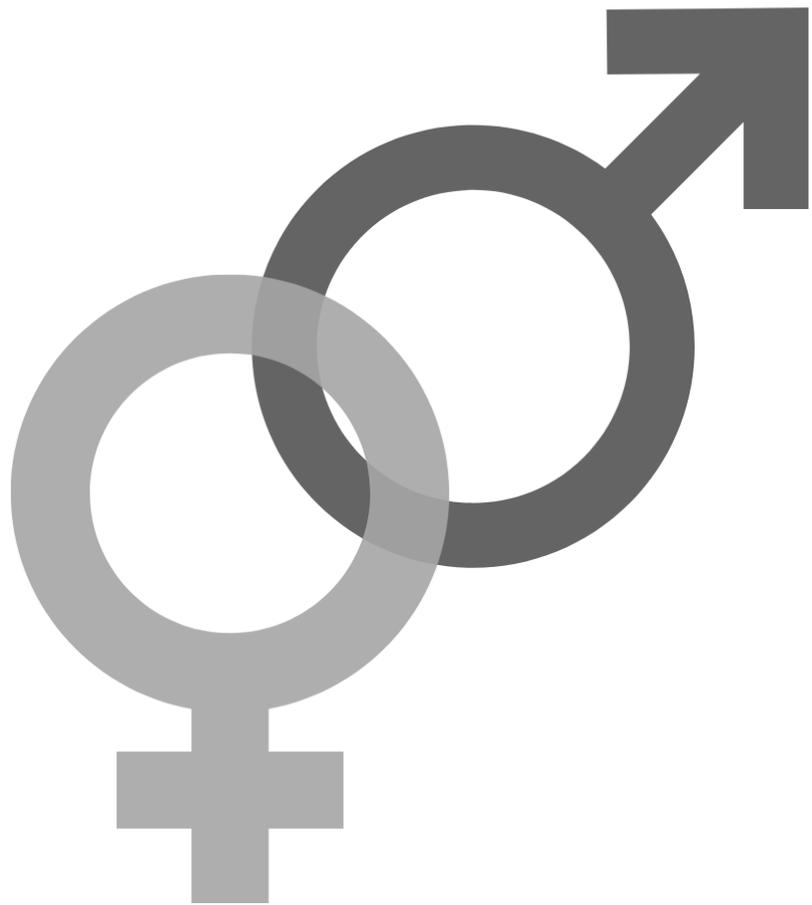


GOD'S DESIGN FOR SEXUALITY



Strange New World: How Did We Get Here and What Do We Do?

American Bible-believing churches are facing a challenge that has arisen swiftly and forcefully in several secular arenas - psychiatric, political, and legal. While a few have long asserted that homosexual behavior should be regarded as normal, and that federal civil rights protections should be afforded lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (hereafter, LGBTQI) persons, acceptance by wide swaths of society has come very slowly over a few decades, but has gained stunning momentum in just the last few years.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), the “Bible” of psychiatry, defined homosexuality as a ‘disorder’ or ‘sexual orientation disturbance’ as recently as 1987, but has since been removed it altogether. The acceptance of homosexuality by the psychiatric profession has paved the way for its advance in other areas as well. *The removal of homosexuality from the psychiatric canon has undoubtedly facilitated the rights of those who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Adoption rights, same-sex marriage, and the repeal of [military prohibitions], would never have occurred if homosexuality continued to be seen [as it was just a few decades ago].*¹

Politically, until just a few years ago, candidates for office felt obliged to define marriage as between a man and a woman. President Obama, when campaigning for the White House in 2008, stated his opposition to same-sex marriage. Once elected, the administration said his views of marriage were “evolving”. Later, the Obama administration announced that it would NOT defend in the federal courts a law duly enacted by Congress, a law passed in 1996 called the ‘Defense of Marriage Act’ (DOMA) which for federal purposes defined marriage as between one man and one woman, and allowed states to refuse to sanction or recognize same-sex marriages. That law was signed by then-President Bill Clinton, but in the years after he said it was a mistake and should be overturned. When DOMA was challenged in the courts, the Obama Justice Department refused to defend the law.

