

ABSTRACT

Evangelicals, Gay Persons, and Hospitality

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This project addressed how the evangelical Church can maintain biblical and theological integrity while showing intentional hospitality to gay persons. The qualitative research occurred in two phases. The first phase involved a survey of evangelical pastors ascertaining their church's practices and attitudes toward welcoming gay persons into their churches. The second phase involved an intervention with a sample group of lay persons at First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, to test a framework by which an evangelical Church might offer hospitality to gay persons. This included an initial assessment of their pre-existing attitudes, a course of study, individual interviews and a post-study assessment.

Evangelicals, Gay Persons, and Hospitality

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CHAPTER ONE

An Introduction to the Project

The face of struggle for gay persons and faith came to me at T.J.'s Deli in Winston-Salem, North Carolina in 1991, my senior year of college. I was having dinner with D., a friend since our freshman year and fellow officer of the Baptist Student Union [BSU] at Wake Forest University. We met somewhat regularly to plan our weekly worship services at the BSU. This was a more informal meal. As we began to eat, he said he had something he needed to share with me. His hands began to visibly tremble. His face went ashen. He fidgeted and looked away as if to find some distraction from the immediacy of the moment. Mustering his composure, he finally said, "I'm gay." He then looked at me anticipating some response. Did he expect me to scream at him? Did he expect me to get up from my meal disgusted and walk out? Did he expect me to condemn him? By the time D. had confessed this to me, he had endured each of these responses from former friends. I did none of these. I thanked him for his courage in sharing this; I affirmed our friendship; I may have told him I would pray for him. We remained friends.

I knew personally then as I know today that the church, my church, lacks a great response to confessions of this type. D. knew this at a far more visceral level than I do or ever will. Certainly he is not alone. I think of G. who my wife and I became friends with in seminary. He came out during this time, confiding in my wife first and later in me. By this time my response had undergone some polish. I replied to his confession saying, "Theologically, I wish you weren't. But we are friends and will always be friends." I think of T. who I had the privilege of pastoring for a decade. He shared his profound

loneliness, his desire to have a family and deep regret that his faith would never condone lifestyle. I can continue with similar experiences. Many can.

But experience, even based on emotionally charged episodes as these, does not make for sound theology. I have firm convictions as to the biblical witness on homosexuality: homosexual behavior is outside God's will. Christianity has had one voice on this from its inception, excepting the past three decades of North American Protestant Christianity. The prohibition of homosexual behavior precedes Christianity, extending to Judaic roots by millennia. Biblically and theologically, there is no basis to affirm homosexual behavior.

I also know in my deepest soul that D., G., and T., as well as others have all prayed earnest prayers to God. I have witnessed the ways in which each loves Jesus. I have seen each serve others from a place of sacrificial love following Christ. They believe in forgiveness, the power of redemption, righteousness and grace. In some ways, their understanding of those words may go to a far greater depth than my own.

Paul says in Romans 3:23¹: *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* He writes in like sentiment in Romans 7:19-20: *For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.* We all sin, believers and non-believers. I have had the blessing to grow in my discipleship within a faith community that accepted me as a sinner while encouraging my progressive sanctification. The church welcomed me before I became a believer; once having accepted Christ as my personal savior, it helped to form me. My local congregation admonished me, challenged

1. Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations come from the New International Version.

me and encouraged me. They wanted more for me; they wanted me to become more Christ-like.

What about gay persons? Do they have in like manner an invitation into the church? Does the church show gay persons hospitality so as to foster a climate of transformation whereby they may encounter Jesus and grow in holiness to become Christ-like?

Our baptisms are eschatological cures for our sinfulness but they are not ontic cures for our transgressions. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ justified believers before God. The road to becoming Christ-like still lies in front of believers. Post-baptism, I have sinful struggles. And these believing gay Christians have their sinful struggles. I am blessed in that my own battles are not fought publicly, which is not the case for most gay persons. Whether owing to Puritanical roots or other reasons, sexual sins garner more public derision and castigation than other sins.² Homosexual sins take this to a higher power across pulpits in America, tragically. Evangelicals must fight against a perception—often deserved—that the church at worst damns gay persons and at best ignores them.

