemeanors with the drivability of that vehicle, so that the vehicle is deemed, incorrectly and quite unfairly, to be unroadworthy, and the lecturer is forced to give up his license to drive because he has too many demerit points. As a result of the scheming I have done with highly connected networks of equally devious acquaintances, the lecturer is required to turn in the Ute, available to be disposed of at any price. But because I have already arranged to collect the Ute to save the cost of towing fees for the WA Police, I collect the vehicle for the cost of re-licencing, and drive it home. It is mine. Scripture is telling me that if I do not change that covetous, thieving, deceitful lifestyle, I am unlikely to enter the kingdom of heaven. The problem is that I have become really good at that, I think about it often, and act on it well. In the end I act on these kinds of impulses so well, that I forget about the warnings of Scripture. I pursue my own desires and that takes me further from God. Life seems so good ...

But suppose that through the course of my lectures Jesus Christ arrests my heart. Something that is said in class just will not let me go until I confess and repent of my actions. I have difficulty turning the thoughts around but I work on that, and with the help of supportive colleagues, family and friends, manage to change up my life. I mean, I thought I was already on the same page with God, but I was wrong. I was doing things that were driving me away, but I am being brought back on the right track. Don’t get me wrong, I still have these thoughts, but when I have those moments I am able to share them with others, and, praise God, with God’s help through His Holy Spirit, and the support of deeply committed and loving Christian friends, it is generally getting easier. The friends I once thought I had are not as close to me now, and I think I am better off with that. I feel I am back on track with God – but I have to keep working at that.

Some will say, “That has little to do with homosexuality in the Church.” My response is “Yes, and no.” Not all of defilements listed in the various catalogs are about sexual immorality. Indeed most of those characteristics listed do not have a sexual orientation. They are certainly behaviours against people and things, but of a material substance. What it suggests, and it is an interesting aside, is that we are often too quick to identify the personally intimate, relational weaknesses in others before we undertake to change the material matters

¹⁵ David F. Wright, “Review of Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality by Stanley J. Grenz,” *Themelios* 25, no. 2, February 2000 (2000), p115.

that affect our business and professional relationships with others. Something about splinters and logs comes to mind here.

For me, although I am no scientist, it seems abundantly clear that along the line from male-ness to female-ness there can be quite a variety. The lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning and intersex (“LGBTQI”) lobby groups have understood this much more effectively than the church. Indeed the LGBTQI groups have been very active against the church; against the church’s traditionalist stand against homosexuality, and so called “gay marriage”, and for its intolerance against individuals who make up those groups. Just as much as there is a vast array of physical differences in preferences of people making those activist communities is the range of difference between thought, affinity, and active lifestyles and practices.

Indeed whether there are causal factors, and what, if anything those causal factors might be, is not important. Each person is still an image holder of God, who, in a perfect, sinless world, and all of us would be very different to what we are now. With one exception there is indeed no such thing as a normal person in this less than perfect world. The exception is that we are all sinful. Sin has no favourites – sin is quite egalitarian. Romans 3:23 tells us that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” God calls us **all** to repent and be transformed – not just those who struggle with homosexuality, same sex attraction, and gender identity issues.

To me it is clear – the homosexuality that Paul is so focused on in 1 Corinthians, Romans, and 1 Timothy, is about active participation in same sex intercourse, not about same sex attraction that is not physically enacted. For those that struggle with their life issues but choose in spite of those life issues to honour God while they live, practicing an holistic Scriptural lifestyle of abstinence of actively living out the issues that perplex them, we should be grateful to them and to God who is directing them for their courage, personal responsibility, and leadership.

7 Three Greek Words – πόρνοι, μαλακοὶ, and ἀρσενικοῖται

The above three words appear in 1 Corinthians 6:9 in such proximity that it is difficult to escape them, and their impact on the complete sexual ethic discussed in Scripture. The word πόρνοι and its various other forms cover the general term sexual immorality. The word μαλακοὶ has a specific meaning, but when combined with ἀρσενικοῖται only adds a certain unmistakable flavor. The word ἀρσενικοῖται only appears in the New Testament on two occasions – in 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1. It is a new word to even the Greek language when used in Paul’s Letters. It’s meaning is very clear, and when added to μαλακοὶ tells us much about the matter of homosexuality and its practice.

