

With a View Towards the Elevation of the Conversation on Homosexuality

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Jonathan Edwards was perhaps the greatest American theologian to ever have lived. He often titled messages with similar wordy titles as I have called this paper.¹ I am humoring myself to think it is worthy of such a lofty title. But that is what I pray the following words do. I hope to humbly elevate a conversation that is perhaps one of the most heated in our culture today.

I have written at length here but I am hoping that the topic may grab you to endure. When asked what I think about homosexuality, I always hesitate to answer not wanting to respond abruptly but rather help people think thoroughly about the topic. It's my opinion that public discourse on the subject has not yielded many positives and I don't want to add to the polarization out there. However, as I have tried to keep my ear to the ground of what is going on, I have been thinking it might be helpful to write some thoughts. Towards accomplishing the title above, I have been working on the following. It has been as much for my own reflection as it is intended for you the reader. I hope that what follows will be edifying and illuminating and I would love to talk at more length if anyone wants clarification or to respond.

First, let me say, what actually needs no mention, that this is a very complicated and hot issue. It is one of the marked topics in our current culture. It is and will most certainly continue to be a defining moment in the history of culture and the Church. In this light I believe the Church's sensitive response is incredibly important. However I am grieved that it has often been inconsistent with the character of Jesus lacking in humility and gentleness. The conservative wing of Christianity has been self righteous and smug. They have looked down on a deeply personal part of some people's lives. They do not themselves understand how anyone could deal with homosexuality and find it reprehensible.

Second and more importantly, before I give you any of my thoughts, let me tell you that I feel so deeply for the angst with which people wrestle with this issue in their lives. It is quite easy to have strong opinions about homosexuality. It is much more difficult to put yourself in the shoes of someone struggling to make sense of the feelings they have and the cultural messages that are all around them. There are far too many inflammatory opinions out there without considering that we all have real emotions, hopes, dreams and fears. If you are one of the many asking yourself what to do with your feelings of same sex attraction, please know that I care about you as a person and would love to sit down and talk more personally. A public forum and the blogosphere are terrible places for dialogue to take place.

¹ Andrew Marin has written a book that has been very helpful to me that contains a subtitle that is similar to my title here. "Love is an Orientation- Elevating the Conversation with the Gay Community", IVP March 25, 2009, 205 pages

For what follows I am keeping in the back of my mind that there are probably two main groups of you. Simply put, some of you experience same sex attraction and of course some of you do not. We all must understand that one's emotional connection to this matter is certainly much different depending into which group you fall. I will try and take that into account and address your potentially different reactions and viewpoints. Though I will try, I will probably fail to fully appreciate the feelings of those with same sex attraction not experiencing it personally and I ask for your pardon in advance.

To further delineate reader response, if you are NOT one who struggles with this issue, then you probably fall into one of two more main categories. First Group- you have your mind made up about what the Bible says and might even be fairly intolerant of any other view whether you come down on the conservative or liberal side. Second Group- you may not sure what you think about the issue and perhaps are even confused. You have of course heard the conservative view that the Bible is clear on the issue. Then you have also heard opinions to the contrary calling the first view outdated and intolerant. You are very concerned with being a loving person and don't want to be judgmental. You see that history reveals many other areas of Christian bigotry once defended by scripture only to eventually be seen for what it is. You are worried that this may be another case where enlightenment will someday shed clarity on another error of the church.

Again to further delineate, if you DO have same sex inclinations, you also might fit into two main categories. They mirror the above however of course you are much more emotionally and physically connected. One, you have your mind made up about what the Bible says and consequently you are either fighting your desires to remain Biblically faithful, or you have freed yourself from a traditional view of the Bible to ALSO remain Biblically faithful. I have known people in both categories. Second, like the above heterosexual, you may be confused. That is probably an understatement if you are in this category. There are so many different opinions and debates raging you may be experiencing a great deal of angst as you wrestle with what you feel, what you hear and you are caught in the midst of it all. Again, it's probably your category that my heart most goes out to and I hope to help you as you process life.

Here are the topics I want to address:

1. The main mantra preached on campus and in the culture at large is "Tolerance". We are commanded to be tolerant of all viewpoints. The question is then asked, "shouldn't we change the condemning stance of the traditional church in order to be more tolerant and perhaps even draw more people in because of it? It is said that if it is arbitrary which laws we abide by and which we reject, the tolerant view is of course preferable.

2. Closely related to the above, Christians are accused of picking and choosing what they take from the Bible as either relevant or not relevant to conduct today. In particular it is questioned why Christians enforce some of the Bible and not others. It can seem that Christians choose what they want to condemn while allowing other norms to be culturally relative.

3. There is also great controversy over the limited discourse of Homosexuality in the Bible. In the NT it is primarily limited to Pauline discourse and Jesus never says a word. In many other areas of Christian ethic, conservatives have repented of previous errors in interpretation at the expense of marginalized groups. With Bible in tow, Christians have promoted slavery, the oppression of women, imperialism and many more heinous actions. It is said that the issue of homosexuality will be one more of those issues that needs release from its oppressive dogmatism.

4. Fourthly, it is being hotly debated whether or not the Bible actually does prohibit homosexuality or whether the conservative interpretation of scripture is outdated and flawed. Perhaps the Bible does NOT even prohibit homosexuality. If that's the case, true Christians should get over it!

Prologue: Planks and Specks

Before I go to the questions, let me mention first one of the fundamental problems in the current debate. Those on the conservative side are sinners. Those on the liberal side also have this flaw. We have all have rebelled against God. We have cut right relationship with the King of the Universe by usurping his authority and claiming that freedom from God is where true life is found. (Genesis 3:1-7) Thus intimacy with God has been lost. The problem is that we were created for this intimacy and without we are ruined. Harsh? Well that is the plight of all of us, conservative or liberal or whatever. That is the foundational premise of the Bible. So no matter where you find yourself in this debate, you must realize that you bring baggage to the discussion.

Now, I am assuming that most of you reading this have responded to the love of Jesus by repenting and trusting in his blood for your salvation. Though you needn't have in order to read on.... But most readers believe that they have been set free from the ultimate consequences to their rebellion mentioned above. However, like all believers in Christ, we still live broken lives. We are relationally wounded because though Jesus has ultimately fixed our foundational relationship with God, experientially it is still on the mend. I am ultimately a child of God and He calls me his beloved. That is radical. That truth can start to fix our identity crisis. Yet I still live in a fallen world where I strive to feel good about myself apart from Christ and so heal myself. Practically, I am relentlessly tempted to put others down and claim my superiority. This is with a view to heal the deep longings of my own heart for my own validation and sense of worth. We try and give life meaning on our own every day. There is a constant battle that rages in my heart. That's me at least....