2. David Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 236-238. 1 Corinthians 6:18 delineates sexual sins from other sins. David Garland offers interpretations of this verse to explain Paul's setting apart sexual sins from other transgressions. One concerns the qualitative difference between sexual sins and other sins. Sexual sin inflicts more harm upon the sexual sinner than does other sin upon that transgressor. The sexual harm includes physical, psychological and spiritual effects.

Another interpretation notes a qualitative difference between sexual and non-sexual sins. Sexual sin leaves a lasting effect upon the person. This effect is both spiritual and personal. Joining the body into a physically sinful union damages that person's spiritual union with Christ. Sexual sin also damages personal relationships through objectification of others and the reflective objectification of the self.

A third interpretation disassociates sexual sin because of the unique nature of sexual union and intimate physical contact. While gluttony and drunkenness harm the physical body, sexual sin unites the body in an offensive way with sin above and beyond the ways that food and alcohol may corrupt the body. Sexual union involves a greater degree of intimacy and connection than do other sins. The misuse of this uniting is therefore a greater offense.

Many evangelical churches have succumbed to this pit due to a failure to articulate a theology of singlehood and a theology of sexuality. The idol of family has in many pulpits replaced the demands of the Triune God, including an advocacy, acceptance and affirmation of singleness (1 Corinthians 7:8). Our churches have so promoted the idea that there is a man for every woman and a woman for every man that we do not know what to do with singles, other than to try to get them married. This anthropology has provided fuel for divorce and remarriage, which the church has come to accept because it can do little else. Without a theology that properly articulates sexual practice, without a theology that views singleness as a viable and divinely ordained alternative to marriage, then the church cannot speak with theological adequacy to gay persons.

And yet, the witness of Jesus Christ and my evangelical nature tell me that the church is the place in which to hear of the good news, repent and receive forgiveness; thereafter we seek to live in the grace of God. This path applies to gay individuals as it applies to all individuals. However, few Bible-believing churches welcome gay persons into their midst. For all of our evangelical talk of liberation from sin, some have not only failed to declare the Gospel to gay persons but openly fomented hostility towards them. Jesus welcomed sinners into his arms; many of his followers have pushed these sinners away from church doors. This must change both for the sake of those struggling with gay attraction and for the sake of the new community which Acts 2 ushered forth on Pentecost two millennia ago.

There are some churches which no longer view sexual behavior as sinful. Whether through a myopic reading of scripture, a hermeneutic of progressive revelation allowing each reader to dismiss untenable and challenging portions of the Bible, a

rejection of Jewish and Christian tradition, or simply as penitent guilt for Christian sins against gay persons, some churches and denominations affirm homosexual behavior. Rather than preach transformation, their Gospel is reduced to inclusion, tolerance and stasis. Their Gospel amounts to “come and remain as you are” rather than Jesus’ proclamation to *repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near* (Matthew 3:2).

I view this “welcoming and affirming” approach not as healing but rather as compounding the pain of gay persons. Jesus did not open wide His arms so that His embrace would instantiate us as we are. Jesus embraced us that we might be forever changed and molded into His followers. The Gospel is about new life, not a continuation of our old lives. When Jesus calls us into community, He calls us to transformation. This redemptive metamorphosis works toward healing our mental, emotional, spiritual, physical and sexual selves.

We are left with an acute dilemma. The church easily welcomes sinners of other stripes into its midst. And yet, this issue confounds twenty-first century evangelical congregations. How can a community with an identity based in Scripture welcome those whose behavior contradicts the norms of that community? How is hospitality extended to gay persons in truth and grace? What are the core elements, possibilities, and limits of hospitality? How are evangelical churches showing this hospitality to gay persons?