7.1 πόρνοι

Generally referred to simply as “sexual immoral ones”¹⁶ this noun describes a range of characteristics of people who carry the broader description of immoral. Scroggs¹⁷ maintains

¹⁶ Keen, Karen R. "Sexuality, Critical Issues." In John D. Barry, Lazarus Wentz, Douglas Mangum, Carrie Sinclair-Wolcott, Rachel Klippenstein, David Bomar, Elliot Ritzema, Wendy Widder, and Derek R. Brown, eds., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2013, 2014).

that sexually immoral people could also mean prostitute, and therefore that where πόρνοι is used in 1 Corinthians 6:9 it could be an alternative for the word μαλακοὶ as the passive partner. I am not convinced that this is so, but rather as a discriminator away from homosexual sexual relationships with which I believe Paul was trying to separately highlight. The word πόρνοι captures a range of unauthorised sexual sins. Where Paul writes, “All things are possible, but not all things are good (or beneficial)”, the sense of an unauthorised sexual and adulterous affair between a Christian husband and a prostitute (or God, may this never happen again, with another woman in the church), that affair – adultery, sex outside of marriage – falls into this category of πόρνοι.

7.2 μαλακοὶ

Thiselton¹⁸ suggests that there is broad agreement that this word, when expressed in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, means the passive partner in a homosexual, sexual relationship. Scroggs¹⁹ provides a view of the word in its general meaning as being “unmanly”. Others have used the word effeminate. More specifically Scroggs calls these young men “the youth who consciously imitated feminine styles and ways.” This definition makes it very easy to slip into the role of call boy, or some form of passive homosexual activity, whether for pleasure or income. Thiselton writes that from “the classical period to Philo, who died in around 50 CE, there was extreme distaste expressed in Greek and Hellenistic literature for the effeminate male who uses cosmetics and the coiffuring of the hair. For which Philo sometimes used the term androgynous.”²⁰

Scroggs view however seems to be biased towards pederastic behaviour. The Scriptural certainly might include pederasty, but it is not conclusive that it was solely adult and youth oriented homosexual sexual activity, or, as I believe the Scripture and other ancient sources uphold, a general practice of both consenting, and non consenting males, of all ages and of both short and long term relationship length. I also have no doubt that whilst Paul seems only to refer to males, there is evidence, at least in the ancient texts, that female homosexual activity also occurred, and is equally caught in the broader effect of the text.

7.3 ἀρσενικοῖται

Schreiner writes that the Pauline word ἀρσενικοῖται used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 is the first time this word actually appears in Scripture, and in Greek literature.²¹ In both occurrences Paul uses the word to describe the sin of homosexuality. Wright argues that the Paul has derived the word from the two Scriptural references from Leviticus discussed briefly, and earlier, in this paper. When we review the LXX we can see the point that Wright²² makes: *kai meta arsenos ou koimēthēse koitēn gynaikos bdelygma gar estin* – You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination (Lev. 18:22); and

¹⁷ Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and homosexuality : contextual background for contemporary debate* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), p108.

¹⁸ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians : a commentary on the Greek text*, p449.

¹⁹ Scroggs, p106.

²⁰ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians : a commentary on the Greek text*, p449.

²¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, “A New Testament Perspective on Homosexuality,” *Themelios* 31, no. 3, April 2006 (2006), p70.

²² David F. Wright, “Homosexuals or Prostitutes? The Meaning of Arsenokoitai (1 Cor. 6:9 1 Tim. 1:10),” *Vigiliae Christianae* 38, (1984), p125-153.

kai hos an koimēthē meta arsenos koitēn gynaikos bdelygma epoiēsan amphoteroi thanatousthōsan enochoi eisin – If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them (Lev. 20:13). The term literally means males that take other males to bed, that is, males have sexual intercourse with males – what we commonly accept as being gay or homosexual activity or lifestyle.

When teamed with the word *μαλακοὶ* (see discussion above), the two words used as a phrase have been suggested to mean pederasty, the homosexual act between an adult male and a much younger man or boy. I find this suggestion difficult to accept as Paul might well have used the Greek word, and more technically appropriate, and obvious, word *paiderastēs* in this section of Scripture.

