

THE FIVE POINTS: Why Christian Gays Should Be Affirmed by Our Churches

The message of so many pastors and churches that God hates homosexuals and will send them to hell is, for millions of gays and lesbians (estimates run from 10-20 million in the U.S.), destroying all their sense of self-worth, separating them from their families, forcing them to live in “closets” in constant fear that their orientation will be discovered, pushing them out of churches they have loved, influencing society to ostracize them, abetting hate crimes against them, and driving disproportionate numbers of them to suicide.

Churches are great losers because of this. Churches that affirm gays and lesbians testify that these people are some of the most spiritual, dedicated, and talented leaders they have.

Why are so many churches content to continue this destruction and this loss? Churches condemn homosexuals because a common interpretation of the Bible is that the Bible condemns them. And since it does, they don't need to study the matter.

It is appalling that this subject that has divided denominations for decades is so little studied and particularly that without study we have deep, two sided, polarizing convictions about it.

I do think we must hold those who disagree with us in high regard and sincere love and that we must know we (either side) could be wrong and therefore we must continue to seek more truth about homosexuals and homosexuality. Every church leader should study this matter so important to so many individual lives and to our churches..

From my reading of over sixty volumes, or pertinent sections of them, I strongly believe that gays and lesbians should be treated just like any others, that they should be welcomed and affirmed in our churches and offered any position of responsibility for which they are qualified, including ordination. I have reasons for this belief grounded in the following five points.

A. The Bible is silent about homosexuals and homosexuality.

The meaning of any scripture is the meaning in the mind of the writer when he wrote it. Why did my esteemed theology professor tell his students, “The Bible doesn't mean what it says, it means what it means.”? - something true of everything ever written or spoken. Have we interrupted a conversation with, “What do you mean?” We heard the words, but the meaning was not there. A writer must *try* to put what he is thinking into words, then the reader must *try* to interpret those words. The true meaning is back in the mind of the writer. Every different denomination and Bible sect represents a different interpretation of the *words* of the Bible, i.e., what the Bible *says*..

We can, however, be certain of this: if there is something the writer could not have known, we can eliminate that as a possible meaning. If I suggested a Bible writer talked about electricity, you would say, "preposterous" (or something worse). Should the same thing be said about a belief that a Bible writer could have had in his mind men who were gay or women who were lesbian? Is not such a concept a gross anachronism? If homosexuals existed, they were unknown, were not in anyone's mind and so, were not in the meaning of anything written - in the Bible or anywhere else until the late nineteenth century.

Many scholars mention this. Theology professor Elizabeth Stuart writes, ". . . it is misleading to give the impression that the biblical authors talked about homosexuality at all, since the concept and reality of homosexuality . . . is barely a century old."

The Bible writers talked about the only kind of people they knew - we would call them "heterosexual," and they said sex between two heterosexuals was evil. We would agree; it would undoubtedly be lust. The Bible has nothing to say about homosexuality or homosexual people. But there was much heterosexual same-gender sex for the Bible writers to condemn.

Historians tell us that same-gender sex was very common in Bible times by people obviously heterosexual. In Old Testament times the practice had to do with the low and often despised place of women in the culture. This is seen in Lot's offering his two virgin daughters to the mob at his door if they would leave his guests alone, and in the daily prayer of the Jewish male: "Blessed be God for he did not make me a woman." It you had a grudge against another man and could subdue him, you raped him, thus making him take the place of a woman. Historians say such humiliation and degradation was almost worse than death. When an army besieged a walled town until it capitulated, the conquering army (possibly 93-95% heterosexual) degraded all their male captives by raping them. "Gang rape [was] an extreme means to disgrace one's enemies . . . to disgrace one's manly honor, to reduce one to a woman's role . . . the ultimate means of subjugation and domination."

In the New Testament world married men with families commonly kept male lovers because "The Greeks regarded it impossible for a man to have a deep, all-encompassing relationship with a woman. This was possible only between two men" and there were "debates about which sex [sex with another man or sex with a woman] was preferable."