For all its history the military had refused to enlist open homosexuals, citing problems with unit cohesiveness if enlisted men and women were forced to share a bunkhouse with someone who practices same-sex. During the 1990’s Commander-in-Chief Bill Clinton ordered the policy changed to, “Don’t ask, Don’t Tell.” Instead of the military asking applicants about their sexual orientation, they would no longer ask at all, but still reserved the right to dismiss anyone who openly identified as a homosexual. That policy lasted through the administration of George W. Bush until the election of Barack Obama, who changed the military’s policy to, for the first time in history, allow openly gay persons to gain entry into the nation’s armed services.

The legal landscape on this issue has shifted dramatically as well. As recently as 1986 the Supreme Court ruled that states could outlaw sodomy. If states could outlaw homosexual behavior then they could obviously outlaw same-sex marriage, which all fifty states did. But in 2003, the Court reversed that in a 5-4 ruling with Justice Anthony Kennedy writing the majority opinion, setting the stage for prohibitions against same-sex marriage to be challenged.

¹ <http://www.madinamerica.com/2014/12/homosexuality-came-dsm/>, accessed September 14, 2016.

As expected, the constitutional validity of bans to same-sex marriage was challenged, winding its way through the federal courts, and reaching the Supreme Court in 2015. On April 28 of that year the Court heard oral arguments in *Obergefell vs. Hodges*, more popularly known as the 'same-sex marriage case.' During that session Justice Anthony Kennedy said: "*The definition [of marriage – as between one man and one woman] has been with us for millennia. And it's very difficult for the court to say "Oh well, we know better."*" But within two months this same Justice Kennedy would write the majority opinion in yet another 5-4 ruling that made same-sex marriage a constitutional right that cannot be abridged by any state.

All of this has happened very, very quickly. Within many of our lifetimes we have moved from a society adhering to traditional Christian values, to a post-Christian culture, and now to the beginning of the "brave new world" that Aldous Huxley predicted in his book by that name. It's a world that Christian thinkers have been warning about for a good while. The late Christian philosopher and theologian Francis Schaeffer wrote in his seminal work, *How Should We Then Live?: The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture*:

If there is no absolute moral standard, then one cannot say in a final sense that anything is right or wrong. By absolute we mean that which always applies, that which provides a final or ultimate standard. There must be an absolute if there are to be morals ... If there is no absolute beyond man's ideas, then there is no final appeal to judge between individuals and groups whose moral judgments conflict. We are merely left with conflicting opinions.²

Given these changes and challenges, it is imperative for Bible-believing churches to restate what the Bible teaches about homosexuality, and also consider how we will interact with an increasingly hostile society, and those close to us who are affected by this cultural drift.

What is Homosexuality?

Homosexuality is sexual desire for a member of the same (homo) sex. Homosexuals seek sexual satisfaction with members of the same sex.

LGBT is an oft-used acronym that represents various manifestations of homosexuality – lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. "Lesbian" refers to female homosexuals. "Gay" is a general term that can refer to homosexual men or women. "Bisexual" refers to sexual attraction to both males and females. "Transgender" designates those who identify as the opposite of their biological gender.

Key Texts:

Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable. (Leviticus 18:22)

If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads. (Leviticus 20:13)

² Francis Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?*, p. 166.

While they were enjoying themselves, some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house. Pounding on the door, they shouted to the old man who owned the house, "Bring out the man who came to your house so we can have sex with him." The owner of the house went outside and said to them, "No, my friends, don't be so vile. Since this man is my guest, don't do this disgraceful thing." (Judges 19:22-23)

God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. (Romans 1:26-27)

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire. (Jude 1:7)

The clear teaching of Scripture is that homosexuality is sin. A homosexual lifestyle cannot be harmonized with God's standard of righteousness.

Is Homosexuality Worse Than Other Sins?

While any type of sin (desire, thought, word, deed, omission or commission), and a single sin of any type, is enough to violate God's character and damn us (see James 2:10), and Christ's death atones equally for all sin, it is nevertheless true that some sins are distinguished by what they *affect* and *represent*. That is, some sins have greater consequences than others, and some represent a greater degree of corruption. For example, as we've seen, the penalty for homosexuality in the Old Testament was death. Why? In part because it threatened to undermine civil order. Dr. Mark Snoberger has catalogued the capital offenses in the Old Testament and found that they fall into four general categories. Of those, the main horizontal (man to man) offenses are those that threaten to undermine civil order.³

In addition to having great consequences, homosexuality also represents a clear example of idolatry which is, ultimately, a focus on self rather than on God. It's for this reason that Romans 1 (see above) places homosexuality in the context of idolatry. The 'exchange' from God to idolatry spoken of in Romans 1:23 ("They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images") and 1:25 ("They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator") is related to 1:26 ("They exchanged the natural ... for the unnatural"). The same Greek word for "exchanged" is used throughout that passage.