These three Greek words highlight the seriousness of relationships – relationships between us all as brothers and sisters in Christ, the relationships between a husband and wife, and our relationship with God. And what Paul is suggesting is not only is there no higher, more important relationship than what we have with God, but that it is spiritual. It is almost as though in verses 9-11 of 1 Corinthians 6, Paul is shouting something like, “Hey folks, stop what you are doing. You are behaving like you used to be before you met Jesus Christ. You are His children now and this behaviour is not only unbecoming of you, it has the potential to cause you to be lost to Christ. Did you really mean the profession you made in Him. You aren’t living like it. Stop, change, get real again – in Christ!”

8 Can I Be Both a Faithful Christian and Live Out a Homosexual Lifestyle?

More simply put, can you be both sexually active gay and Christian? Depending on which side of the broader debate about homosexuality and the church one tends to lean towards – traditionalist or revisionist – will likely determine whether or not one considers you can be both of a faithful Christian and contemporaneously living out a homosexual lifestyle. For me to answer “Yes” is a step too far, a movement away from God’s truth. As difficult as it may be to confront life and all that it brings, whilst having an innate sense and urge for same sex attraction, I believe it still must be said that the Gospel of Jesus Christ requires us to stop, turn our lifestyle and our habits around, and follow Him and what He asks of us. That more of God’s people would do this faithfully would place the entire church in a better place. But these are my thoughts.

Richard Hays put forward a methodological framework for New Testament ethics. He argued that “New Testament ethics has a fourfold task: the descriptive, synthetic, hermeneutical, and pragmatic.”²³ For Hays, the hermeneutical and pragmatic tasks must proceed from the assumption that the Bible functions as the authority over Christian faith and practice. Hays writes, “normative Christian ethics is fundamentally a hermeneutical enterprise: it must begin and end in the interpretation and application of Scripture for the life of the community of faith.”²⁴

²³ Richard B. Hays, *The moral vision of the New Testament : community, cross, new creation, a contemporary introduction to New Testament ethics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), p3-7.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p10.

Pro homosexual theologians argue that the biblical authors were culturally biased against homosexuality. They are not the only ones to argue that the apostle Paul was a product of his strong Jewish traditional training of his time, and, as a result, had cultural blind spots. These blind spots are regularly referred to against women and gays. McNeill asserted that, “the Scriptures are ‘historically and culturally limited’ so that one cannot merely transpose a text of Scripture to the contemporary circumstances of life.”²⁵ The thinking of homosexual proponent authors seems to be that because the biblical authors wrote from such a distant and culturally irrelevant setting, they conclude, like Scroggs, “The conclusion I have to draw seems inevitable: Biblical judgments against homosexuality are not relevant to today’s debate.”²⁶ “Paul’s arguments,” states Marti Nissinen, “are based on certain Hellenistic Jewish moral codes that are culture-specific and that had their own trajectory of tradition.”²⁷ Nissinen goes on to say that in fact, Paul may have needed sexual therapy himself.²⁸

The following statement sums up well the revisionist’s view of the biblical teaching on homosexuality:

Sexuality as we understand it today is not addressed in the Bible. It is a modern concept. The Bible treats sexuality only in limited forms of actualization. . . . The terms of Israel’s culturally shaped understanding will not satisfy our present need. In this field we must look to the ongoing revelation of science and of newly emerging voices of experience.²⁹

The conclusions reached by the gay proponents above are not kind to the traditional and historic approach to biblical interpretation. As seen below, other pro homosexual authors actually disagree with these findings, bringing into doubt their own reliance on biblical authority, but at least honouring Scripture.

Via, writing that whilst homosexual practice between committed, homosexually oriented partners should not be regarded as sin, substantially agreed with Gagnon (with whom he was writing) that, “the biblical texts that deal specifically with homosexual practice condemn it unconditionally”³⁰. Pronk similarly expressed, “wherever homosexual intercourse is mentioned in Scripture, it is condemned.”³¹ Crompton writes:

²⁵ John J. McNeill, *The church and the homosexual* (Kansas City Kan.: Sheed Andrews and McMeel, 1976), p37.

²⁶ Scroggs, p127.

²⁷ Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the biblical world : a historical perspective* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1998), p124.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p125.

²⁹ Phylis A. Bird, “The Bible in Christian Ethical Deliberation Concerning Homosexuality: Old Testament Contributions.” In David L. Balch, *Homosexuality, science, and the "plain sense" of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2000), p168.