Chapter 2 will lay out a biblical and theological understanding of homosexuality according to Scripture, including an exegesis of Mark 10:1-12 in which Jesus affirms marriage as between a man and a woman. It will then define Christian hospitality through an examination of Elizabeth Newman’s *Untamed Hospitality*. Finally, this chapter will present a picture of church hospitality by utilizing Miroslav Volf’s *Exclusion and*

Embrace, and his idea of porous boundaries. Porous boundaries allow for outsiders to enter an identifiable community while providing for a community to add new people to itself. The porous nature enables others to join the group while the boundaries provide coherence of the group around an identity.

Chapter 3 will present the collection practices for qualitative data in two parts. The first concerns a survey of American Baptist churches from the ABCOFLASH region³ concerning best practices for how some of these evangelical churches are welcoming gay persons. The second collection practice will cover an intervention with a group of parishioners at First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona—an ABCOFLASH congregation—on a curriculum based on the conceptual framework in Chapter 2.

Chapter 4 will offer results from both instances of data collection beginning with the survey and concluding with the congregational intervention. This chapter will consist of raw results and analysis. Chapter 5 will offer conclusions resulting from the data and ultimately assess the viability and practical application of the project overall.

A word about terminology is warranted. I choose to use the phrase *gay persons* when referring to people with same-sex attraction and/or people who engage in same-sex behavior. Many gay persons view the term *homosexual* as an impersonal and dehumanizing slur. Some of this is due to the impersonal nature of labels. Some is due to how these terms have been applied and appropriated by society and the church.⁴ I will use the term *homosexual* to describe same-sex attraction and/or same-sex behavior in a general sense.

3. American Baptist Churches of Los Angeles, the Southwest and Hawaii.

4. Gregory Coles, *Single Gay Christian: A Personal Journey of Faith and Sexual Identity* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP, 2017), 69-70.

CHAPTER TWO

Transformation and Hospitality

God calls believers in Jesus Christ to share the Good News of Jesus Christ to others (Matthew 28:19-20). Followers of Jesus share this message with words of truth and deeds of welcome. Regarding words of truth, what does the Bible say about homosexuality? Regarding deeds of welcome, what does the Bible say about hospitality? May a Christian stance on homosexuality and hospitality co-exist and mutually edify one another? This chapter will endeavor to answer these questions in the affirmative from the perspective and edification of the evangelical church.

The Bible and Gay Persons

What makes a church evangelical? For the purpose of this project, I will appropriate the qualities that Thomas E. Schmidt identified in his book *Straight and Narrow: Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate*.¹ They are stated as follows. First, evangelical churches identify Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Word incarnate, the only and final atoning sacrifice for the sins of humanity (1 John 2:2). Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega (Revelation 22:13), the Lamb of God (John 1:29), the Resurrection and the Life (John 1:29).

Second, the Bible has final authority over theology and practice for believers. The Bible is revealed and therefore supersedes reason, tradition and experience.²

1. Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight & Narrow? Compassion & Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 1995), 17.

2. Ibid., 18-20.

Furthermore, the hermeneutical task of interpretation rests upon the text of Scripture itself. Readers necessarily bring their own subjectivity to the text; however, the text itself offers a message that confronts and challenges readers. We encounter a voice other than our own. Related to this, the Bible's revelation is normative for human behavior. God's Word transcends societal norms. Contemporary ethics and changes in cultural values do not determine the relevance of the Bible; rather, the Bible determines the relevance of ethics and values. Continuing, the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21). Transmission came through human agents; the Bible did not drop down from heaven in final form. And yet, God's Word is a unified revelation: Scripture directs readers—and hearers—toward God and the story of God dealing with God's creation from Adam and Eve through the early church. The message of the Bible has coherence and relevance. The Bible testifies to Jesus Christ and presents his Good News to those seeking salvation as well as a path for those seeking to live as disciples of the Son of God. As John Webster states: "To say that Holy Scripture is the authoritative canon is to say that this determinate collection of writings, received and read as a unified God-given prophetic and apostolic testimony, legitimately claims the acknowledgement, assent and obedience of the church and its theology."³