So, if I am still trying to find my own justification for my existence in life, it causes me to be at odds with those around me. Others' success means my loss in some sense. That is why I don't fully delight in my friend's promotion. What does another's promotion mean but my demotion? I don't fully delight in my friend's joy. What does another's joy mean but my awareness of my depression? My life is lived in constant evaluation of my own value in light of another's performance and thus my own worth.

So when it comes to an area of sin in my own life, I play a game of deflating the seriousness of my own issues while inflating the value of the sin of others around me. I feel safe when I can point to others and say, "at least I am not as bad as them"! "Sure, I have issues, but look at theirs"! Loving others becomes quite tedious when I am in a war for my own identity. Instead of wanting what is best for my neighbor, I secretly desire their subordination, if just a small amount, in order that I can find validation for my existence. Sound extreme? Search your heart....

Now return to the issue herein being discussed. For the conservative Christian, homosexuality can really be your validation. What a blessing to your identity. A group of people disdained by the church, disdained by society and a group with which it is so easy to find fault. Yes, you have sin. I have sin, but look at their sin! Honestly, if we can keep the attention on the GLBT community we don't have to examine our own issues so carefully. You see how it works?

Some of you think this discussion is a waste of time so far. You want to get down to what I think about the issue of homosexuality in black and white terms. Do I side with the conservative or liberal view? Please examine your heart. Do you see what you are doing? You want to find justification for your point of view, conservative or liberal and so somehow to feel superior to another group of people and so justify your existence. We all play the game. Until we are honest, humble our selves repent of our own self-justification we will never have a fruitful discussion. The polarization will continue. Christ will not be hope, but will be a tyrant in the eyes of many. Gandhi's famous quote will prove true, "I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."

When I first started writing this paper, I set out to do some research on the different views so I could intelligently communicate what I personally think. I wanted to come to terms with the key passages of scripture. I wanted to define clearly what I believe so as to take a stand in the argument. The more I thought about it, the more I read, the more I prayed, I see great danger in my heart in this approach. Sure, I want to equip others to think Biblically. But in order to think Biblically about specific issues there is so much about

our hearts that we need to first examine. If we would fail to love as the Bible points us toward, how can we think truly Biblically about any specific issue? In the current discussion, it is not clear teaching on homosexuality that is most needed. It is clear teaching on the self-righteousness to which all of our hearts cry if not tempered by the Holy Spirit.

So examine your hearts. Why do you care so much about this issue? What do you have to prove? What are you trying to accomplish in your attempt for right answers? Have you ever put yourself in another's shoes? Have you asked the Lord to cause you to free yourself from self-love in order to truly love others? We will only be further polarized in this debate if we do not answer these questions with the Gospel of Jesus Christ's love for each of us. No matter what anyone says, the liberal side will further be entrenched in their views of superiority at the intolerance of the other side. The conservatives will only be further entrenched in their feelings of superiority at the clarity of truth on their side. I believe there is true truth in this matter but it will not matter unless we can express it in a humble, listening, compassionate, gentle manner that stems from the redemption found in Jesus. I encourage you to read no further today and pray that God might lead you to deeper intimacy with him before you come back to this topic.

In light of the above, I want to help shape the discussion and clarify some of the surrounding difficulties of interpretation that our culture brings to the argument. I am consciously spending a good deal of time shaping the discussion as the foundations of angst in this area run deep and no quick response is adequate. I urge you to read on and evaluate your assumptions.

Topic #1: The Intolerance of Tolerance²

The Search for Truth

The modern understanding of truth largely influences the culture's understanding of the discussion on homosexuality. The Postmodern system of relativism claims that we can never know anything for certain. It claims that anyone who states they know an absolute truth is arrogant and power hungry. The greatest evil in our Western culture today is to claim that you have a knowledge that is binding for everyone, a Total Truth. To claim that the Holy Spirit through the Bible says anything definitively is claimed to be oppressive. All claims to knowledge depend on contextual backdrops. With so many cultural, racial, geographic and historical considerations true knowledge is simply not attainable. No one can therefore make an absolute claim as to the Bible's view of Homosexuality that applies to today.

² One of my favorite theologians, D.A. Carson wrote a book called "The Intolerance of Tolerance" Eerdmans Publishing, Jan 31, 2012, 196 pages, ISBN-13: 978-0802831705. He has largely influenced my thinking on the topic here.

That sounds like a very enlightened viewpoint, but it is actually quite arrogant. Get this...it is *NOT* arrogant to make truth claims, but it *IS* arrogant to state that we cannot know truth. The latter of the two makes our understanding as enlightened humans the ultimate judge of truth. We are left as the gatekeepers to what is truth and what is not. Our evaluation is preeminent in the discovery of what is real. In the previous statement, the statement that we *CAN* know ultimate truth, we are taken out of the judge's chair and allow the God of the Bible to take his rightful place. It is impossible and arrogant to claim that humans *can* know....or *cannot* know truth on their own. But if there is an outside source of truth and he gives it to us in the form of a written and divine Word, then all claims to superior wisdom are cast out. We certainly cannot claim that we know all truth. We can claim however that God has revealed truth in his Word and in His Son so that truth is knowable as he reveals it to us. It takes great humility to admit this.

So on issues such as sexuality, law, human dignity, evil, justice etc. there is true truth out there and we can discover it as God reveals. When we search the scriptures there is truth to be found. We do not need to add to it. We do not need to end in the defeatist position that all truth claims are equally valid. We do not need to succumb to postmodern deconstructionism that leads down a winding trail where contextual background wins any discussion of finding absolute meaning. There is truth available in these matters and God wants us to know it.

The demise of true tolerance

It is to the philosopher Voltaire that we owe the widespread use of the word "Tolerance". However the way he used the word was vastly different from the way the word is used today. Voltaire believed in religious freedom. He said, "*it is better for it (humanity) to be subject to all possible superstitions, as long as they are not murderous, than to live without religion.*"³ But he ardently defended the right to believe and defend one's religion over against another religion. He thought it imperative that we publically debate claims to truth but not that we need accept one another's truth claims as equally valid. Accept the person, but one need not accept the belief. In the current culture "tolerance" has morphed into quite a different meaning. Now it would seem that one must not only accept the person but accept their beliefs as well. Today, evil is that someone would not accept another's belief as equally valid. So, while I would not become an aboriginal human *sacrificer* personally, the true evil is to claim that given their cultural surroundings, another culture is wrong to sacrifice humans according to some truth standard. I must not only respect the person but agree with their beliefs and practices.

