

Homosexuality From a Theological Perspective

Part Two, Paper One, Question #9

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Question I am answering regarding Homosexuality in the Church

At an inter-church conference of lay leaders for your denomination, a discussion of human sexuality leads to the public acknowledgment of a homosexual life style by a staff member from a church in another city. You were impressed by the mature and thoughtful way in which the group handled this revelation, but could not hold back your own opinion that homosexuality was a fundamental disorder when considered from the perspective of God's creation of humanity as male and female. The response was gentle but firm: "I have no other nature than an orientation to members of my own sex. I think that you are reflecting typical cultural patterns of hostility toward the homosexual person, which even the Bible contains, rather than truth based upon divine revelation." You had no immediate response to this, but could not shake the discussion from your mind. After returning home, you decide to write this person a letter and explain more fully what your views are on the subject after studying more thoroughly the issue from a theological perspective.

John, I have been thinking a lot about our conversation the other night after you acknowledged your homosexuality to our church group. Your comments caused me to go back and look more thoroughly at what the Bible does have to say about homosexuality. In an effort to better understand God and his word, I would like to take this opportunity to share with you more fully my current understanding of what God reveals in the Bible about homosexuality and human sexuality in general. John, as we explore the important matter together, I pray that we both can keep an opened heart and mind as we strive to understand God's desire for our lives.

In order to provide a context for my statements in this letter, please allow me to review some of our conversation from the other night. You seemed to acknowledge that you are aware of the few Bible texts, both in the Old Testament and the New, that so clearly condemn the practice of homosexuality. Verses such as Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, Romans 1:24-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9, and 1 Timothy 1:10 make it very clear that the unambiguous statements of the Bible forbid homosexual acts. Yet you said that you understood these Biblical texts as merely reflecting typical cultural patterns of hostility toward the homosexual person as opposed to revealing some truth based on divine revelation. It is this statement that I would mainly like to address in this letter.

Even if we set aside these clear statements and assume for the sake of argument that they merely reflect cultural biases,ⁱ I would like to submit to you that by examining the Bible's account of creation we do see a divine revelation of God's intention for humankind.ⁱⁱ Unlike many non-Biblical ancient myths that merely try to describe how things came to be as they presently exist, the account of creation recorded in the Bible contains a revelation of God's view of the created order of things.ⁱⁱⁱ It reveals how God intends for his creation to function.

The Bible reveals that humans are unique among all of creation in the fact that they were created in the very image of God. This is stated very clearly in Genesis 1:27 and 5:1. What is

striking about these two passages that describe the fundamental essence and meaning of humankind, is that in the same breath describing ‘human’ as the ‘image of God’, both passages also call them ‘male and female’.^{iv} The distinction of being male and female, and yet being joined together as one, is in some way fundamentally related to humans expressing the very image of God. Thus, human sexuality is a foundational and essential aspect of being a human person; it is intrinsic to the differentiation of all humans. This takes sexuality out of the category of race, ethnic origin, cultural practices, or social status.^v Cutting across all these other differences, there is still the fact that a person must by nature be either male or female; this is the one universal and intrinsic differentiator of all humans.

The other chapter of the Bible that reveals God’s intention in the creation of humankind is Genesis 2. Here the Bible reveals more directly the purpose and proper context for marriage and sexual relationships. Genesis 2:22-24 shows how God formed the woman from the very bone taken out of the man. It then states that ‘for this reason’ a man and woman should be joined together in marriage and thus ‘become one flesh’. It is significant that it was not another man that came from the rib of Adam, but it was a woman, showing the correspondence and union between male and female.^{vi} Furthermore, even physiologically it would be impossible for two males or two females to be joined together as ‘one flesh’ as is clearly intended for a man and a woman.

Moreover, Genesis 1:27-28 indicates that part of the intention for humans being male and female is for reproducing and filling the earth with creatures that represent God’s image. Mating and reproduction is clearly one of the reasons for humans being male and female. Now, one could argue that not every human being is able to reproduce and that not every instance of a marriage relationship between a man and a woman results in reproduction, and this would of course be true. However, it would be illogical to deny altogether that mating and reproducing is in anyway associated with our human sexuality.^{vii}

Because human sexuality is intrinsic to the created order of humanity, any kind of sexual behavior that does not uphold this fundamental order is not in keeping with God's intention in creation. The only relationship that properly portrays the order of God's creation, and the fundamental meaning of humankind to reflect the image of God, is that of a monogamous, lifelong, heterosexual marriage. Any sexual behavior outside of this context is a perversion of God's created order and is therefore dehumanizing. Just as destructive or demeaning actions that take place within a heterosexual marriage relationship should be condemned as dehumanizing,^{viii} so should any sort of homosexual relations. Homosexual behavior portrays a complete distortion of God's created order to reproduce and to express God's image as male and female. When humans engage in homosexual activity, it is a clear sign that they have rejected the Creator's design and intention.^{ix}

John, during our discussion the other night, you also mentioned that you had no other orientation than to members of your own sex. I can't argue with what you feel is true about yourself and your own feelings. However, after having discussed what God's intention is for us as humans, we must now ask ourselves what we will do with that knowledge. We are all moral agents that were born with certain tendencies biologically and have other propensities based on the environment in which we were raised. None of us are subhuman robots; we know what we *want* to do, based on our physical desires, but we must ask ourselves, "Is that what we *should* do?"^x None of us has a choice as to how we were born or raised, but all of us have a choice and responsibility as to what we do with our lives. As humans we don't have an absolute right to do everything our instincts dictate to us. But rather to be human is to bring our nature into the service of what it means to be human, which is the formation of the image of God in relationship with others.^{xi}