The question of biblical authority relates to this project in the following ways. If one accepts the Bible as normative, then one's understanding of homosexuality will have basis in the Bible [for exegesis on the Bible and homosexuality, see Appendix A]. If one accepts that hospitality is a biblical mandate, then one will display Christian hospitality to others. The evangelical church does not arrive at a position on homosexuality or

3. John Webster, *Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 19.

hospitality through a study of situational ethics or focus groups; rather, Christians are to abide by God's Word as revelation (2 Timothy 3:16).

Third, evangelical churches believe that creation falls under both the benevolent providence and judgment of God.⁴ God is active in the world and not simply through the work of God's followers. However, the world is not at present the Kingdom of God, which the Bible presents as a place and time of harmony and righteousness. The work of God continues to bring light to the nations (Isaiah 51:4).

Finally, evangelical churches believe that all people need to hear the Good News of Jesus, accept the free offer of salvation, and seek to live as disciples (Mark 16:15).⁵ Evangelical churches accept the privilege and responsibility of directing others to Jesus through invitation and witness in word and deed. The church must reach outsiders with the Gospel however necessary in order to share the message of Christ. The mission of evangelical churches is therefore two-fold: to form disciples within the faith community and to lead those outside the church into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

This is not an exhaustive outline; seeking to characterize and categorize evangelical churches would be a project in and of itself. However, for the purpose of this project, these points are salient: Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior (Romans 10:9); the Bible is the revealed Word of God and has authority over the followers of Jesus (1 Thessalonians 2:13); everyone needs the redemptive power of Jesus in their lives (Romans 6:23); and the church has a mission to spread the Good News of Jesus to others (Psalms 96:3).

4. Schmidt, *Straight & Narrow?*, 21.

5. *Ibid.*, 21-22.

I will not endeavor to rehash the myriad of works that exegete the Bible on the issue of homosexuality, particularly the most direct verses.⁶ For the best exegetical examples of these verses, see Appendix A. Rather, I here assume the plain reading of the Scripture that is in line with two millennia of Christian tradition and its far older Jewish roots. The summary of this general understanding follows.

The biblical position on homosexual behavior is clear and without condition—homosexual behavior is immoral, prohibited and sinful.⁷ This stance goes back to the origins of Judaism in its universal rejection of homosexual practice. Within the Holiness Code of Leviticus, homosexual behavior is considered a greater sin than incest and adultery and only exceeded in its degree of sinfulness by bestiality.⁸ The Old Testament was not ambiguous in its denunciation of homosexuality (Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13).

For the New Testament homosexual behavior remains under the rubric of sexual sins. Both male-male relations and female-female relations are considered sinful and offensive to God while also dangerous to the faith community (Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10).⁹ While Jesus did not explicitly comment upon homosexuality, his other comments upon sexuality illustrate a very strict view on sexual

6. These are Genesis 19:1-29, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10.

7. Preston Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved: Why Homosexuality is Not Just an Issue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 70. See also Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002); Stanley Grenz, *Welcoming But Not Affirming* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998); and Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996).

8. Robert Gagnon and Dan Via, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 48.

9. Luke Timothy Johnson, “Disputed Questions: Debate and Discernment, Scripture and Spirit,” *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Eugene Rogers (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 370.

holiness. Preston Sprinkle argues that within the Jewish rabbinic tradition surrounding first century Judaism, Jesus favored the stringent sexual ethics of Shammai over the more liberal understanding of Hillel.¹⁰ As homosexuality was considered a gentile practice, neither rabbi commented upon homosexuality per se. In other sexual matters, the schools of Hillel and Shammai offer some diversity in the sexual and marital comportment of first century Judaism. Hillel allowed for a husband to divorce a wife for a multitude of reasons including the wife being a poor cook. Shammai only allowed for divorce in the event of the wife's infidelity. Shammai's school taught an unpermissive and rigid understanding of sexual conduct. Jesus' strong statements regarding divorce (Matthew 19:1-12), adultery (John 8:1-11) and co-habitation (John 4:1-18) evidence a strict sexual ethic.