³ Voltaire, *A Treatise on Tolerance* 1763

So when people claim an allegiance to tolerance, what they really mean is that they claim to be tolerant as long as your claims don't contradict their ultimate value of tolerance as defined by current standards. One is free to believe whatever they want AND I must also agree that their belief is equally valid to mine. However if your belief contains an element which claims superior knowledge, that belief is not tolerable. One need not think very hard to find the irony. (The tolerance view of today is claiming superior knowledge and itself to be "truth" when that very claim is ruled out by its own view!) It truly is the intolerance of tolerance. All claims to truth are protected by the tolerance clause except those truth claims which claim *ultimate* truth. Then we must put aside the tolerance doctrine to expel the only evil, which is intolerance. My head is spinning, I better stop....

Tolerance does not mean love

Perhaps there is a greater value than tolerance? Certainly there is in the Bible. Taking a look at the life of Jesus, we find a man who exuded both love and *intolerance*. The 2 most often quoted scriptures today have the same theme. One is James 4:12- "*Who are you to judge your neighbor?*"(ESV) The other is from Jesus in Matthew 7:1- "*Judge not that you may not be judged.*"(ESV) These two verses are quoted more than John 3:16 today. In fact few even know what John 3:16 says.

But what do these often quoted verses really mean? One thing that they *cannot* mean is what people think they mean when they quote them. People in essence claim, "don't tell someone else what they are doing is wrong because it is not necessarily wrong for everyone." Don't judge others is the cry of our culture! But is that what is meant in these passages? It can't be. Look at Matthew 7:6 immediately following the 7:1 statement. "*Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs*". (ESV) Jesus is actually judging quite harshly and calling us to judge as well. He makes a qualitative statement calling some "dogs" and some "pigs". Just as today, these are not terms you want to have applied to you. Not only is he judging but he also calls us to judge by suggesting that we determine who fits into these categories.

So in 7:1 he cannot be telling us to make no judgment on any person but rather always be tolerant. The judgment of 7:1 actually probably means something closer to "condemn". Jesus calls us not to condemn or take away value from another. The prohibition is similar to Matthew 5 where Jesus warns against calling someone a "fool". Using the word fool is to disdain the person's very existence. He warns against calling someone's inherent value into question. But someone's ideas, their ways of life, their views of reality are indeed open to judgment. Jesus will later call some of the religious rulers "*whitewashed tombs*". Dead on the inside but giving off the appearance of health. The context of his whole message in the Sermon on the

Mount was “repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand”. If there is no ultimate truth by which we are to be judged there is no need to repent.

Jesus’ character is one of ultimate love. So therefore love and intolerance are not mutually exclusive. In the ultimate expression of love, Jesus came to the earth to proclaim his intolerance of sin so that you and I might live as we were created in truth to live. If Jesus was not intolerant, we would never have experienced true love. We are dependent on intolerance for life and hope.

What if there was a new vaccine for cancer available. However, as I tell my friend he does not believe me and emphatically states that there is no vaccine. In the name of tolerance then, what should I do? Communicate value to my friend’s identity yes, but also communicate value to his view of truth? “Friend, your views of reality are every bit as valid as mine and I don’t want to be intolerant of your ideas and introduce truth that will save you!?” Of course not. Love is a greater value than tolerance. Love always trumps tolerance. Of course that is a claim of truth that the postmodern might argue against...rightly so. If all claims are relative then the claim that human life has value over a rock, or that life is better than death, or that truth is better than despair are all in question. You want to find true despair, keep following that one to its logical conclusion.

So, when it comes to our current discussion, very popular arguments are 1- Christians apply the Bible arbitrarily, 2- We cannot know anything for sure, 3- Christians are arrogant 4- All truth claims are relative, and 5- Tolerance is the highest value. In the discussion so far, I am attempting to show that though sometimes persuasive related to our lack of ability to truly understand God’s view of sexuality, these statements are not determinative. True truth is available and the pursuit of all humans should be to find what God says about such issues and conform our hearts and actions according to his truth.

The above discussion instead of leading to arrogance and self-righteousness leads us to humility to love and to a greater understanding of other points of view. But it most emphatically does not mean that all view are true and right. There are surely times when our lives, feelings, and actions are going to come up against a wall of God’s truth. God designed it this way.

Topic #2: How do we apply the Bible Today?

You eat pork don't you!?

There is a regular question that I hear being discussed on campus as students try to discern the validity of the ethical demands of the Bible. It comes in many different forms but goes something like this- “You eat pork

don't you!?" The Bible says don't shave your beards. Don't work on Sunday. Don't mix fabrics in clothing styles. Kill a goat when you want to talk with God! "Yet you do all those don't you?" Then how can you justify condemning one area of Biblical law such as homosexuality when you don't keep many other areas? Certainly some of the Biblical law is outdated so why don't we just get on with the times and admit homosexuality fits into the same category? There was a day when slavery as well as the degradation of women were both also sanctioned by citing Biblical text. We now admit that passages were torn out of context in regards to those issues. The selection process seems to be subjective to the cultural norms of the day and so isn't it time to throw out this antiquated view on homosexuality? One person jests- *(a) I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her? (b) Most of my male friends get their hair trimmed, including the hair around their temples, even though this is expressly forbidden by Lev.19:27. How should they die? (c) I know from Lev. 11:6-8 that touching the skin of a dead pig makes me unclean, but may I still play football if I wear gloves?*⁴ Pretty funny. But the point is heard.

This is indeed an argument that deserves some attention. How would you respond? Let me suggest we use caution on how we make decisions related to these types of questions when interpreting the Bible. It is indeed a dangerous downward spiral to say that we can throw out the Bible's teaching on the basis of changing cultural norms is it not? The gatekeeper of ethics becomes societal norms. The strongest voices in society determine what is relevant in the Bible. Culture becomes God. What is advocated one day is no longer valid the next. Who decides society's view? Is there a survey taking cultural opinion out there that I am not aware of? If there was who says it has anything to do with what is "right"? So here are some thoughts to think about.

Biblical Law Categories

When looking at the ethical commands of the Bible, most scholars tell us that there are three main categories of Old Testament Law. They are the Civil, Ceremonial and Moral.

The Civil laws are the practical laws addressed to Israel as a nation state and specifically pertain to the preservation of the societal life in that context. An example of a civil law is *Deuteronomy 15:1, "At the end of every seven years you must cancel debts."* Or, *Exodus 21:16-17 "Anyone who kidnaps another and either sells him or still has him when he is caught must be put to death. Anyone who curses his mother or father is put to death."* (ESV) Often they contain a command and prescribe penalty for disobedience.

⁴ Knoxville News Sentinel June 7, 2000

Ceremonial laws pertain to the Old Testament sacrificial system. They are rules of how to worship God rightly as a community. An example is in Deuteronomy 16:13, which instructed the Israelites to *"celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days after you have gathered the produce of your threshing floor and your winepress."* (ESV)

The Moral law category is fairly intuitively understood. They are prescriptions of moral conduct. The 10 commandments are the central examples of moral law commands, though not all moral law is contained in the Decalogue. Jesus later qualifies our understanding showing that the moral law reflects not just actions, but heart conditions behind the actions.

