

## Six Points

### **IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING HOMOSEXUALITY** **Why Churches Should Welcome and Fully Affirm Christian GLBTs**

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"It terrified me to think that God made me just to hate me and send me to hell." This was the response of a teenager to hearing his pastor tell the congregation that the Bible says God hates homosexuals and will send them to hell. He knew he was gay; he didn't want to be, but that was the way God had made him. But God hates me? God will send me to hell for something I have no control over? Is this the kind of God we worship? Or was the pastor exhibiting very faulty Bible interpretation? The Bible says or implies so many times that "whosoever" believes will have eternal life that we cannot discard that assurance. So whatever the Bible says or doesn't say about homosexuals, they may not necessarily be going to hell. But sadly isn't this pastor's belief accepted by many without any thought toward responsible interpretation?

I discuss below what I consider to be six very important truths about homosexuality that have been generally overlooked.

#### **1. There is nothing in the Bible about homosexuality or homosexual people.**

My eyes were first opened to this truth years ago when I read theology professor Elizabeth Stuart: "... 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."[i] And theologian Walter Wink writes, "The idea [homosexuality] was not available in [the Bible writer's] world."[ii]

The *meaning* of any scripture is the meaning *in the mind of the writer* when he wrote it. So we have to go behind the words in our Bibles to know what the author meant. Why did my seminary theology professor tell his students, "The Bible doesn't mean what it says, it means what it means"? Isn't that true of everything ever written or spoken? We should not talk about what the Bible says, we should talk about what it means, what it teaches.

We may often find it difficult to know what the writer was thinking, but we can be certain of one thing: if there is something the writer could not have known, could not have had in his mind, we can eliminate that as a possible meaning. If I suggested that a Bible writer talked about electricity, you would say "preposterous" (or something worse). Electricity existed from the beginning of the world, but it would not be discovered for many centuries after the Bible writers lived. No Bible writer could have had it in his mind, could have said anything about it.

Homosexuality was unknown for centuries after the Bible writers lived. In Bible times everyone believed that people fell in love with someone of the opposite sex, that is, they believed all people were heterosexual. Until the 19th century, when the word "homosexual" was used for the first time[iii], those were the only kind of people anyone, including Bible writers, could talk about. If the Bible writers could talk only about the only kind of people they knew, there is nothing in the Bible about homosexual people or anything they did.

Actually, recognizing this is not interpretation, it is simply accepting an obvious truth. There cannot be anything in the Bible about homosexuality or homosexual people. All references to same-gender sex in the Bible have to be about heterosexual people - condemnations of heterosexual lust.

The Bible speaks in several places of same-sex practices. We know from historians that in Old Testament times and Greco-Roman times such sex was widely practiced by people who unquestionably were heterosexual.[iv]

Much of this practice of sex by heterosexuals in Old Testament times originated in the low and often despised place of women in the culture.[v] It was common for a man who had a grudge against another man, if he could subdue the begrudged, to rape him, thus reducing him to the place of a woman.[vi] When an army conquered another army or besieged a walled town until it capitulated, the conquering army (94-96% heterosexual if present percentages prevailed) degraded all their 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." [vii] Sex was incidental; heterosexual men were raping other heterosexual men to degrade them and show domination over them.

In the Greco-Roman world of the New Testament married men with families often kept male lovers. "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".[viii] Women were uneducated and virtual slaves to their responsibilities as mothers and housekeepers and cooks. Historians tell us that men had debates "about which sex was preferable [sex with another man or sex with a woman] as erotic focus"[ix] and "Roman authors published a great deal of homosexual poetry." [x]

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 the parents or boy was assuaged not only by the purchase price but also by the knowledge that the boy would never be hungry again, would have good clothes, and, especially, would be sent to school.

Bible writers condemned these forms of same-gender heterosexual sex, the only kind they knew. There cannot be anything in the Bible about homosexuality or homosexual people.

## **2. Sexual orientation (heterosexual and homosexual) is innate and unchangeable; it is never a choice.**

Psychologists and psychiatrists I have read accept this as a fact. Sexual orientation, gay or straight, is intrinsic to a person's nature, and it cannot be changed. Neither the homosexual person nor the heterosexual person has any choice in the matter.