I know it may seem tragic not to be able to live and act how you feel regarding yourself. However, in light of understanding God’s design for humankind, I ask you to honestly answer the question as to whether you feel satisfied with who and where you are in life. I am convinced that the Bible reveals that as humans created for God and his image, we can ultimately only be satisfied when we are living according to his created order. As we honor God’s intention and proper order for our lives, we can trust him to “supply all our need according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”^{xii} For indeed, God says concerning the order he brought about in creation, “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.”^{xiii}

Selected Bibliography

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ENDNOTES

ⁱ It seems contrary to the effectiveness of this letter to try to argue that studies concerning the Biblical statements prohibiting homosexuality do not in fact seem to support the theory that they merely reflect a cultural bias against homosexuality. In fact William Webb says, “the prohibitions against homosexuality within Scripture often carry a countercultural purpose in relationship to society. ... The purpose is so that Israel's practices, in contrast to the practices of the surrounding cultures, would be acceptable to Yahweh.” William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001) 109-110. Furthermore, Webb also points out the transcultural aspect of homosexual prohibitions. He says, “With very few exceptions, almost all of the items in the vice and virtue lists would be considered issues that retain an ongoing status. In view of the repeated inclusion of homosexuality with the vice lists, the case for not accepting homosexuality in general for today is extremely strong.” William J. Webb, 196.

ⁱⁱ Anderson concurs with this by stating, “If there were not a single text in the Bible which mentions homosexuality, there would still be a basis to discuss the ethical aspects of homosexuality in the biblical doctrine of the image of God as a created order of personal being, expressed through the biological differentiation of male and female, male or female.” Ray Anderson, *ST512 Expanded Course Syllabus* (Fuller Theological Seminary) 64-65.

ⁱⁱⁱ Victor Furnish tries to make the account of creation in Genesis 1-3 irrelevant as far as having anything to say regarding homosexuality being a perversion of the created order by arguing that “This is an ‘aetiological’ account, told in order to explain why things are as they are, not to prescribe what people ought to do.” Victor Paul Furnish, “The Bible and Homosexuality: Reading the Texts in Context”, Jeffery S. Siker, ed., *Homosexuality in the Church*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994) 21.

^{iv} Karl Barth argues this point very strongly when he says, “Could anything be more obvious than to conclude from this clear indication that the image and likeness of the being created by God signifies existence in confrontation, i.e., in the juxtaposition and conjunction of man and man which is that of male and female, ...” Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. III/1, p. 195, quoted in Ray Anderson, *ST512 Expanded Course Syllabus*, 36. Lisa Cahill also argues for this view: “In all three creation accounts (chaps. 1, 2, 5) humanity is constituted male and female, so that sexual differentiation is definitive of humanity from the beginning.” Lisa Sowle Cahill, “Homosexuality: A Case Study in Moral Argument”, Jeffery S. Siker, ed., *Homosexuality in the Church*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994) 66. Although Furnish disagrees with this: “It is sometimes argued that the creation accounts present heterosexuality as intrinsic to the created order ... and at least part of what it means to have been created in the image of God. ... The texts themselves, however, do not support this interpretation.” Victor Paul Furnish, 22-23. However, the Hebrew text makes it very clear that being created in the ‘image of God’ is very closely bound to being ‘male and female’. In both Genesis 1:27 and 5:1, there is no vav-consecutive between these two statements as is normal for a narrative account like this. Every other phrase is separated by a vav-consecutive, but not the ones that tie ‘image of God’ with ‘male and female’. This indicates that the fact of humans being male and female is not a further statement about creation, but intimately ties human sexuality to the image and likeness of God. Cf. also Ray Anderson, *On Being Human*, (Pasadena: Fuller Seminary Press, 1982) 64-65.

^v Cf. Ray Anderson, *ST512 Expanded Course Syllabus*, 63.

^{vi} Cf. Ray Anderson, *On Being Human*, 114.

^{vii} Cf. Ray Anderson, *On Being Human*, 106-107. Cf. also William J. Webb, 131.

^{viii} Cf. Ray Anderson, *On Being Human*, 126.

^{ix} In comments regarding Romans 1:24-27, Richard Hays states, “God the creator made man a woman for each other, to cleave together, to be fruitful and multiply. When human beings engage in homosexual activity, they enact an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual reality: the rejection of the Creator’s design. They *embody* the spiritual condition of those who have ‘exchanged the truth about God for a lie.’” Richard B. Hays, “Awaiting the Redemption of Our Bodies: The Witness of Scripture Concerning Homosexuality”, Jeffery S. Siker, ed., *Homosexuality in the Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994) 8.

^x Cf. Stanton L. Jones, “Homosexuality: The Behavioral Sciences and the Church”. Jeffery S. Siker, ed. *Homosexuality in the Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994) 108-109.

^{xi} Cf. Spoken lecture from Ray Anderson, ST512 – Theological Anthropology, *Lesson 14 – Issues of Human Sexuality* (Pasadena: Fuller Theological Seminary, Academic Technology Center).

^{xii} Philippians 4:19. The New American Standard Bible NASB, Copyright 1995, by The Lockman Foundation. All rights reserved.

^{xiii} Genesis 1:31. New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission. All rights reserved.