An Understanding of the Biblical View on Homosexual Practice and Pastoral Care

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary Position Paper

Marriage was divinely instituted in the Garden of Eden at Creation, and it is a special gift to humanity from a loving God from before the Fall. The design of our Creator for marriage was to satisfy the deepest human needs and longings for love, intimacy, joy, care, and appreciation. "The Bible opens and closes with marriage. Genesis presents marriage as the first institution … while the last chapters of Revelation use marriage as a metaphor to portray the relationship between Christ and His people. Significantly, marriage is uniquely positioned at the end of the creation week to underscore God's ideal for the human race."

Unfortunately, the sacredness, beauty and relevancy of marriage is diminished as never before in contemporary culture, society, and law, because the growing influence of a secular sexual ideology and practice have undermined biblical standards of sexual morality and family relations. Premarital sex, marital unfaithfulness, spousal abuse, promiscuity, pornography, cohabitation, and the "liberated" lifestyle of many married people have brought the institution of marriage into a deep crisis. Thus, God's ideal for humanity has been perverted.

In addition, various alternate sexualities, including homosexuality, bisexuality, and the variety of transgender identities have become increasingly mainstream. Over the years, thewhole measure of the factors are the sexualities and the sexualities have become increasingly mainstream.

ist" (Eph 4:13 NIV). His message to broken and fragile people is always redemptive. He summons us to holiness (1 Thess 4:3), so that our lives may flourish (John 10:10) and we may bring glory to Him in all spheres of life (1 Cor 10:31) including marriage and sexuality. Thus Scripture teaches us that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and that He lives in us (Col 1:16). He wants to be the Lord of our lives, marriages, and sexuality.

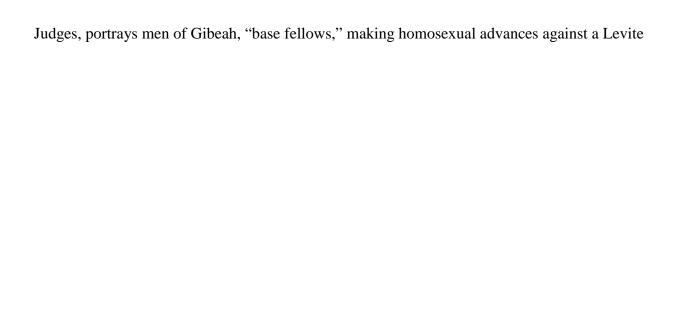
Theological Aspecets, Ekkehardt Mueller and Elias Brasil de Souza; Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald, 2015), 1.

² See official Church statements on marriage, homosexuality, and same-sex unions at http://www.adventist.org/information/official-statements/statements/.

³ Unless otherwise noted, biblical citations are from the NRSV.

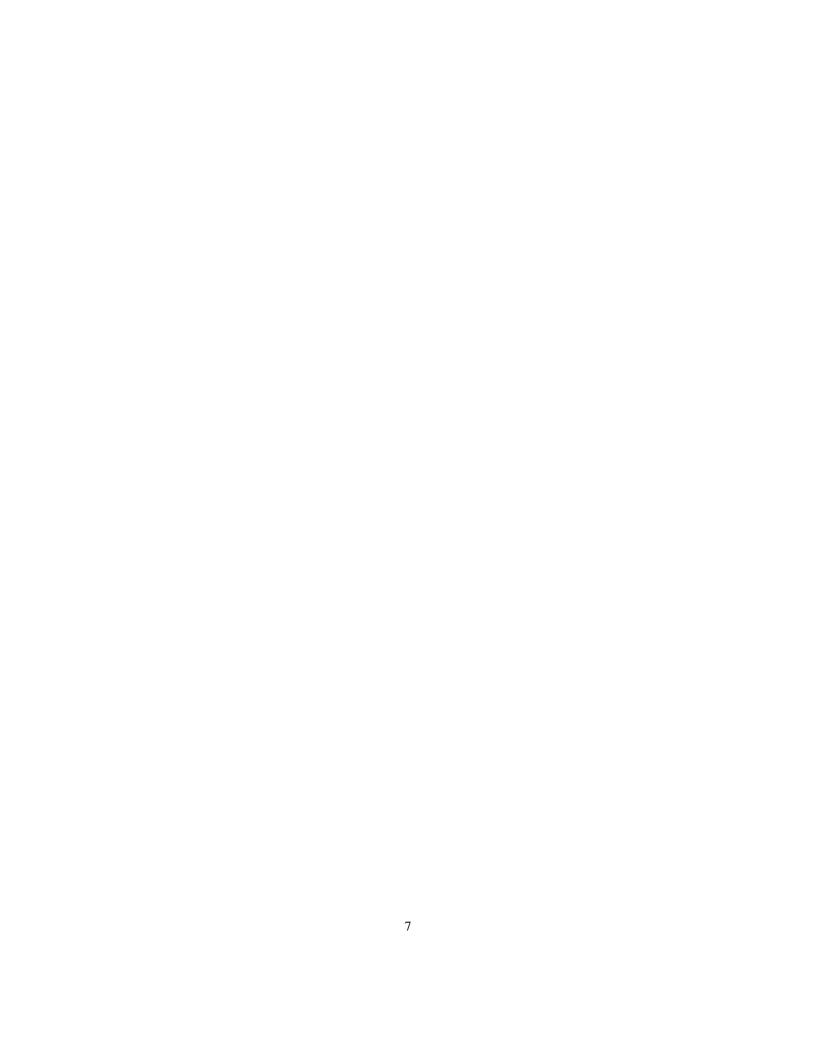
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"Creation order," for humanity from the beginning. This paradigm means that marriage cannot consist of the sexual union between a man and another man or a woman and another woman. This Creation pattern of marriage between a man and a woman remains the norm throughout Scripture. Any deviation from this heterosexual norm is portrayed by the biblical writers as a distortion of the Creation norm (Rom 1:24–27). The importance of male/female relationship in