³ <http://www.dbts.edu/2015/04/06/what-shall-we-do-with-moses/>

Nature and Nurture

We are all 'born that way' in that all of us are born as sinners and struggle with different manifestations of that sin nature, but we're also 'made that way' as we're influenced by the models we grow up with, and the cultural consensus that dominates our environment.

For example, the teaching and preaching I heard growing up was full of a kind of a culturally-accepted machismo that was passed off as biblical masculinity. It would be easy in that environment for a boy to conclude, "If that's the profile of a man, and that's not what I am, then maybe I'm not a man." But, the issue of whether you're a man, is not whether you meet some extra-biblical profile created by society or preachers, but whether you are biologically a male.

We need to be very careful that the images we portray of masculinity and femininity are strictly what the Bible says, and not merely the models we grew up with and sought to emulate.

The emerging cultural consensus on same-sex behavior and gender identity means that, not only will the Bible's teaching on these matters be questioned, but more young people will be inclined to translate gender confusion into identity and, following the advice of peers, the media, school counselors, etc, to 'come out, loud and proud'. Some of these young people are in our churches, forcing some of us to face this issue directly, many for the first time.

Is Homosexuality Normal?

In 1989, an episode of the television show 'Thirty-Something' showing two gay men talking in bed cost ABC \$41 million in advertising revenue. But [by 1996], two lesbian characters on the NBC sitcom 'Friends' married with barely a protest from network affiliates."⁴ There are currently several popular TV shows with homosexual characters. Homosexuals are now common in almost all segments of modern culture. As our culture seeks to normalize homosexuality, people (including Christians) face the danger of being desensitized to immorality. The Bible warns us of the need to remain vigilant in the spiritual battle for our moral purity:

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.
(Ephesians 5:1-4)

As homosexuality becomes more "normal" and acceptable in our culture, criticism of such behavior may become dangerous, even criminal. Currently, those who refuse to acknowledge homosexuality as acceptable are labeled homophobic, ignorant, and other epithets.

⁴ Katia Hetter, "The New Civil Rights Battle," in *U.S. News & World Report* (June 3, 1996): 30.

Christian Homosexuals?

Some outspoken, practicing homosexuals proudly wear the label, “Christian”. In fact, there is even a nation-wide “Christian” denomination for homosexuals, the Metropolitan Community Church. These folks claim that the Bible does not condemn homosexual behavior. They offer the following arguments:

- The homosexuality prohibited in the Bible was “unnatural,” while what is practiced today is “natural.” For heterosexuals to experiment with homosexuality is sin, but for the individual who is born as a homosexual, and oriented toward it, it is not sin.

Biblical Response:

Never does the Bible make a distinction between acceptable and unacceptable homosexuality. Heterosexual sexual involvement, for instance, can be either acceptable or unacceptable, depending upon one’s state of marriage. But the Bible *never* suggests that any form of homosexual behavior is acceptable. It is *always* treated as sinful activity.

- The homosexuality prohibited in the Bible did not involve commitment. The Bible prohibits casual, unloving sexual relationships of all kinds. But as long as the relationship, whether heterosexual or homosexual, involves two people who are committed to each other and who genuinely love each other, no sin is involved.

Biblical Response:

The biblical passages do not simply condemn the wrong *attitudes* of some homosexuals, but rather the homosexual *act* itself — “*Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman*” (Leviticus 18:22). Old Testament and New Testament authors knew what sexual perversion was. They were not naïve to homosexual lifestyles, whether casual or committed. Nowhere in the Bible do we find a hint that homosexual behavior of any kind is morally acceptable. If love is the issue, adultery could also be viewed as acceptable to God if it happened in a loving relationship. The Bible, however, never views sex outside of marriage as acceptable no matter how much love exists in the relationship.

- The homosexuality prohibited in the Bible is part of the Old Testament Law that does not apply to us today.