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.[xi] Helmut Thielicke, a theologian conservatives respect highly and quote often, recognized in his work, *The Ethics of Sex*, written some fifty years ago, that at least some gay men and lesbian women have "constitutional homosexuality"; he says we must "accept" the fact that it is "incurable," and, therefore, "our attitude toward [it] changes." [his italics][xii]

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) officially recognized that homosexuality was innate, instead of a previously believed mental illness, in 1973. The American Psychological Association followed with similar action two years later.

The "ex-gay" programs offered by some surely should be avoided. 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." [xiii]

The National Cancer Institute reports on a study finding that "[b]eing 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." [xiv]

Biological evidence should put to rest all questions about whether homosexuality is innate. 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 approximately the same size as that of the heterosexual female.[xv] Homosexuals are physically different from heterosexuals.

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 (i.e., face the ostracism of society and the condemnation of the church); (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." A friend said to me, "my brother hates God because God made him gay." (See ["Letter to Louise"](#)).

How can anyone believe that GLBTs (gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgenders) choose their orientation?

### **3. Homosexual people are often highly gifted.**

It is well known that while certain characteristics are dominant in men and others dominant in women, all people have some of the opposite gender's characteristics. Psychologists have found that the gay man has an exceptional supply of feminine characteristics, and the lesbian woman has an exceptional supply of male characteristics, and that these special combinations of characteristics often result in exceptional potential in homosexual persons.

Sigmund Freud found homosexual persons to be "of high intellectual and ethical development" and "as characterized by special development of their social instinctual impulses and by their devotion to the interests of the community." [xvi]

Psychologist Mark Friedman found that the gay and lesbian subjects he tested were superior to their heterosexual counterparts in such psychological qualities as autonomy, spontaneity, orientation toward the present, and increased sensitivity to the value of the person. [xvii] Thielicke found that the homosexual "is frequently gifted with a remarkable heightened sense of empathy." [xviii]

The eminent psychologist Jung gives five very positive aspects of the homosexual male:

- This [homosexuality] gives him a great capacity for friendship, which often creates ties of astonishing tenderness between men, and may even rescue friendship between the sexes from its limbo of the impossible.
- He may have good taste and an aesthetic sense which are fostered by the presence of a feminine streak.
- Then, he may be supremely gifted as a teacher because of his almost feminine insight and tact.
- He is likely to have a feeling for history, and to be conservative in the best sense and cherish the values of the past.
- Often he is endowed with a wealth of religious feelings, which help him to bring the *ecclesia spiritualis* [the church as a spiritual body - BL] into reality, and a spiritual receptivity which makes him responsive to revelation. [xix]

A special hope for homosexual influence on society is expressed by psychotherapist John McNeill:

There is no doubt that the homosexual man is freer to develop aesthetic values than is his male

counterpart in the heterosexual world, and thus he has an important role to play in guiding humanity to a deeper appreciation of aesthetic values. ... There is the hopeful possibility that the homosexual community could serve the human community as a whole by making the male free to do works of service in the human community without feeling guilty about betraying the standards of his male identity.[xx]

Many writers tell of the contributions gay men and lesbian women have made to our world and give dozens of examples, some of the world's most famous statesmen, artists, writers, musicians, etc., present and past. While those who are gay and lesbian make up probably 4%-6% of the population, a study of the biographies of 1004 eminent people found 11% of them to be homosexual or bisexual, with certain categories higher: 24% of poets, 21% of fiction writers, and 15% of artists and musicians.[xxi]

Surely, we ought to look on the gay man or lesbian woman as potentially a very special person, made that way by God, one we could find joy in associating with, and especially a benefit and blessing to our churches.

#### **4. Many churches and pastors are sinning greatly against homosexual people.**

*"Kill a Queer for Christ"*

This cleverly alliterative bumper sticker is sad, even unbelievable, and so very real. The thinking shown in the bumper sticker and the position of so many churches and their pastors abets the crimes against gay men and lesbian women. Peter Gomes, Professor of Christian Morals at Harvard, says, "The combination of ignorance and prejudice under the guise of morality makes the religious community, and its abuse of scripture in this regard, itself morally culpable." [xxii] He relates this:

In preparing for her novel *The Drowning of Stephen Jones*, based upon the true story of a young gay man tossed from a bridge to his death by a group of young gay-bashers, author Bette Greene interviewed more than four hundred young men in jail for various forms of gay-bashing. Few of the men, she noted, showed any remorse for their crimes. Few saw anything morally wrong with their crimes, and more than a few of them told her that they were justified in their opinions and in their actions by the religious traditions from which they came. Homosexuality was wrong and against the Bible. One of those interviewed told her that the pastor of his church had said that homosexuals represented Satan and the Devil. The implication of his logic was clear: Who could possibly do wrong in destroying Satan and any of his works? The legitimization of violence against homosexuals and Jews and women and blacks, as we have seen, comes from the view that the Bible stigmatizes these people, thereby making them fair game. If the Bible expresses such a prejudice, then it certainly cannot be wrong to act on that prejudice. This is the argument every anti-Semite and racist has used with demonstrably devastating consequences, as our social history all too vividly shows.[xxiii]

Most readers remember reading about Matt Shepard, the young gay man tied to a fence and beaten to death. When his funeral was held, a preacher from Kansas and his followers from several states were there marching in front of the funeral site with placards reading, "God Hates Fags" and "Fag Matt in Hell." It is some consolation to know that the people of the town put themselves between the marchers and the family, and when the marchers began to cry out their messages, the people sang loudly "Amazing Grace." ("Fag," short for "faggot," originated several centuries ago in Europe when people suspected of engaging in same-gender sex were burned at the stake.)

A gay and a straight man worked together and became close friends. Then the straight man became a Christian. When his gay friend learned about it, he was concerned and asked, "Now that you are a Christian, will you still love me?" This woeful question is one the church has earned. Jesus' love included; our lack of love excludes. I have read that Carl Sandburg was once asked what he thought was the ugliest word in the English language. He thought for a minute and replied, "Exclusion."

Theologian John Cobb tells of Ignacio Castuera, Latin American Liberation Theology leader, saying "that if he [Castuera] were to be true to liberation theology, he must be especially concerned for those who

are most oppressed in our society. He had come to the conclusion that these are gay people." Then Cobb comments: "Some may question whether GLBTs are the most oppressed in our society. There is serious competition for that spot. But it is clear that whereas in most other oppressions the church has given at least some support to the oppressed, in this case the church has been the leader in the oppression." [xxiv]

Sagacious Will Campbell has observed that many denominations have apologized to Blacks for the way they were once treated and prophesied that one day we will apologize to gays and lesbians for the way we are treating them. Was Martin Marty right when he said it took churches 300 years to change social practices?

## **5. No sex act has morality in itself.**

Some believe that the Bible condemns the act of homosexual sex, whether by heterosexuals or homosexuals and in whatever century. 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" (I Samuel 16:7) of a person; it is always the person behind the act that God judges, not the act. When the Bible talks about "good" or "evil" acts, it is talking about the people behind the acts. We cannot say the Bible condemns the act, in itself, of sex between two men or two women. The same act may be loving conjugal sex or rape. God does not judge the act itself but the hearts of the people involved. So God is not interested in the same-gender sex act itself. God's judgment is on the hearts of those involved. Psychologists tell us that homosexual partners fall in love with each other just as completely as heterosexual partners do. Homosexual sex can be as loving as heterosexual sex and so just as moral in God's sight.

A serious mistake made by some who do not affirm homosexuals is, I believe, in their grounding their convictions about GLBTs in their personal revulsion to the same-gender sex act. Surely we recognize that personal feelings should never be a basis for moral convictions and criteria.

It is unfortunate that homophobics seem always to think of perverted sex when they think of homosexuals. To them, a "homosexual act" is sex, though every homosexual performs a thousand acts every day that have nothing to do with sex. Heterosexual sex may be loving or it may be lustful. The same is true with homosexual sex. When sex - heterosexual or homosexual - is out of love, it must have a godlike quality, for God is love.

## **6. The trend in our society and in our churches is toward affirmation of homosexuals.**

As the truths set forth above become known Americans are beginning to look differently at homosexuals. A letter to the editor of *Baptists Today* (January 2010) was undoubtedly correct when the writer said: "Whether the church likes it or not, the American culture is on its way to full acceptance of homosexuals." Nineteen states and Washington, D.C., have laws barring discrimination based on sexual orientation. Maryland has just legalized marriages of gays and lesbians. In 2006 the U.S. House passed a bill prohibiting employment discrimination based on sexual orientation. (It has not yet been voted on by the Senate.) A bill is pending in the House that would create federal recognition of same-sex marriages; it already has 69 co-sponsors.