There is a long tradition among scholars that suggests we decide on the modern validity of the laws in each of these categories in the following ways:

In the case of the Civil Law category, they were designed for the nation of Israel as it functioned as a nation state under the sovereign rule of God. These laws no longer pertain to us today as the document called the Westminster confession outlines: They are *"sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people (Israel)"* (XIX. 4).⁵ Richard D. Phillips comments, *"In other words, these laws were for regulating the nation of Israel, which was then but no longer is the particular people of God. While there is an undisputed wisdom contained in this civil law it cannot be made applicable to any nation today, since there are no biblically sanctioned theocracies now."*⁵

In the case of the Ceremonial Laws; the person of Christ fulfilled these laws explicitly. That is, they were meant to prepare a categorical system of understanding that Jesus would come to fulfill. For example, the command to sacrifice of a lamb on the day of Passover (Exodus 12:1-20) was fulfilled perfectly one day by Jesus' own sacrifice on the day of Passover. Or in the preceding example from Deut 16:13, Israel was to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. It was a celebration of remembrance of Israel's time in the dessert where they set up tents (tabernacles) as they followed God in his temporary tabernacle. Now God no longer lives in a physical tabernacle, but Jesus' spirit "tabernacles" with each one of us who is a believer. The law pointed toward and has now been fulfilled in Christ and is no longer binding.

The Moral law category is the one that we focus on today. These laws are timeless, crossing both Old and New Testament periods. Or, more precisely, they transcend Old Covenant to New Covenant (after Jesus'

⁵ Richard D. Phillips, "Which Old Testament Laws Must I Obey?," Tenth Presbyterian Church, August 6, 2000, accessed June 26, 2012, http://www.tenth.org/qbox/qb_000806.htm.

death and resurrection) times of today. They derive from God's Holy character which never changes so the demands of the moral law never change. The Westminster confession illuminates: *"The moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof"* (WCF XIX. 5). For a Christian, the moral law both reveals God's character to us and tells us how to live a life pleasing to Him. Adherence to the moral law is not what brings someone into a relationship with Christ. We will never follow it closely enough to erase our moral culpability. But it gives us a guide in how to live as one under the rule of the one who has given us a relationship with Himself through grace.

It can therefore be said, with respect to the question of why Christians suggest we follow some laws and not others; they come to us in different categories from the Old Testament to accomplish different purposes. Jesus fulfilled the ceremonial laws making them obsolete. The demise of the Nation State of Israel also led to the obsolescence of the civil laws as societal imperatives. However it is the moral laws stemming from God's moral character that is still binding on into the present New Covenant period. This can be further verified by that fact that all of the Ten Commandments originally given in the Old Testament are reiterated in the New Testament. If Jesus, Paul or other New Testament authors verify laws of the Old Testament in the New Testament, it gives legitimacy to their timeless application.

Jesus and the Law

So let's look at how the New Testament talks about the moral law. As I mentioned, the whole of the Ten Commandments can indeed be found within the corpus of the New Testament teaching validating their role in New Covenant life. However, Jesus gave us a refined understanding on how to handle these laws today.

In Matthew 5, Jesus in his famous Sermon on the Mount says, ¹⁷ *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. (ESV)*

However, Jesus also tells us that Jesus fulfills the *whole* law and now under the New Covenant the law is bound in the ethic of loving God and loving others. *Matthew 22:27-40 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (ESV)*

So which is it? Jesus reduces the law to the two Great Commandments of Matthew 22 or Jesus teaches that not one “iota” will be removed from the Law validating not only the moral law, but the entire Old Testament system of laws? The answer lies in the heart of the message of the Sermon on the Mount and indeed in the heart of New Testament teaching. Jesus’ radical message was to beware of making the externals of the law the measuring stick of a life under the reign of God. The whole law is relevant as it reveals our heart issues before God. ²¹ *“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, “Raca”, is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell. Matthew 5:21-22(ESV)* It is not only the outward adherence to the law that is required. Even inner anger is equated with murder! The outward expression is only valid as it reveals the true heart condition of the follower.

Jesus’ call under the new covenant is much *more* demanding not less demanding. *Matthew 5:20²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”(ESV)* The bar is raised, not lowered. Our righteousness will never surpass that of the Pharisees (religious elites of the day) on our own. The bar is so high that only Christ lived the law perfectly in heart and deed. The only way that our righteousness will be enough is if God gives us His righteousness. It is not conformity to the law, even to the heart of the law that gets us His righteousness. It is belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus on the cross that gives us the required righteousness. It is regeneration by the Spirit of God that he works within our hearts, not the external law. It could be said that the law is not what saves, but the law both points out our inability to save ourselves and then gives us a guide in how to live rightly unto God once we are in a saving relationship with Him. Therefore it is at once no longer legally binding, but at the same time incredibly valuable as it convicts our hearts and then acts as a moral guide of how to honor God.

Let's make some applications at this point. First, a word of caution that is ripe according to the context. Beware those of you that hold the majority conservative opinion in the debate on homosexuality. It was the majority that Jesus constantly called into question during his ministry on earth. He challenged not only the externals but the internal heart conditions that others did not see. Why is it that we preach against outward sins with vengeance, but treat the inward self-righteousness that all of us possess with a passing eye? However, to others of you, beware of picking and choosing between God's laws. It is not that Jesus broadens the gate that leads to righteousness, he actually narrow it. (*Matt 7:13*)

To begin with some examples for application, let's return to look at the civil and ceremonial law categories. While not binding they still reveal the heart and character of God. We learn the moral character of God as we see the outworking of his character through those outdated systems. For example, why this Old Testament civil law to avoid eating pork? *"And the pig, because it parts the hoof but does not chew the cud, is unclean for you. Their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch."* (Deuteronomy 14:8 ESV) It was ultimately to set a precedent for the need of perfect cleanness as God's people. To eat an animal that rolled in the mud and lived close to the dirt of the ground represented a tainting of purity before God. In order to create vivid life pictures of people's need for purity.... ultimately of the heart, God set examples in the civil lives of the people of Israel. So, while the civil command to avoid pork is no longer valid, the heart of the law is still valid as God's character has not changed. He demands perfection. That perfection has been satisfied in His Son and is available through Him now. But the heart of the law, to be pure for God in the way that we live our lives, is still morally right for us personally and for society as a whole.