Paul's direct comments on homosexual practice leave no doubt as to his position: homosexual behavior is sinful (Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10).¹¹ Some scholars have argued that orientation, either heterosexual or homosexual, was a foreign concept in the first century and thus Paul's point lacks force against the enlightened understanding now available to twenty-first century congregants. Neither Paul nor the Levitical Holiness Code address orientation specifically; they only address homosexual behavior.¹² Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 denounce homosexual actions; they do not address inner desire or attitudes of attraction that may lead to homosexual actions. Paul also focuses on homosexual practice in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10. The

10. Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved*, 73.

11. Robert Song, *Covenant and Calling: Towards a Theology of Same-Sex Relationships* (London: SCM Press, 2014), 71.

12. Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 462.

lone possible exception to this is Paul's writing in Romans 1:26-27; for more on this, see Appendix A. Homosexual orientation is neither condemned nor affirmed within the Bible. However, evidence exists that orientation was a concept in New Testament times.¹³ Aristotle references homoerotic desires as being both acquired and inborn.¹⁴ Soranus, a contemporary of Paul, argued that homosexual orientation was a product of biology more so than environment in *De Morbis Chronicis*.¹⁵ The concept of homosexual orientation was not a foreign concept in Paul's day. Regardless, Paul's reasoning for rejecting homosexual behavior does not stand upon an understanding of orientation or sexual identity; thus, the notion of orientation would have had no impact upon his denunciation of homosexual behavior.¹⁶

Other arguments have emerged regarding the applicability of the Bible's witness on homosexuality. Would the existence of monogamous, faithful, committed gay relationships have an effect upon the force of the biblical witness against homosexual practice? A number of writers argue that a union of two committed partners mirrors covenantal theology making the genders of those partners superfluous.¹⁷ God and Israel

13. Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved*, 60.

14. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co. Inc., 2014), 120.

15. Thomas K. Hubbard, *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook of Basic Documents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 463.

16. William Loader, *The New Testament on Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 324.

17. See James Brownson, *Bible Gender Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013); Victor Furnish, *The Moral Teaching of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009); Justin Lee, *Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays vs. Christians Debate* (Nashville: Jericho Books, 2013); Song, *Covenant and Calling*; Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* (New York: Convergent Books, 2015); and Ken Wilson, *A Letter to My Congregation* (Canton, MI: Read the Spirit Books, 2014).

voluntarily entered into a covenant based upon mutual love and faithfulness (Deuteronomy 29). Marriage exhibits this mutual faithfulness. Biblical statements regarding homosexuality are pointed toward wanton sexual experiences outside of a monogamous, committed relationship, so the argument goes. This argument presupposes that homosexual monogamous relationships did not exist during biblical times, or at least were kept in secret. Evidence does not back this presupposition; in antiquity, monogamous gay relationships existed openly and publicly.¹⁸ Gagnon says “moving statements about the compassionate and beautiful character of same-sex love can be found in Greco-Roman literature.” Plato’s *Symposium* (178C-180B) and Plutarch’s *Dialogue on Love* (750B-751B and 752B-C) are but two examples.¹⁹ While it is true that Scripture does not explicitly mention monogamous homosexual relationships, this lack of qualification does not undercut the force of the biblical prohibition. Rather, Scripture’s lack of qualifications provides further evidence that the Biblical prohibitions on homosexual behavior are unconditional.