Biblical Response:

While it is true that the Mosaic Law does not have direct application to believers today, the prohibitions against homosexuality appear in the New Testament as well.

- God has made homosexuals that way, so to be any other way is to deny God’s sovereign design for their lives.

Biblical Response:

Even if there is found some direct correlation between one's biological make-up and his sexuality, "biology is not destiny." In other words, one's sexual behavior is too complex to reduce simply to biology. If homosexuality is connected to one's biological make-up, the Christian response should still be that of resistance and avoidance.

Because we are born sinful creatures we are "naturally" sinners, yet the Bible commands us to flee from our lusts and pursue godliness. Homosexual desires, like any other lust which flows from man's depraved nature, must be resisted. One should never entertain or gratify his depraved desires, even though they may be natural and biologically based.

Scripture clearly teaches that one cannot be a practicing homosexual and a Christian at the same time. Christians with a homosexual background will struggle with temptations just like heterosexual people do. They may even occasionally backslide and engage in homosexual sins. Those who repent of such sin and seek to change have evidence that their profession of faith is genuine. But those who embrace and condone a homosexual lifestyle are thereby rejecting the clear teaching of the Word of God.

How Should Christians Treat Homosexuals and Their Families?

We are commanded to love and give the gospel to everyone, regardless of the types of sin they commit. Further, the Bible's teaching on the universality of sin ought to have a humbling effect on the believer such that he resists the sinful temptation to look down on others for their particular struggle. Therefore, when we come in contact with a homosexual, we must show him kindness and respect, make every effort to build a God-honoring relationship with him, and give him the gospel. If we do not, we are disobeying and dishonoring the Lord.

In the radically reordered environment in which we now live, we may increasingly hear words from church members like 'accept' and 'support' in the context of 'outings' within our church's families. It's important to remember that the connotation of those words may be different than the denotation. So, we need to be patient in discovering what people really mean by what they say. 'Acceptance' may simply mean, "I still love my son/daughter and always will." 'Support' may mean "I love my child and will be there for him/her no matter what."

Can Homosexuals Change?

Homosexuality is a sin like any other in that it flows from man's depravity. This fact offers hope for the homosexual. Through faith in Jesus Christ and the power of God's Spirit, it is possible for the homosexual to abandon his sinful behavior. The Bible makes it clear in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 that through faith in Christ, homosexuality, like other sins, can be abandoned.

*Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. **And that is what some of you were.** But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

How does one conquer immoral desires?

- Believe that God's Word is sufficient. (2 Peter 1:3)

Homosexuality is sin, Christ died for all sins, and the Holy Spirit can empower one to change.

- Understand and apply biblical sanctification.

One abandons and controls the sins of homosexuality the same way as other sins — through transformation produced by the renewing of the mind such that God's will can be accomplished.

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)

By studying, learning, and applying the Scriptures, the homosexual can become sanctified through God's truth ("Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." John 17:17). Sanctification is the process whereby the sinner is **gradually** becoming holy. As he learns and applies God's truth, his mind will slowly become new and his life will be transformed. The homosexual may do battle with this sin for his entire life, but through the Spirit's use of the Bible in his life, he can grow in Christlikeness.

Sanctification involves "putting off" sinful habits and practices:

- ✓ Don't allow yourself to be influenced by people who tempt you to sin. Determine to separate yourself from friends, co-workers, fellow students and others who provide particular opportunities for sin.
- ✓ Stay away from places that provide temptations (e.g., stores that make pornographic material easily accessible and other locations that have proven to have led to sin in the past).
- ✓ Get rid of pornography, TV, Internet, 900 phone numbers, and the phone itself if necessary.

Sanctification involves "putting on" righteous living:

- ✓ Develop a disciplined mind. (Matthew 5:28; 2 Corinthians 10:5)
- ✓ Commit yourself to studying, pondering and responding positively to the authority of the Word of God. (Ephesians 5:18-19)
- ✓ Practice other spiritual disciplines, such as prayer, fellowship and church participation. (Acts 2:41-46)
- ✓ Make yourself accountable to another believer in the church. Meet regularly to discuss how well you are handling temptation. (Galatians 6:1)

Conclusion: The Bible strongly teaches that homosexual behavior is sinful. The Christian and homosexual lifestyles are incompatible. One should deal with homosexuality like any other sin, through salvation and by pursuing biblical sanctification.