Here is another example. Leviticus 25:10 talks about a year of Jubilee where everyone is commanded to give up one's property! It says, *"Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each of you is to return to your family property and to your own clan."* (ESV) What do we do with this? I'd like to see Warren Buffet read this one. Remember, the heart of the law has not changed, but of course there are significant differences between and agrarian near eastern culture, and the world of today. The heart of generosity, the heart of not exploiting others, treating business manners in fairness and equity for all, these still remain. We do not keep the year of jubilee in a literal sense as prescribed under the civil law because we no longer live in a nation state of one religion under the rule of God. But even today, the heart of the law still remains. We still are called to generosity, to fairness, to equity etc. Once again, it is best for us personally and it is best for us as a society. We are called to love God and love others, these are the greatest laws.

Here's an example from the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians women are commanded to cover their heads. *1 Corinthians 11:4-6* ⁴ Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. ⁵ But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved. ⁶ For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head." (ESV) How should we apply this odd command? Perhaps there is a different cultural way in which we carry out the same heart of the ordinance. In ancient times, women who were married showed honor to their husbands by wearing head coverings. It was a symbol of honor and integrity. So today, women who are married wear a

wedding band displaying the same connection to their husband. The heart of the law has not changed though the cultural customs have seen through to new expressions.

In these examples, the underlying motive of Love for God and Love for others is the substructure to which the law points. Therefore, the Christian follows the law today, not arbitrarily, but with a view to loving God and loving others out of a response to what God has done in his grace for them. We do not set aside certain laws based on cultural desires. We set aside those either fulfilled in Christ, or not pertaining to the nation state of Israel. We now eat pork without second thought. We now shave our beards. We no longer sacrifice animals. Though we set them aside as not binding, there is not one jot or tittle of the law that is not instructive in understanding the heart and holiness of God. So, positively, we do love others, we do give to the poor, we do memorize God's Word so on and so on. The heart of these laws stem from God's character and though times and specific expression change, the heart from which they stem does not. We are always morally bound to do what honors God and what is best for those with whom we share the earth. There will be argument about the specific ramifications of how that is lived out since we are now lead by the spirit and the list of New Testament is much more sparse than the Old Testament. However, once again, it is not arbitrary and the Word of God is the guide for the Christian and not cultural pressure.

Back to Homosexuality.... No matter which side you fall in the argument about sexual norms, you must admit that there is the possibility that God's moral character means certain prescriptions for our sexual conduct today as yesterday as always. It is possible that the heart of loving God and loving others means certain things about how we live in sexual relationship with others. In a modern world of "suggestions" and "options" it could still be that there are "shoulds" and "oughts" as designed by God for the benefit of people individually and the benefit of society. It may be that Christians prescribe a certain moral ethic *not* based on random adherence to antiquated sexual norms. It is possible that a conservative view does not stem from a Christian's desire to exclude or judge. Perhaps conservative Christians have turned Christian mantra into just that, but ethically, that does not necessitate from where it derives. It may be that God's moral laws stem from an understanding of God's character of protection for people, people's love for God and love for one another and the preservation of society, even secular, pluralistic society.

Furthermore then, it could be that a homosexual lifestyle is not what is best and is not sanctioned in either the Old or New Testament under the heart of God's character for protection, flourishing and the preservation of society. I am not going to argue this point. But we must say that this could be. It could be that the conservative view of Homosexuality stems from God's character not of oppression or judgment, but of love, concern and a desire of protection against our own desires. (Remember love *over* tolerance) It could

be that our very desires are not in conformity with God's character of love for us and others, I know mine are not.

Now at this point you might disagree with the argument put forth. I am hoping that at least you might see through to agreeing with me that the prohibition against a homosexual lifestyle *could* come from genuine love of God and love of others. I urge you to read on.....

Topic #3: Jesus and Paul

Paul's a Bigot

It is often claimed that Paul had notoriously discriminating views in several areas. We have been freed from other categories where he was wrong, so now let's liberate ourselves from his teaching on homosexuality as well. He advocates slavery. Obviously we are above that view now. He advocates the subordination of women and once again, we have risen above. He even has the audacity to claim that the Bible is authoritative and a source of Truth given these obvious errors. (2 Timothy 3:16-17) Millions have been treated unjustly on the basis of these views. Therefore, even if he does prescribe against homosexuality, how can we believe that this is God's heart today?

Yes, the above views are often attributed to Paul. However, are the accusations warranted? How are we to evaluate what Paul really thought about these notoriously discriminating issues? Ephesians is one of the books from where people often make the claims of Paul's bigotry. "*Wives submit to your own husbands*", and "*Slaves obey your Masters*" Ephesians 5:22 and 6:5 respectively seem to be self-condemning statements. But before you cry out "bigot" take a deeper look. If you have this opinion, have you actually looked at the passages before?

The context of Ephesians 5:22 above is Ephesians 5:21. "*Submit to one-another out of reverence for Christ*". We are ALL to submit to one-another in submission TO Christ. Wives are indeed to submit to their husbands but that is not a statement of subordinate value, women to men. Indeed in the rest of the passage related to marriage it is the men who bear the brunt of the burden to love their wives in a way such that submission would be a joy. Husbands have certainly used this passage over time to claim a role of tyrant over their supposed loved ones. But the context and weight of the passage does not allow for a demeaning role for women, but rather a valued and esteemed role. What is more, to hold this view you would actually need to say that the Bible holds a discriminating stance within the Triune God Himself. It is quite clear that the Son submits to the Father. And the HS submits to the Son. However, there is no implication of differing value between the three. They are all of equal value yet different role. In the same way Paul ascribes differing

roles to Husbands and Wives yet they are valued the same as the set their eyes ultimately on submission to God through submission to one another.

A more thorough understanding of New Testament life will also help us in the passage related to slavery. At the time of Paul up to 70% of jobs were performed by slaves. However they were not slaves in the traditional sense. They were more likely what we would call “indentured servants” or “bondservants” as the English Standard Version translates. When someone would owe a debt and have nothing with which to pay, they would sell themselves into servitude to pay off the debt. Most slaves were not slaves for life and it more closely approximated the paying off of a debt- they essentially received wages for their work. Moreover, Paul does condone the practice in the passage whether or not it was as described. He commands slaves to obey their masters out of reverence for Christ. A Christian slave’s testimony was proclaimed through his service and so many a master might be won to faith one could surmise. What would have happened if Joseph didn’t submit to his role as an enslaved servant in Egypt? Far from discriminating against women or slaves, Paul rather communicates the high position of those that submit to the savior of the world vertically through their earthly submission to others horizontally.

The supposed evidence that Paul was a bigot can easily be explained in looking at these contextual clues. There is great danger in taking isolated texts out of context and making them a proof text! He does not speak out of a harsh desire to subjugate those to inferior positions. Rather in the same vain as Genesis 1-2, he raises the value of humanity as those that have been created in the image of God and are inherently objects of God’s value and love. (Eph 1:3-10) One must be very careful in disregarding Paul’s words, the Bible’s words, based on accusations against Paul’s character that quite likely are self serving to the views of the one that lobbies the accusations. Mind here once again, this goes to all of us. We all want to step out from under God’s law and find our own foundation apart from Him!