³⁰ Dan Otto Via and Robert A. J. Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible : two views* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), p93.

³¹ Pim Pronk, *Against nature? : types of moral argumentation regarding homosexuality* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1993), p279.

“According to [one] interpretation, Paul’s words were not directed at ‘bona fide’ homosexuals in committed relationships. But such a reading, however well intentioned, seems strained and unhistorical. Nowhere does Paul or any other Jewish writer of this period imply the least acceptance of same-sex relations under any circumstance. The idea that homosexuals might be redeemed by mutual devotion would have been wholly foreign to Paul or any other Jew or early Christian.”³²

Walter Wink, a well known, but now deceased New Testament scholar, upon reviewing Gagnon’s *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* conceded, “Simply put, the Bible is negative toward same-sex behavior, and there is no getting around it.”³³ Specifically for the matter of distance or gap between 21st Century church life and 1st Century Christians, not only does Thiselton make the comment, cited earlier, that there are significantly close similarities between life then and now, but Hubbard writes at length on the diversity and complexity of homosexual relationships in the ancient world of the early church. Not only does there seem to be little consistency, or a normalised form of homosexual relationship³⁴. There appeared to be what we would label both homosexual and lesbian relationships, not limited to being between older and younger persons (as in pederasty), and strong evidence of longer term committed relationships as well as the short term or even prostitution form of relationship.³⁵ It is also evident that Paul’s voice was not a lone voice in the time of the early church. Hubbard notes that:

“Literature of the first century C.E. bears witness to an increasing polarization of attitudes toward homosexual activity, ranging from frank acknowledgment and public display of sexual indulgence on the part of leading Roman citizens to severe moral condemnation of all homosexual acts, even with slaves.”³⁶

Luke Timothy Johnson adds two important comments. He notes that, “accepting covenanted love between persons of the same sex represents the same downward spiral with regard to Scripture, since the Bible nowhere speaks positively or even neutrally about same-sex love”³⁷. In describing how one personally deals with the seeming restrictive practices required by Scripture he adds:

“I think it important to state clearly that we do, in fact, reject the straightforward commands of Scripture, and appeal instead to another authority when we declare that same-sex unions can be holy and good. And what exactly is that authority? We appeal explicitly to the weight of our own experience and the experience thousands of others have witnessed to, which tells us that to claim our own sexual orientation is in fact to accept the way in which God has created us. By so doing, we explicitly reject as well the premises of the scriptural statements condemning homosexuality – namely, that it is a vice freely chosen, a symptom of human corruption, and disobedience to God’s created order.”³⁸

³² Louis Crompton, *Homosexuality & civilization* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), p114.

³³ Walter Wink, “To Hell With Gays: Sex and the Bible,” *The Christian Century* 119, no. 12 (2002).

³⁴ Thomas K. Hubbard, *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome : a sourcebook of basic documents*, Joan Palevsky imprint in classical literature (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2003), p8.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p5.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p383.

³⁷ Luke T Johnson, “Homosexuality & The Church,” *Commonweal Magazine*.

<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/homosexuality-church-1>. (Accessed 30 April 2015).

³⁸ *ibid.*

As there is such a difference of views within the gay proponent community, the church can and must with compassionate conviction declare homosexual practice to be sin, yet a sin which, like so many others – when repented of – is covered by the grace of God displayed in His Son Jesus Christ upon the cross of Calvary. The church is not the only group of people deplored at what is happening in society. But what we must not do is rely on our own experience as the authority upon which we practice our lives.

Perhaps the most striking interpretation from Scripture that arises from any author, traditionalists and revisionists alike, is that of Brownson.³⁹ In a serious study of gender and sexuality, Brownson reviews in detail many of the traditionalist and revisionist arguments about homosexuality. He provides an extensive study of “two becoming one flesh” and the nature of kinship. In his discussion on what it means to have sex with a prostitute Brownson writes “that the bodily act of sexual union with a prostitute puts the Christian in an impossible position of being united both to holiness and to uncleanness.”⁴⁰ Importantly, while Brownson discusses the possibility of there being a space for long term committed same gender relationships being included in the “two becoming one” rubric, he concludes that the two becoming one “position continues to affirm that the normal experience of the vast majority of Christians not called to celibacy should be that the one-flesh union consists of one man and one woman in the bond of marriage.”⁴¹