Robert Song argues that sex within a relationship gains meaning from the relationship surrounding it; therefore, a committed and monogamous gay relationship in covenant and fidelity may provide a witness to God’s fidelity and love resulting in a similar conclusion, though different form, to a committed and monogamous heterosexual marriage.²⁰ He argues that the relationship defines the physical intimacy of the partners

18. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 350.

19. Plato, “Symposium,” in *Plato: Collected Dialogues*, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989), 533-534. Plutarch, “Dialogue on Love,” *On Love, the Family and the Good Life: Selected Essays of Plutarch*, edited by Moses Hadas (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1957), 307-308.

20. Song, *Covenant and Calling*, 58.

and not vice versa. The quality of the relationship matters more than the type of genital contact.

Utilizing Song's reasoning then, would not other types of marriage also warrant a divine seal of approval? If the criteria were only commitment and fidelity within the marriage, then couldn't incestuous marriage with the prerequisites of fidelity and covenant witness to the glory of God? Would Song's standard also apply to polygamous marriages, so long as the members of those marriages remained in covenant with all other members of that marriage? Having established the validity of marriage as commitment and fidelity within the marriage, Song is left with these logical conclusions. Song does not argue this; nor am I aware of other advocates of homosexual marriage arguing the merits of polygamy or incestuous marriages. But the applicability of polygamy and incest as extensions of Song's thought undercut his argument.

Scripture does not qualify its prohibition against homosexual behavior, including those based upon commitment and fidelity. Marriage, according to Scripture, involves more than just commitment and fidelity within the marriage (Ephesians 5:22-33). What is additionally required for a marriage to be biblical? A number of scholars argue that God sets forth a gender pattern for marriage in Genesis 1:27: *So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them* [NRSV]. Marriage is a covenant in fidelity involving a male and a female. God purposefully created humanity in two gender types; those gender types are anatomically complementary. The rest of Scripture assumes this male/female pattern in marriage as this criterion appears in both the Old Testament and the New Testament (Hosea, Song of

Songs, Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3.18-19). The Bible takes for granted that uniting in marriage occurs only between male and female genders.²¹

Jesus Himself assumes the male-female archetype in Mark 10:6-9: *⁶ But from the beginning of creation 'God made them male and female.'* ⁷ *'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife,* ⁸ *and the two shall become one flesh.'* ⁹ *Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate* [NRSV]. These verses occur within the larger context of a section on discipleship (8:22-10:52) within a passage on the lawfulness of divorce (Mark 10:1-12). The Pharisees ask Jesus to specify when divorce is lawful. While the questioners begin with a Mosaic decree on divorce, Jesus moves the question from what is permissible for divorce to what God intended with marriage. He quotes from Genesis 1:27, specifically the gendering of humanity, to state that marriage is between a male and a female. Jesus continues with a quote from Genesis 2:24 detailing the beginning of marriage as the occasion when a man and woman come together as “one flesh.” Jesus stands within the Jewish tradition’s definition of marriage as one male and one female to the exclusion of all other definitions.

Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 provide a marriage gender pattern for Jewish and subsequent Christian enactment. The male and female gender differences allow for complement, fit and the sharing of resources between a husband and wife.²² This match builds up both partners making the couple greater than the sum of its parts. The

21. Brownson, *Bible Gender Sexuality*, 108.

22. Terence Fretheim, “The Book of Genesis,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, Volume 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 345.

distinctions include anatomical and biological differences that allow for the possibility of procreation. The gender differences present in creation, per the Genesis passages, reflect the purpose and intent of the Creator.²³ Judaism and Christianity framed marriage based upon the theology found in the creation narratives of ancient Israel. More than happenstance or tradition, the Bible posits marriage as exclusive to a man and a woman.