Pederasty was common. A man of the middle or upper class would purchase a boy from lower class parents to keep for sex. Any grief on the part of parents or boy was assuaged by their knowledge that the boy would never be hungry again, would have good clothes, and would be sent to school.

The Bible writers condemned these forms of same-gender heterosexual sex.

B. Sexual orientation is part of everyone's nature. It cannot be changed. It is not a choice.

The concept of a homosexual nature first appeared in print in Europe in 1869 and in the United States in 1889. Freud, in the early twentieth century accepted homosexuality as natural and considered it unchangeable. Helmut Thielicke, a theologian conservatives respect highly and quote often, recognized in his work, *The Ethics of Sex*, written in 1957, that at least some gay men and lesbian women have “constitutional homosexuality,” and, therefore, we must “accept” the fact that it is “incurable,” and “our attitude toward [it] changes.” [his italics]

The American Psychiatric Association officially recognized that it was natural, instead of a previously believed mental illness, in 1973. The American Psychological Association followed with similar action two years later.

In 1998 the APA adopted a position opposing any therapy designed to change a person’s sexual orientation. The APA President stated, “There is no scientific evidence that reparative or conversion therapy is effective in changing a person’s sexual orientation.

There is, however, evidence that this type of therapy can be destructive.”

The National Cancer Institute reported on a study finding that "Being gay is not simply a choice or purely a decision. People have no control over the genes they inherit and there is no way to change them."

Other evidence that homosexuality is unchangeable includes: (a) ten thousand suicides each year of homosexual youth, unable to change and unwilling to face life with that orientation; (b) the large numbers of homosexuals who go to psychotherapists desperately wanting to change their orientation, and then (c) the disappointing failure of the psychotherapy to help after hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars have been spent; (d) the millions of homosexual people who live “in the closet,” not wanting anyone to learn of their orientation because of a homophobic society and church. One lesbian, accused of choosing her orientation, said, "I wouldn't wish this on my worst enemy." A gay man said, "No homosexual ever lived who didn't wish he could change."

Some anti-gay writers admit that homosexuality is not chosen. Mike Haley, representing “Focus on the Family” which is strongly anti-gay, in his *101 Frequently Asked Questions about Homosexuality* answers his question “Do homosexuals choose to be gay?” with: “Let me answer this one directly” *No!* And in case you didn’t hear me, let me speak up: *NO!* This continues to be one of the myths of homosexuality that uninformed people perpetuate.” (p. 21)

Biological evidence should put to rest all disagreement. Scientists have found a physical difference between homosexuals and heterosexuals. They have discovered that while the hypothalamus, a regulator in the brain of sexuality, in the heterosexual male is approximately twice the size as that of the heterosexual female, the hypothalamus of the male homosexual is roughly the same size as that of the heterosexual female. Homosexuals are by nature different from heterosexuals..

One argument against homosexuality is that it is “unnatural“. Dr. Joan Roughgarden, a biologist at Stanford University has found more than 450 species of animals “with same-sex courtship.”

Surely all this evidence convinces us that homosexual people are homosexual by nature; it is never a choice for them.

C. The same-gender sex *act* is of no moral importance to God.

A serious mistake traditionalists make, I believe, is in holding their convictions about gays and lesbians because of their personal revulsion to the same-gender sex act. Even scholars sometimes refer to the act itself as evil.

Ethicists, however, remind us that only human beings have morality, only people are moral or immoral, not *acts* apart from the people performing them. "The Lord looks on the heart" of a person; it is always *the person behind the act* that God judges, not the act itself. I point a gun and pull the trigger. Is that act moral or immoral? Neither. *My* morality is judged according to the intention of my heart - murder? putting a suffering animal to sleep? target practice? Each of these would be the same act, in itself without morality. The same act can be rape or loving sex. God's interest is not in the act itself but in the hearts of the people involved. In different words: God is not interested in the same-gender sex *act*, only people's hearts.

So we are back to people. When the Bible talks about "good" or "evil" acts, it is talking about the hearts of people. In the Bible, the people are the heterosexual people discussed above.