On the weight of Scriptural and cultural evidence before us, irrespective of how the activist groups and media might comment on the church, we in the church really cannot actively live out a sexually immoral life, and be a genuine disciple of Christ. No matter the pain and suffering, we must live a life that follows and serves Christ. This is not an easy argument for many people to hear, including many contemporary Christians – gay and straight – if I can so use those words. But it is the instruction that Scripture puts before us. I can accept that there seems to be limited discussion about sexuality in Scripture. But the Bible is not manual written on human sexuality. Where the Bible speaks of sexuality, it speaks of a very practical and God honouring, expression of sexuality within the body of Christ, and a strong allegiance to covenantal marriage between one man and one woman.

So, what do we do? What shall we say? What shall our position be? Burk asks the questions, “Who or what determines when Christians should and should not speak to a given moral issue? Is it okay for Christians to stop discussing their opposition to homosexuality ... ?”⁴² Burk goes on to say that if we believe that Hays is correct and that our assumptions should, as believers, be made on the basis of the inherent authority of Scripture, then “Yes”. Alternatively, if we pursue Johnson’s point of view, that we will rely on our own experience in a range of moral and ethical matters, that we believe Scripture can be trumped by a range of other things external to it, then we will not have a voice.

³⁹ James V. Brownson, *Bible, gender, sexuality : reframing the church's debate on same-sex relationships* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2013).

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p102.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p108.

⁴² Denny Burk, “Why Evangelicals Should Ignore Brian McLaren: How the New Testament Requires Evangelicals to Render a Judgment on the Moral Status of Homosexuality,” *Themelios* 35, no. 2, July 2010 (2010).

Gay activist Chris Glaser wrote, “I knew the church needed to address ... issues for heterosexuality and homosexuality alike: singleness without celibacy, sexual intimacy outside of covenant relationships, bisexuality.”⁴³ To that end I believe Grenz put it well. He asked the question, “Is it proper for Christians to respond to homosexual urges by forming same-sex unions? ... traditionalists are not claiming that the doorway to the church is closed to homosexual persons. Their concern has to do with the kind of conduct that befits disciples within the covenant community.”⁴⁴ So, what is the lifestyle that believers – disciples of Christ and pursuers of holiness – should strive for? Those who might be seen as traditionalists simply see that Scripture has already defined a response – sexual abstinence as a single person and, for those who are married, fidelity in our covenant relationship.

9 Same Sex Marriage

I return briefly to the matter of same sex marriage.

As I was growing up, in school, voraciously taking in the information around me, I learned very little about marriage. In the late 1960s my eldest brother got married. As an impressionable 14 year old, I was invited to be a part of the bridal party, one of the groomsmen. Sure, I had been to weddings before, always church based, across a range of denominational forms and settings – dependent on the family member, or church person getting married, to which my parents and their family was invited. But I had no idea of what really was being committed to until I was a part of the bridal party group. Mind you, what I knew was fairly limited. There was marriage, there was divorce – that all seemed so new, and yet the way people spoke about those who were divorced seemed that they had some terribly contagious disease. There seemed to be such vitriol ... I also recall the words *de facto* creeping into my vocabulary – in terms of being married. I didn’t know of anyone who lived a homosexual lifestyle. I am sure there were people that I might have even known who lived that lifestyle, but it certainly was not a matter for open discussion.

And yet none of that is important to me. What is important is the marriage I share with my wife. We are two individuals that have made a covenant to each other, in our instance before God and our respective families, to love, honour, obey and uphold each other, until death parts us. The latter part seems to be such a big ask these days. And as imperfect as I am, my wife still loves me. I love her more and more each day. At almost thirty-five years of this thing called marriage, I am still learning about my wife, learning about myself, learning more about the world and about God who created it all and lives in me. This is a wonderfully mysterious thing to try to get my head around, but still be absolutely committed to in a true covenantal sense. I admire Gushee’s statements in this regard⁴⁵. I still believe that God’s model of marriage for His people is the better way. It is a matter on my heart that everyone could enjoy such a relationship. But we in the church have not always got even this quite right. Whilst I am concerned that all could enjoy such a relationship, the choice of others is their choice. For the world, there are likely many ways in which marriage, if it happens, can

⁴³ Chris Glaser, *Uncommon calling ; a gay Christian's struggle to serve the church* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), p174.