Is this gender difference--this anatomical matching--solely for procreative reasons? Victor Hamilton argues from the Genesis verses that it is not; the ability to procreate is not the sole goal of marriage.²⁴ Obviously, procreation cannot happen without the involvement of a male and a female. However, per the Genesis accounts, marriage involves the forsaking of one family to create a new family—one without offspring at its inception. Becoming a new family entails more than a sexual experience with the potential for biological reproduction. The new couple in covenant journey through life hand-in-hand as a unit. One flesh implies that the man and the woman have taken on new self-understandings and a new unified identity.²⁵ This fundamentally shifts the prior perspectives of the man and the woman when each was single. The new husband and wife move from self-centered individual foci to a singular vantage point. This change in outlook and decision-making happens prior to, and includes the subsequent decision about, the conception of additional members of the family.

23. Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Interpretation Series (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 33.

24. Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1990), 181.

25. Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis," 354.

Jesus' words in Mark 10 allude to a complementarity within the purpose of creation for marriage.²⁶ The Creator's design included a gender fit; Jesus builds his response to his questioners on this understanding. God fashioned the masculine and feminine genders for his glory and for the benefit of one another in marriage. God created humans as male and female with the intention of uniting physically, emotionally, and spiritually in marriage.

A point of clarification is necessary. I do not use gender and sexuality as synonyms. Gender signifies cultural and societal characteristics and roles of the masculine and feminine categories. Sexuality refers to anatomical and biological differences between males and females.

This gendered union in marriage includes a complementarity that allows for procreation, but does not necessitate procreation. The distinct anatomy and biology of males and females provides the means for a husband and wife in marriage to follow Genesis 1:28: *God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."* Procreation is a blessing; the ability to have children is a gift. Procreation is not a command. Nor is procreation a necessary essential to marriage. The reality is that some married couples are infertile; some choose to *increase in number* through adoption; and some choose to remain childless. The lack of children through procreation does not invalidate a marriage; neither does the birth of a child born out of wedlock validate the procreative relationship of that

26. Sharyn Dowd, *Reading Mark: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Second Gospel*, Reading the New Testament, Vol. 2 (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2000), 102; and Larry W. Hurtado, *Mark*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series, Book 2 (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 1989), 161.

child's non-married biological parents by elevating that sexual union into a matrimonial state. Marriage does not hang upon the production of offspring; the production of offspring does make a relationship a marriage. The point is that gender distinction allows for the possibility of procreation; it does not necessitate it.

At the risk of having overstated the distinction, let me emphasize that marriage and procreation are connected within God's framework. Procreation is not to occur outside of marriage. God may will a marriage without procreation; God does not will procreation outside of marriage—aside from the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

Does then the intrinsic ability of heterosexual marriage to procreate provide the basis for rejecting homosexual behavior? Obviously, neither a male-male nor a female-female relationship can produce offspring. Song argues that the church should affirm gay relationships since marriage is not inherently for procreation removing this as a barrier to the affirmation of homosexual marriage within the church.²⁷

Husbands and wives know full well that intercourse provides a physical closeness beyond the creation of offspring. Sex within the bond of marriage is for God's glory primarily making the production of offspring a secondary good.²⁸ The argument that the Bible rejects homosexual relationships because of an inability to yield offspring is specious. The scriptural rejection of homosexual behavior has no basis in the inability of gay partners to procreate.²⁹ Paul is typically cast as maintaining that procreation is

27. Song, *Covenant and Calling*, xi.

28. Paul Evdokimov, "The Sacrament of Love: The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of Orthodox Tradition," *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Eugene Rogers (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 188.

29. Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved*, 67.

God intends procreation to occur within marriage. Procreation and marriage are not therefore completely separated. Genesis 2:24 speaks of a husband and wife becoming "one flesh." This speaks to

necessary to marriage; however, upon deeper examination, this point falls aside. Paul's rejection of homosexual behavior, inclusive of gay marriage, has nothing to do with a lack of procreativity. Paul's rejection of homosexual behavior is not based solely or primarily upon horizontal relationships, inclusive of the production of offspring, but upon the vertical relationship of the gay person to God.³⁰ Homosexual practice is immoral and offensive to God. Scripture does not qualify this prohibition in either the Old Testament or New Testament as having a basis in the non-procreative potential of gay partners. The prohibition is based, per the biblical warrant, upon offending God through sinful transgression (Leviticus 11:45).