In the conversation related to Paul’s view on Homosexuality, it may or may not be that what Paul meant in Romans 1 and 1 Corinthians 6 are not what conservatives take them to mean. But let’s not naively claim that Paul was a bigot in some areas in order to justify disregarding what he says on other moral issues.

Jesus’ silence

“I mean Jesus never even talked about homosexuality!” That is another one of the arguments often raised. It is said that it is a hypersensitive prudish generation of conservative Christians who have read the prohibition of homosexuality back into the Bible. In fact Jesus says nothing conclusive on the issue so we should not prohibit that which Jesus does not explicitly prohibit.

I am not here going to tell you what I believe Jesus thought on the issue. But again, a caution. We certainly must be warned against putting words into Jesus' mouth when they are indeed absent. Your basic philosophy 101 class will tell you that arguing for a point of view based on one's silence on an issue is dangerous. An argument from silence is never a good argument. Logically it would hold that one can argue for a negative OR positive view on an issue if nothing is said. So, just because Jesus does not say anything specifically, does not make homosexuality prescriptive. One can find a myriad of topics that Jesus does not address specifically. He does not prohibit domestic violence. He doesn't speak against rape. He doesn't speak against pedophilia. Does that mean we are free to choose our own preferences in these areas?

We know that Jesus was concerned with us loving Him and loving others. Those are the ethic of the NT as we discussed already. There are many implications of this ethic as we hear him teach on the heart of the law and its relevance to norms of our pleasing Him and prescribing behavior that is best for people and society. We therefore are able to make reasonable judgments on issues that he does not address. If we want to come to an understanding of what Jesus must have thought, we must keep this in mind as well as look closely at other passages that reveal what he thinks on other related areas; marriage, sex, design etc. But let's make sure we don't say silly things like, Jesus never talks about it so there is no prohibition. Or conversely that we can know what he thought simply by looking at the conservative tradition over the history of the church. We need to examine the Bible, context and moral law issues to determine Jesus' (God's) desires for our conduct. By the way, have any of you even checked to see what Jesus does say and what he doesn't say?

Topic #4: What DOES the Bible Say?

Back to the Beginning

Paul talks about homosexuality explicitly and Jesus didn't, that much is clear. Therefore most of the Biblical evaluation of this topic revolves around interpreting several key passages from Paul and also Peter. The discussion will usually center on Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6, Jude 7, 2 Peter 2:7 and in the OT, Leviticus 18 and 20. However at this point, rather than look at these controversial passages, I would like to look at three foundational chapters in the Bible that set the stage for all sorts of questions regarding orthodox Christianity's view of the norms of life. Those chapters are found at the very beginning of the Bible's narrative, Genesis 1-3. In my estimation, the most foundational passages on this topic come right from the beginning of creation.

Now, again, I am assuming that most of the readers want to know what the Bible says about the topic and believe that the Bible indeed has truth to give us. If you don't believe in the Bible's reliability or pick and

choose what you want to believe from it, the following discussion may not be of much value. However, my intention with this whole paper is to help us understand not just what the Bible says, but why it says it. Many people reject the Bible because they do not understand how Christians could think some of the things they do and then extrapolate back to their incredulous view of the Bible. I am suggesting that we take the words of the Bible, try to understand some of the “why’s”, test against the backdrop of life as we know it- do the words ring true with our experience of life, and then give them credence if they do. With that said, ere we go....

Genesis 1:1 “In the beginning God.” This is one of the most important verses in the whole Bible for all times and situations and most certainly for our current culture. God is at the beginning and God IS the beginning. John 1:3 adds, *“All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.”* God is both the creator and the designer of life. He designed life for us and therefore knows “why” we were created not just “how” we were created. In our naturalistic culture, theories abound of how we came to be that don’t include God. If there is no God designer, then there is no God ordained purpose. All we have is random chaos resulting in what we now call life. We are left to answer the “whys” on our own and competing answers will debate for supremacy. The loudest voice will win. However, if God created all things, if he created humans, the earth, relationships between all three, and reveals some of the “how’s” and “why’s” then we have great insight into life as God intended.

Therefore, addressing *“In the beginning God”* is the most important key in the world for a generation asking “why” and finding no consensus answer. Without “why”, we are left to figure out our own trajectories. We are left to figure out our own moralities. We are left to figure out our own identities. We have ended up with a purposeless, morally abase generation confused about their existence. In the words of the 70’s band *Supertramp*, *“Please tell me who I am”* is the cry of the postmodern generation. Into that cry, the Bible shouts back, *“In the beginning God”!* He gives reason, he gives knowledge, he gives true truth and he gives us value as God’s pinnacle of creation. If God of the Bible exists, he gives us the answers we are all looking for. It is to His purpose and His design and our identity that arises out of these that we need turn to evaluate God’s norms in the current topic. Let’s keep going....

Little Mirrors⁶

We were created to orbit around God. He is the center of life. As we orient our lives around him, it has been said that we are to be little mirrors that harness the character and beauty of God. We reflect it to the ends

⁶*This title and much of the subject matter was taken from Pastor Tim Keller’s sermon, “In the Image of God”*
http://sermons.redeemer.com/store/index.cfm?ParentCat=6&fuseaction=product.display&product_ID=18871

of the earth. (2 Corinthians 3:18) This was the purpose of Jesus and so this is the true purpose of all of us. (John 12:28, 17:1) Millions and millions of mirrors reflecting God to the world. God's glory can never increase in absolute measure, but the radiance of his glory goes out further and further. His glory has a more widespread display as his image bearers reflect his image. That is the ultimate reason for our existence. We exist not for ourselves, but for Him, for the increase of His glory.⁷

Adam and Eve turned away from their design in the ultimate conspiracy of history. The result was a cataclysmic reorientation of the created order. No longer did man orbit God, but the created told the creator to orbit His creatures. God was told that our will is preeminent and that His design for humanity would be subordinate to our own cravings for power and self-fulfillment. God and his glory were to be the highest calling and overarching purpose of creation. Now each individual in the history of man has decided that we singularly are the center point of the universe. Therefore we are all on a collision course with each other as we have lost our fulcrum point of orientation in life. We now try and create identity on our own. We now try to establish our own reality apart from the one who has the ability to tell us what reality is.