⁴⁴ Grenz, p155.

⁴⁵ Gushee et al., p105.

be formalised. And today's world is so challengingly different. Marriage, divorce, same sex partnership, multiple heterosexual partnerships, the potential of marriage between a three-some. When I was in my twenties the breadth of options is just something that I did not have to consider, that the world around me seemed something not needing to be considered.

Is it possible that two men, or two women, can find long term, committed happiness in relationship with each other? Yes, even antiquity has shown us that. Is it marriage as, I believe, God has intended? No, but if they are not observers of God's Word, then whilst I might get an occasional opportunity to influence those people, they do not have to choose the way I endeavor to live. Is it appropriate that there be some form of societal recognition, or marriage formality of such folks? Does it have to be the same form of marriage that we have in the Church? Does it really matter if it is of the same form, but regulated and practiced by the State (in some way)? Provided that the church is entitled, because of its love of God, because of its tenets of faith, to maintain its own practices, including not permitting some couples presenting for marriage, should a change in marriage provisions and legislation really bother us.

How much do we agree with Paul that "For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside."⁴⁶ Cannot this same sentiment belong to us in the Church – even if we influence those outside the church to think about a Christian response?

10 How the Local Church Can Share its Faithfulness With Inclusiveness?

If church is a place where together, in community, we strive to glorify God, then there likely should be some guidelines that we can apply to all people that both welcomes them into what we believe is God's house for us all, yet honours the responsibility the local church has to manage its own responsibilities – before God and before mankind.

I offer the following, adapted from a 1992 protocol developed by John Piper's Bethlehem Baptist Church in the United States of America, as a statement of welcome and affirmation of all people, but one that recognizes that we all sin and have an accountability requirement before God. It is adapted from Burk, 2010⁴⁷, and added to as we believe should be so done.

- 1 That all persons have been created in the image of God and should be accorded human dignity.
 - 1.1 We believe that hateful, fearful, unconcerned harassment of people with any human difference from the accepted and valued norm should be repudiated. This includes those people with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, and intersex attraction and identification.

⁴⁶ 1 Corinthians 5:12-13. ESV.

⁴⁷ Burk, "Why Evangelicals Should Ignore Brian McLaren: How the New Testament Requires Evangelicals to Render a Judgment on the Moral Status of Homosexuality," p225-226.

- 2 That heterosexuality is God's revealed will for humankind and that, since God is loving, a chaste and faithful expression of this orientation (whether in singleness or in marriage) is the ideal to which God calls all people.
 - 2.1 We believe that all sexual immorality is a result of what the Christian Bible describes as the fall of humanity into a sinful condition that pervades every person.
 - 2.2 Whatever biological, familial or environmental roots of same sex attraction may be discovered, we do not believe that these would sanction or excuse homosexual behaviour.
 - 2.3 We believe that sexual intimacy is to be reserved for marriage of a husband and wife.
 - 2.4 We empathise with the personal struggle and pain that same sex oriented people endure, and, in order to live a chaste lifestyle, the grief of loss of surrendering the hope of partnering another person.

- 3 We believe that there is hope for people with a same sex attraction as Jesus Christ offers a healing alternative. In His grace, the power of sin is broken and people are freed to know and experience their true identity in Christ and in the fellowship of their local church.
 - 3.1 We believe that this grace is attained through a process which includes recognising homosexual behaviour as sin, renouncing such behaviour, rediscovering healthy, non-erotic friendships with people of the same sex, and embracing a moral sexual lifestyle. This, we believe, is God's ideal for humanity.
 - 3.2 This process parallels sanctification needed in dealing with heterosexual immoral temptations, indeed temptation and sin of any kind whatsoever.
 - 3.3 We believe that this grace comes through faith in Jesus Christ, by the power of His Holy Spirit.