D. The single criterion by which God judges the morality of sex is whether it is out of lust or love.

Many theologians believe that the Bible criterion for moral sex is spousal love, the kind of love Christ had when he died on the cross for us (Ephesians 5:25). James B. Nelson expresses this: "I believe that our best biblical scholarship reaches Walter Wink's conclusion: 'There is no biblical sex ethic. The Bible knows only a love ethic.'"

From much evidence, scientific and otherwise, it must be recognized that gay men and lesbian women cannot have erotic attraction for someone of the opposite sex but that they can have spousal love for their partners of the same sex just as fully in every way as heterosexual partners can. As far back as 1963 a Quaker committee after long study of homosexuality concluded, "Homosexual affection can be as selfless as heterosexual affection, and, therefore, we cannot see that it is in some way morally worse"

In 1975 the Christian Association for Psychological Studies reported that behavioral science research and the realities of their clinical practice had forced them to conclude that while promiscuity, fornication, and adultery should be regarded as sinful for both homosexual and heterosexual persons, a loving, committed, permanent relationship between two persons of the same sex was in an entirely different category and was not condemned in Scripture.

If God is looking on *hearts*, the criterion for moral sex is whether there is love or lust in the hearts of those engaged in the sex. If the sex comes out of lust, heterosexual or homosexual, it is immoral, for lust is always condemned in the Bible. On the other hand, if God finds spousal love in the heart, heterosexual or homosexual, then that attribute of God can only be considered moral and to have God's blessings.

E. The story of the acceptance of Gentiles by the early church offers guidance about the acceptance of gays and lesbians.

When, after God had shown Peter the vision of (clean and unclean to Peter) animals and told Peter not to call unclean what God had cleansed, and then Peter had led the Gentile Cornelius and the many with him to salvation and had seen the Holy Spirit come upon them all, Peter realized that Gentiles were not necessarily the unclean people he had always considered them to be, and God was opening the door of salvation to Gentiles as well as to Jews. As Gentiles began to be accepted into churches, many Christian Jews were horrified. All of their lives they had known that Gentiles were trash, dogs, unclean; even the shadow of a Gentile must not fall on them. Christ was the Messiah to the Jews. Perhaps a Gentile could become a Christian if he first became a Jew. He would need to repent of all the evil of being a Gentile and embrace all the things that would make him a Jew - circumcision, food rituals, etc.

When Peter went to Jerusalem, these Jews called him to task for accepting Gentiles without their first converting to become Jews. Peter then told them all the details of the conversion of Cornelius and those with him, testifying that, to his astonishment, the Holy Spirit had clearly come upon them when they believed in Jesus as he had preached to them. Peter said to them, "So if God gave them the same gift [of the Holy Spirit] as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?" Then the Christian Jews "praised God, saying, 'So then, God has granted even the Gentiles

repentance unto life.”. .

The parallels between this story and our dilemma about homosexuals today seems clear. Traditionalists consider practices of gays and lesbians to be unclean, evil. If homosexuals want acceptance, they must repent of their homosexuality and become heterosexual (or remain celibate).

I want to testify that I have observed the Holy Spirit in the lives of gay and lesbian fellow church members just as fully as I have found in any others. Our church has a dozen to fifteen gays and lesbians - including a number of partnerships - who are open about their orientation. Any member who knows a few of them will join me in saying they are some of the most dedicated Christians, conscientious and effective workers we have, some holding high positions of responsibility. Like Gentiles, homosexuals are not necessarily evil.

I know a lesbian who is a pastor of a church who is outstanding in her commitments to bringing her church into deeper relationships with the Lord. Several times I have visited the largest predominantly gay and lesbian church in the world, and I have been moved by the depth and intensity of their worship and commitment to God.

Many of us know of churches with devoted gay and lesbian leaders, and many of us know of gay and lesbian pastors. There has been much publicity about one whose dedication and service to his denomination has led him to a position as bishop of New Hampshire..

I cannot understand how any person can believe that the presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of these people is any less than it is in his or her life. And if God's Holy Spirit has accepted these people who have professed Christ as Savior and Lord, how can we fail to do so? Should we not also praise God and say, "So then, God has granted even the homosexuals repentance unto life."