One of the ways we have reversed roles with God is that we have tried to define sexuality on our own terms apart from God's definition. Look at these verses: *Genesis 5:1-2* *When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. 2 Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created.* Our design is that in many ways we are like God. We are not gods, nor do we collectively make up god. But we bear his image in the design of our being. In the verses above, you can see that being made like God is closely connected with gender. There is something about gender and our living out its specific roles that gives glory to God. It is not that God has a gender or genders in himself. That is clear from scripture. But something about the creativity of God is wrapped up in the beauty and wonder of the two genders he created in us. Therefore, our design, which incorporates our sexuality and also the relationships between genders, is not random. It somehow serves to more fully communicate God's image to the world. Gender and sexuality is therefore not up to us to choose or to manipulate. It is part of the very design of who God intends for us to be.

⁷ *It has been often asked if this view does not result in a God who is a megalomaniac? A being who exults in his own glory and renowned is certainly prideful at least and a tyrant at worst. I have wrestled with this question a good bit myself. Jonathan Edwards in "The Reason for Which God Created the World" has greatly helped me. It follows logically that there is some being or thing that is the greatest thing in the universe. The only thing that would be greater than the greatest thing is for that greatest thing to be made more known. (This is going to get wordy) For any human, to desire praise and glory is indeed arrogant and prideful. But for the greatest person in the universe, it is simply the recognition of what is true. As what is true is recognized it serves to further extend knowledge of the greatest thing....which is the only thing greater than the greatest thing! We were created to acknowledge that which is great. Our hearts are built to worship something greater than our selves. So by glorifying God, we both fulfill our purpose and acknowledge the greatest truth in the universe.*

Hence, if the way we live out our purpose as God's creatures is to live according to our identities, which are created in the image of God, we need to understand what God's concept and design of gender is. To live any other way is to live as a fish out of water or as a little boy that thinks he can fly without any aid. It will ultimately lead to great injury or death. However, you must realize that this concept of living under the authority of a creator that at once defines our design also defies the very foundation of Western culture and the primary cry of our modern world. We should not expect that it would be readily accepted.

The cry of William Wallace

Not many of us have covered our faces with blue war paint, roared down a war party on a horse and cried "Freedom" at the top of our lungs. That is, not physically, but we all at least have yelled the same sentiment at the top of our lungs spiritually. "Freedom" is the pre-eminent value in our culture.⁸ One might even say that our undermining of the authority of God in our lives is a grand attempt to get out from under any sort of ultimate responsibility so we can realize our freedom. No one can tell me what to do. No one can tell me what to believe. No one can tell me that I am designed for any one purpose. No one can tell me what the "shoulds" or "oughts" of life truly are.

Ultimately I think there is a deep thread in all of us that teaches us to desire freedom rather than submission. With great irony, the Bible's view is quite the contrary. The Bible rather teaches that *submission* is the way to *freedom*. No matter what one might think about the contradiction of this statement, it is foundational to the Bible and the discussion at hand. Real freedom is not found in aversion to God's authority. Real freedom is found in submission to God's authority.

Again, ironically, the cry for freedom actually leads to slavery. You see, as soon as I put all my energy into financial freedom, I actually become a slave to that desire through craving money. As soon as I put all my energy into sexual liberation, I become a slave to liberation through sex and might even become a sex addict. As soon as I put all my energy into loving others, I become a slave to the satisfaction or emptiness of the quality of my love for others and the return of their love towards me. Because we have elevated freedom above God's design, we substitute God, who actually can set us free from all sorts of things we think will give us freedom.

⁸ Discussed by Os Guinness in "Time for Truth" Baker Books February 1, 2002 ISBN: 978-0801064036

Soren Kierkegaard defined sin as anything that replaces our desire for God.⁹ It might actually be “good” things that become ultimate things. In light of this definition, it most certainly can be the good and right desire for “freedom” that actually replaces our desire for God. It did for Eve. Instead, when we place ourselves under the authority of God and live according to his Lordship, he sets us free. He created us for this relationship to him. The fish that lives under the authority of his liquid environment is not held captive by water. One would be foolish to tell a fish to live above the water in an appeal to liberate it from the confines of the tyranny of underwater living. When something lives according to its design, it is truly free. Such is the case with humanity’s relation to the authority and design of God. When we live in right relationship to God, we are truly free. We must realize that our design and our aversion to living under God’s that design play foundationally into the current attitudes in our culture towards the conversation on homosexuality.

Nakedness is the Point

Genesis 9:6b-7 For God made man in his own image. 7 And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it.

Genesis 2:24-25 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Review quiz.... “Why” were we created? The central reason that God created man and woman was to populate the earth with image bearers and so bring glory to Him self. The above passages further clarify. This is the design of humans and gives us a foundation for the incredible dignity of human life. But there is more. God created us for relationships. God is relational and so we are relational in his image. God has lived in relationship before the beginning of time. (Gen 1:2, John 1:1) When we live according to our design we find personal fulfillment in an unhindered relationship with Him. When Adam and Eve lived in submission to God’s authority they experienced real life. One of the ways the Bible communicates this is that we see no embarrassment in nudity as Adam and Eve lived in harmony with God. They didn’t have to cover up in shame or fear of anyone or any thing. Life was as it was mean to be as they lived in right relationship with God.

However, we are designed to need relationships with other people as well. We are to find great joy in relationships with other humans. But here is the key: As our vertical relationship with Him is intact, our horizontal relationships with others flow out of the central secure relationship with Him. When I am freed by the love of one that loves me unconditionally, I am free to live relationships of self-sacrificial love with others. (1 John 4:19) The danger for all of us is that we place horizontal relationships, whether between man

⁹ Soren Kierkegaard “Sickness Unto Death” Princeton University Press (November 1, 1983) 201 pages ISBN-13: 978-0691020280

and woman, man and man, woman and woman, as primary, when they are secondary to our ultimate relationship of identity with God Him self.

So some of us live in defiance of our design in our relationships with the *opposite* sex as we place inordinate, God usurping value in them. Some defy their design with *same* sex relationships- sexual and non-sexual. All relationships that contradict our design to place Him and His will for us as primary are not God's heart for us. The present topic of the homosexual relationship falls into this category. According to the verses above, clearly, the central covenantal relationship of love prescribed by God is between a man and a woman. Certainly men are also created to love men and women also to love women. But unequivocally, the sexual relationship between genders prescribed here in Genesis and later by Jesus¹⁰ and Paul, is specifically meant for a man and a woman as it is the way that God designed for his to mirror his image. (Matt 19:4, Mark 10:1-12, John 5:46-47, Romans 1:25-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

Homosexuality is not God's design as we are called to live as image bearers of Him. Male and Female we were created in God's image and living within the distinction of these roles brings the highest glory to Him. That is the "should" and "ought" for which we were created. To live otherwise is living as a fish out of water.