status of the passive partner (alien, slave, foreigner), and/or cultic association."¹⁴ "The language is devastatingly untechnical, leaving no room for ambiguity."¹⁵

The Hebrew clause l o ' t "you shall notblie" is a negative particle followed by the qal imperfect, expressing a permanent negative command. The phrase mishkebeh ' i s'the dying of a woman" is clearly a euphemism for sexual intercourse (cf. the male equivalent of this passage in Judg 21:11–12). Thus this passage is a permanent prohibition of all sexual intercourse of a man with another male (zakar)



"abomination" ($t \circ estingular$) is the exact term used to describe homosexual practice in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.

Those who regard the sin of Sodom as non-sexual argue that the word "abomination" ($t \circ o$ ' o ib va 500 simply refers to the social injustice described in v. 49. However, a careful look at this passage²³ reveals that the term $t \circ o$ ' e 'abound nation" (singular) in v. 50 speaks of an

Homosexual Practice and the New Testament

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Jesus affirms the creation ideal of marriage between a man and a woman by quoting from Genesis 1:27 and 2:23: "But from the beginning of the creation, God made them *male* and *female*. For this reason a *man* shall leave his father and mother, and shall be joined to his *wife*, and the two [man and woman] shall become one flesh" (Mark 10:6–8; cf. Matt 19:5, emphasis supplied). Jesus' emphasis on the fact that "God made" this arrangement "from the beginning of creation," shows His acceptance of the prescriptive nature of the Creation texts, and affirms that heterosexual relations as divinely ordained in Genesis 1 and 2 remain normative in NT times.

Jesus' pronouncements against *porneia* (Matt 5:32; 15:19; 19:9; Mark 7:21), when viewed against the OT background, include same-sex intercourse as well as other heterosexual practices (Matt 10:15; 11:23–24; Mark 6:11; Luke 10:12; 17:29). The nature of *porneia* (without qualifiers) as used by Jesus and the various NT writers has been the subject of considerable debate, but the OT provides the key to its identification. Especially significant is its usage (again without qualifiers) in Acts 15:28–29, where, as we saw, intertextual allusions to Leviticus 17 and 18 are unmistakable.

Acts 15 lists four prohibitions for Gentile Christians given by the Jerusalem Council: "That you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality [porneia]" (v. 29). Particularly striking is that this is the same list, in the same order, as the four major legal prohibitions explicitly stated to be applicable to the stranger/alien as well as to native Israelites in Leviticus 17 and 18. These OT chapters forbid: (1) sacrificing to demons/idols (Lev 17:7–9); (2) eating blood (Lev 17:10–12); (3) eating anything that has not been immediately drained of its blood (Lev 17:13–16); and (4) various immoral sexual practices (Lev 18). In this clear case of intertextuality, the Jerusalem Council undoubtedly concluded that what should be prohibited to Gentile Christians were those very practices forbidden to the uncircumcised alien in Leviticus 17 and 18.

The parallel of the fourth prohibition in each passage is unambiguous: what Acts 15

Homosexual Practice and the Pauline Epistles

The apostle Paul specifically denounces homosexual lust and practice in three

Paul's concern in this passage is with the image of God according to Genesis Creation order, which humans have corrupted with idolatry and ensuing heterosexual and homosexual immoralities. Paul is distressed, because these departures from original design cannot reflect God's glory.

Romans includes language declaring that the relationships at issue are characterized by mutuality, rather than exploitation. The phrase "men . . . burned in their desire toward one another [a l l]" luses the Greek term a l l , which indicates a mutuality, a shared experience of desire. Moreover, the reference to "women exchang[ing] the natural function for that which is unnatural," also reveals a concern with elements beyond exploitation or dominance. Lesbian relationships were especially known in ancient times for their lack of hierarchy, domination, or prostitution. 32

promiscuous activity; nor is it restricted to pederasty. All homosexual activity is against the Creation order and against divine law and is, therefore, a sin that needs to be repented of, forgiven, and given up."³⁷

After surveying the evidence of both OT and NT, NT scholar Richard Hays summarizes well the biblical witness concerning homosexual practice:

Though only a few biblical texts speak of homoerotic activity, all that do mention it express unqualified disapproval. . . . The biblical witness against homosexual practices is univocal. . . . Scripture offers no loopholes or exception clauses that might allow for the acceptance of homosexual practices under some circumstances. Despite the efforts of some recent interpreters to explain away the evidence, the Bible remains unambiguous and univocal in its condemnation of homosexual conduct.³⁸

It should be emphasized, however, that the biblical materials condemn homosexual *practice*, but there is no castigation of innate homosexual *orientation* per se.