Acts 10 tells how the early church welcomed Gentiles whom they at first rejected when they realized the Holy Spirit was working in the lives of Gentile Christians. More and more church leaders are welcoming and affirming gay and lesbian Christians as they see the depth of spirituality so many of them show. One denomination has elevated a gay minister to the position of Bishop. I know of gay and lesbian Baptists whose spirituality and qualities of leadership have brought them to ordination as deacons. I know a lesbian who grew up Southern Baptist, felt the call to preach and graduated from an SBC seminary. Knowing her chances of pastoring an SBC church as a woman and a lesbian were nil, she went to officials of the Disciples denomination. They told her that her being lesbian was

unimportant, they would ordain her and see that she got a church. She is pastor of a Christian (Disciples of Christ) church in one of our southern U.S. cities.

Wikipedia lists 20 denominations (out of 33) that welcome and affirm GLBTs. Some mainline denominations have long done so, e.g. United Church of Christ, Episcopal Church (United States), Evangelical Lutheran. Last summer (7-8-10) the Presbyterian Church (USA) voted at its General Assembly to begin ordaining homosexual deacons, elders and clergy. At least eleven denominations have organizations working within them that support gays and lesbians, e.g., American Baptist Churches: Welcoming and Affirming Baptists; Presbyterian: More Light Presbyterians; United Methodist Church: Reconciling Congregation Program; Catholic: Dignity.

I am 95 and shall not see the time when Christian GLBTs are welcomed and affirmed by our churches, but I do believe many of you reading this will. Until then these special people will continue to suffer (at the ignorant hands of society and the ignorant/sinful hands of the church), many will never go to a church to hear the saving gospel preached, and our churches will continue to be deprived of their talents. Lord, open the eyes of your people, and hasten the day.

[i] "Dancing in the Spirit" in Timothy Bradshaw, Ed., *The Way Forward?* 81

[ii] "Homosexuality and the Bible" in Wink, Ed., *Homosexuality and Christian Faith*, 36

[iii] In a pamphlet by Karl-Maria Kentbeny expressing opposition to German sodomy laws. He believed some people were naturally attracted erotically to members of the same sex, and that all sodomy or same gender sex was not "mere wickedness", the common belief at the time.

[iv] We do not know when true homosexuals first came into civilization.

[v] We see this degradation of women in Lot's offering his two virgin daughters to the mob of Sodom for the mob to do with them whatever it wanted to do. We see it in the daily prayer of every pious male Jew in Bible times: "Blessed be God, for he did not make me a woman."

[vi] Could the very wording in Leviticus, "do not lie with a male as with a woman," refer to this practice of making a man to be a woman?

[vii] Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, p. 48

[viii] Ibid. p. 64

[ix] John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*, p. 19

[x] Ibid, p. 23

[xi] From Ellen Herman, *Psychiatry, Psychology, and Homosexuality*, 33

[xii] Helmut Thielicke, *The Ethics of Sex*, 283-4

[xiii] APA News Release No. 98-56, December 14, 1998

[xiv] Reported in *New York Times*, October 18, 2000

[xv] Carl S. Keener and Douglas E. Swartzendruber, "The Biological Basis of Homosexuality" in C. Norman Kraus, Ed., *To Continue the Dialogue*, p. 159

[xvi] Quoted in David L. Balch, Ed., *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture*, 140

[xvii] *Psychology Today*, Vol. 8, No. 10 (March 1973), 27-33

[xviii] Thielicke, 227f

[xix] C. G Jung, *The Collected Works*, vol. 9, pt. 1, 58-59

[xx] John J. McNeill, *The Church and the Homosexual*, 143

[xxi] David Myers "Sexual Orientation and Science" in LeDayne McLeese Polanski and Mill-ard Eiland, Eds., *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*, 172

[xxii] Peter J. Gomes, *The Good Book* 147

[xxiii] *Ibid.*, 146 [xxiv] John Cobb, Jr., "Being Christian about Homosexuality" in Walter Wink, Ed., *Homosexuality and the Christian Faith*, 90