- 4 We believe that respect for people with a same sex orientation involves honest, reasoned, nonviolent sharing of facts concerning the immorality and liability of homosexual behavior. We also believe that endorsing behaviour that the Bible disapproves endangers people and our communities, and dishonours God.
 - 4.1 We believe that Christian churches should reach out in love, compassion, and truth to minister to people who identify as homosexual.
 - 4.2 We believe that those who contend Biblically against their own sexual temptation should be patiently assisted in their battle, not ostracised or disdained.
 - 4.3 We believe that the more prominent a leadership role or modeling role a person holds in a church or ministry of the Church, the higher will be the expectations for God's ideal of sexual obedience, wholeness and practice.
 - 4.4 We affirm that all can find help through the Church to engage in the battle against all improper sexual thoughts and behaviours.

- 5 We believe that some views expressed by parts of the Christian Church on immoral sexual conduct have been, plain and simply, violent.
 - 5.1 We must never allow our discussions about any immoral sexual behaviour, and our views about moral failures, to be the cause of demeaning physical, emotional, spiritual, and psychological attack.
 - 5.2 We believe that such demeaning behaviour is discriminatory and prejudicial.

- 6 We believe that life long, covenantal marriage as expressed in the Bible – Christian marriage – is God’s preferred way of formalising a marriage between consenting heterosexual partners.
 - 6.1 We choose to officiate Christian marriages only.
 - 6.2 We believe the Church has the obligation to speak courageously, yet lovingly, into every generation’s social construct of marriage and society.
 - 6.3 We believe that the Church should be permitted to so speak without penalty.

It is one thing to have a written protocol of our views and beliefs, but how are we going to personally, individually within our church community, take on these practices?

As believers in Christ we ought be helping homosexual people and their families work out and live through their family situations in God honouring and constructive ways. Yet some of our past feelings, words, and actions have been plain and simply, violent. A critical test of our faith is how we regard and serve the needy and, what we might consider, socially out of our paradigm of normal – outcasts if you like. That includes those with behaviours and practices that we believe are out of line with Scripture. Taken to its practical outcome, we must never allow our discussions about homosexual practice, and our views about its moral failures, to be the cause of demeaning physical and psychological attack. Such behaviour is discriminatory and prejudicial.

Prejudicial behaviour towards homosexual people is quite prevalent in many parts of the church. We should proactively develop ministry strategies that unashamedly pursue a full Gospel view and practice of care and ministry that welcomes, supports, and mirrors the attitude of Jesus towards individuals, couples, and families who face struggles with same sex attraction and homosexual behaviour. For example, Living Hope Ministries⁴⁸ in Arlington Texas have been helpful for even some Australian people struggling with these issues. It is worth exploring and developing such ministry supports.

11 Conclusion

Sin is abhorrence to God. But we are not perfect, no, not one. In 1 Corinthians 6:7-20 Paul encourages his Corinthian brothers and sisters to understand how deeply offensive God considers sin, particularly the ten that are listed in this section of text. Paul reminds the Corinthian church of how some of them were once like the people described by him. But they have been washed, justified and sanctified. God has made them new people, but Paul’s rhetorical reminder that they might not see the kingdom of God if they slip back into acting their previous ways is used as an exhortation for the body of believers to grow in their faith and service. Growing together was also required, as the Corinthian church had been pulling in several directions to various human leaders and away from Christ.

It seems that a major part of the Corinthian tradition revolved around illicit sexual activity and perversion. Sadly, as perverted as some of the behaviours of the Corinthian church were, they are repeated today. We see this in terms of crime against people, crimes against property, and dealings between people and property that simply are too costly for people to access resolution. Marriage, it seems is more desirable a form to vocally cherish by both the church,

⁴⁸ Living Hope Ministries, <http://livehope.org/>. (Accessed 24 May 2015).

and same sex couples. Sadly, divorce rates remain high. And in spite of the HIV-AIDS epidemic of the 1980s, sexual promiscuity and immorality is still often practiced, sadly also within the church.

This paper has focused on homosexuality in the church. The church needs a compassionate and balanced approach to people who struggle with same sex attraction, and a plan of action on how it will work with those involved in homosexual sin. The church can offer support for an individual to assist them to change – should they choose to be cared for within the church environment. Should such a person choose to not change those lifestyle actions, then Paul shows us in 1 Corinthians how we are to manage those outcomes.

We need to remember though that we all sin, and therefore we need to be judicious about how we manage disciplinary processes. But we have a responsibility to lead God's people inside the church according to the instructions provided to us in Scripture, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We can influence those outside, but we have to leave the change process to God.

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