Second, Scripture condemns all forms of sexual immorality, whether homosexual or heterosexual. The anthropology set forth in

A Pastoral Approach to Distortions of the Edenic Ideal of Marriage in Light of the Grace of God

Throughout the Bible, God unequivocally upholds the Creation plan for male and female (Gen 1:26) and the ideal of marriage between a man and a woman (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:8). Divine judgment is pronounced against those who depart from this norm and that includes homosexual practice. These judgments are expressed against peoples and nations that do not have access to the oracles of God, and thus should be viewed as part of God's guidance for humanity generally and not just for the covenant community (Gen 18–19; Lev 18:24–30; Ezek 16:53–59; Jude 7). This means that Christians have a responsibility to underline in their witnessing the protection and promotion of the divinely instituted importance of heterosexual marriage and of motherhood and fatherhood to the raising and development of children. Such efforts should be made in the spirit of love and care for all members of the community, but we should resist, in the spirit of Christ, calls to give up on traditional marriage, which was instituted at Creation, as a vital pillar of social organization.

At the same time, the grace of God is revealed in the OT portrayals of these sexual and family distortions. Homosexual practice is presented as part of the Canaanite abominations condemned in Leviticus 18 and 20. Yet, these Canaanites, with their abominable practices, were given 400 years of probation (Gen 15:16), with many opportunities to learn of the true God and the universal standards of morality and holiness, and many did join God's covenant people. Witness also the grace of God to Sodom: Abraham was divinely directed to rescue Lot and the inhabitants of Sodom from the hands of the four invading kings (Gen 14) and possibly some of these rescued individuals were part of the crowd that attempted the homosexual rape at Lot's house (Gen 19). Furthermore, God would have spared the whole city, including the homosexual practitioners if there had been even ten righteous persons in Sodom (Gen 18:32).

According to Ezekiel 16, Judah had multiplied abominations more than Sodom (v. 51), including the abomination of homosexual practice. Just two chapters after the allegory of Ezekiel

³⁹ The Adventist Church has already recognized in a formal statement the propriety of church members and institutions acting to protect the civil institution of traditional marriage in a careful and compassionate manner. "While Seventh-day Adventist institutions and members may appropriately advocate for preserving the unique and God-given institution of heterosexual marriage in their societies and legal codes, it is the position of the Church to treat those practicing homosexual or alternative sexual behaviors with the redemptive love taught and lived by Jesus." From "Responding to Changing Cultural Attitudes Regarding Homosexual and Other Alternative Sexual Practices" voted Spring Meeting 2014. Cited on September 30, 2015. Online: https://www.adventist.org/en/%20information/official-statements/guidelines/article/go/0/responding-to-changiiad individuals were7211 9.96 Tf1 0 0 1 224.81 ho6(a)

We stand against any antipathy toward homosexuals as well as any cultural biases that fuel a lack of Christ-like love toward them. These kinds of attitudes need to be repented of and the Church needs to provide more intentional ministries directed toward gay and lesbian persons (Matt 9:13; John 3:17). We should be aware of how easily we might fa299.93 6676(tt)-3(9:13;)-3(J)-10(ohn (n

What distinguishes Christians is the quality of love they extend, without partiality, to everyon						

who are unjust won't inherit God's kingdom? Don't be deceived. Those who are sexually immoral, those who worship false gods, adulterers, both participants in same-sex intercourse, thieves, the greedy, drunks, abusive people, and swindlers won't inherit God's kingdom. That is what some of you used to be! But you were washed clean, you were made holy to God, and you were made right with God in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:9–11, Common English Bible).

When the Church denounces sin both within the Church and in secular society, it must do so with caution and humility. "Christ sometimes reproved with severity, and in some cases it may be necessary for us to do so; but we should consider that while Christ knew the exact condition of the ones he rebuked, and just the amount of reproof they could bear, and what was necessary to correct their course of wrong, he also knew just how to pity the erring, comfort the unfortunate, and encourage the weak. He knew just how to keep souls from despondency and to

Holy Spirit and that we are not our own but bought with a price. Therefore we must glorify God in our bodies (1 Cor 6:19–20; 10:31). Because our bodies belong to God, we may not do with them as we please. Rather, we must be conformed to the image of the Son of God (Rom 8:29). This call to holiness is extended to all of Christ's followers. It is the contention of this document that such holiness is possible only when we use our bodies in conformity with God's creation ideal for which we were created as male and female. We prayerfully release this document in the hope that through its service many who struggle with their sexuality will come to embrace the divine ideal of holiness and sexual purity as their Christian calling. May our gracious God give us His Spirit (Ezek 36:25–27; Rom 8:4, 14), who provides victory over sin and power to live in harmony with His will through our Lord Jesus Christ.