Therefore, it is not that Paul, Peter, the Bible itself, the Church were/are culturally out of touch to where we are today in the evolution of humanity. It is rather that they understood that the very purpose of human life centered on our calling to live under God's design and authority. It is not an oppressive, bigoted conservative Christian culture that prescribes against the Gay lifestyle (of course it can be, but what I am trying to communicate is that that is not God's heart). It is not that some day a "truer" reading of the Bible will see through to a more inclusive view. God has set his design from the beginning of creation. The norm was established before the Law of Moses, the Church's teaching, before Paul and Peter. This is ultimately why I believe homosexuality defies the very design of human life and is not God's desire for humans.

Then Why Did He Make me This Way?

What a difficult question. The emotional connection to what you are experiencing and what I have said so far is so strong I know. Please hear me, I am not condemning you. But listen, I want to love you with a full expression of love and not a trite dismissal of what I believe the Bible says about reality. Since Adam and Eve, we all fall prey to the overarching nature of the fall. Humanity to God, Humans to Humans and Humans to the earth are all tainted. God allowed us all to not just know, but to feel the results of the original

¹⁰ As I said before, Jesus does not explicitly address homosexuality, though he give credence to marriage between a man and a women often and does not give authority to any other form of marriage.

rebellion against him. What is...is not what God ultimately desires it to be and not what it always will be. Why did he make me with a propensity to lie? Why did he make me with a propensity to steal? Why did he make me with a desire to place other things in front of God? Like a propensity to homosexuality, I believe that these are things that are but that are not as they were meant to be.

The message of the Bible is one of great hope. Each of us has and still do rebel against God as we choose our own will against His. But, if we place our faith in Christ, our nature is not who we once were or what we now do, but what Christ makes us in Him. What once defined us no longer needs to. That does not mean that our allegiances practically change overnight, perhaps not fully in our lifetime. But He promises to eventually redeem what is not as it should be in us. He calls out from the very first moment of sin, "Adam, Eve, where are you"? He is still calling, "Where are you"? (Genesis 3:8-9) If we respond, He enters in and heals and changes. He changes our very nature. (2 Corinthians 5:17) Once we were in wholehearted rebellion to him. Now we are set free from what we deserved as we takes Christ's work on the cross in our stead to pay the penalty for our sin.

This is great news! You and I can re-orient our selves back to our original design to glorify Him. That which was off center can be realigned. Now that Humans to God are vertically able to be restored; Humans to themselves, Humans to other Humans and Humans to the earth can be horizontally restored. We align our trajectories around the center point of God and all creation returns to harmony with God and to the universe. Collisions with one another are then averted as we orbit together in one direction living out our God shaped design.

That is the message of the Bible which is the context of the discussion on homosexuality. There is great danger in isolating the question to a conclusion on relatively few but inflammatory passages. The previous is the big picture and backdrop of the stage onto which God appears first and tells the rest of the stage how to orientate them selves around his design. That is the backdrop of all of life and indeed the backdrop of our sexual behavior.

So why did God make you this way....? I don't know. The battle rages whether same sex attraction is the result of nature/nurture. They are still looking for the "gay gene" and the most recent science does not look like it is getting any closer to finding it.¹¹ Honestly, I am not sure it really matters. The reality is, whether

¹¹ See the definition of Homosexual Orientation in the American Psychological Association Website: <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/sexual-orientation.aspx> "There is no consensus among scientists about the exact reasons that an individual develops a heterosexual, bisexual, gay, or lesbian orientation. Although much research has

nature or nurture, we all exist in a state of brokenness. There are things about all of us that are not as they should be. We are still responsible for our actions despite the circumstances that we are dealt. I have a proclivity to heterosexual lust that certainly is genetic. My nature tells me by what I feel that I would be most satisfied and live according to whom I am if I would throw off the restraints of marriage and family to pursue what I feel strongly inside. However, the Spirit of God also inside me whispers something different. It is to that voice that I must listen. The culture's mantra of freedom and following our desires tells me something alien to who I really am by design even if it is who I am by experience. This is why we must listen to revelation from God through the Bible that tells us who we really are. As creatures of God's purpose and design we have much more to live for than our fleeting feelings and desires.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, some clear questions and answers:

Why do orthodox Christians say homosexuality is wrong?

1. Homosexuality is not living life under God's design to glorify Him through bearing His image. Is same sex attraction in itself wrong? Well, it is not as God designed it. But we are responsible to live in a world that has all sorts of situations that are not according to original design. The desire of God for fallen people living in a fallen world is to live lives that strive to reflect his design whether we are naturally inclined to or not. So the call to a person that experiences same sex attraction is to live according to the design of God rather than the design of the world. It is to live under the authority of God rather than the urgings of what we feel. Who you are is not wrong, what you do can be.
2. Homosexuality is not best for individuals or society. I don't have time to enumerate the consequences of Homosexuality in our world. The statistics are pretty overwhelming. Any other behavior that is not so politically charged would certainly be outlawed by the state quite abruptly. What the orthodox Christian ultimately wants is the best for God's primary creation- other humans and the context in which we live, society as a whole. It has not been well communicated by the Church, but the heart of God is for the flourishing of individuals and society, not their suppression. As discussed at length, the orthodox Christian believes that it is simply in our best interest to live out our design in gender and sexuality. Again, truly I believe the foundation for communication of God's heart in this area is for the goodness and health of individual lives. I want so badly for people to experience freedom from Christ and not a cheap imitation.

examined the possible genetic, hormonal, developmental, social, and cultural influences on sexual orientation, no findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors. Many think that nature and nurture both play complex roles; most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation."

What would I tell a person with same sex attraction?

I love you and God loves you much more. What I know to be true for sure is that God does not make mistakes and nothing happens outside of his authority. You are fearfully and wonderfully made. (Psalm 139:14) You can be identified by how God views you. You don't need to be identified by how you view yourself, society views you or what lies Satan tells you. You are an image bearer of God and greatly loved by the creator. The way we find freedom in life is to find out who God is and who he made us to be. Don't label yourself by your desires, but label yourself as the pinnacle of all creation in God's plan. Let's talk more in a better venue!

My prayer as I write is that you would take this lengthy writing to heart. My prayer is that you would not write it off. No matter into which category you fall that I outlined at the outset, would you test your hearts to see if you might need to be moved in one direction or the other. If this solidified some thoughts you already had, don't be smug and self-satisfied. Strive to be an image bearer of grace, mercy and truth. If you are reeling against the propositions, my hope is that you could at least hear a gracious attempt to answer why orthodox Christians view homosexuality as wrong and that it comes from a desire for what is best for humanity. If you disagree, dialogue with me, what are you feeling? What are your thoughts? Where do you agree and disagree? Could I ask you to think about it for a couple days though before you respond? I don't have all the answers and there could be some flawed thinking in this piece I admit but it has taken weeks to write and years of thought so at least give me credit for trying to explain my view with thoughtfulness and sensitivity and so do the same in your response. May this serve to elevate the conversation on homosexuality... *Miles O'Neill*

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