The Bible prohibits homosexual behavior. Jesus Christ builds upon the Genesis creation accounts by stating that marriage is between a man and woman. Some scholars who theologically affirm both homosexual behavior and gay marriages acknowledge that their view is contrary to the scriptural mandate.³¹ With very rare exceptions, biblical scholars recognize that the Bible prohibits homosexual behavior. The scriptural witness is clear and without qualification.

As the Bible prohibits homosexual behavior, inclusive of gay marriage, what does Scripture offer gay persons? Scripture makes no allowance for homosexual behavior just as it makes no allowance for heterosexual behavior outside of marriage.³² The biblical

their union as a couple in becoming a new family as well as the potential for the production of a child made from the DNA of the husband and wife.

30. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 337.

31. See Song, *Covenant and Calling*; Luke Timothy Johnson, "Disputed Questions: Debate and Discernment, Scripture and Spirit," and William Loader, *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible and the Church*, ed. Preston Sprinkle, Counterpoints Bible & Theology Series (Grand Rapids Zondervan, 2016).

32. Welcoming and affirming proponents may level the charge that evangelical churches widespread acceptance of divorce and second marriages undercuts their stance against homosexual

mandate therefore for gay persons is no different than the scriptural command for single heterosexual believers as it comes to sexual behavior—live a chaste and celibate life (Romans 13:13 and Ephesians 5:3). Matthew Vines, a gay believer who affirms gay marriage, asserts that celibacy is a specific call from God as opposed to a biblical imposition.³³ In his reasoning, individual believers who are gay must receive a personal directive from God to live celibate lives. The church cannot impress celibacy upon believers as a category based upon sexual orientation. Vines argues that celibacy denies gay persons the inherent good of marriage, i.e. living in covenant and fidelity. Gay believers therefore may choose to live a celibate life; however, celibacy is not a default status for gay persons. Marriage including sexual intimacy within that covenant relationship is an option for gay persons who have not received a specific directive from God to live a celibate life, per Vines.

Vines' point that celibacy only applies to those who receive a specific and personal call misses the mark. Living a celibate lifestyle does necessitate the sacrifice of sexual intimacy with another person. Vines posits homosexual behavior as being legitimate only within gay marriage; while he does not follow the biblical mandate in prohibiting homosexual activity, he does affirm that appropriate homosexual behavior occurs only within a committed monogamous relationship.³⁴ Ostensibly, he would agree that unmarried believers are to remain celibate, whether heterosexual or homosexual.

behavior. They would have justification in doing so. Jesus alludes to homosexual prohibition in Mark 10 while speaking directly against divorce and second (or third or fourth or...) marriages. And yet, most evangelical churches accept heterosexual divorce and additional marriages as an accommodation to the culture despite the biblical witness against both. For consistency in biblical interpretation, theology and practice, evangelicals need to address divorce and re-marriages.

33. Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 44.

34. Ibid., 137.

This viewpoint relies upon an understanding that sexual purity is a call of each and every follower of Christ. Believers in Jesus are all called to a celibate lifestyle until marriage. Vines wishes to include gay marriage as acceptable to God; however, as has been shown above, godly marriage is between a man and a woman only. The call to celibacy then applies to gay persons as well as it applies to unmarried heterosexuals. Celibacy is part of the cost of discipleship for single believers, whether gay or heterosexual.

Vines continues his argument: since creation is inherently good and sexuality is part of the created order, then sexual intimacy must be inherently good; so then, if sexual intimacy is inherently good, a denial of that intimacy harms creation.³⁵ This is faulty theology as it subordinates the doctrine of redemption to the doctrine of creation. Genesis 1 does witness to the goodness of creation. Two chapters later in Genesis 3 the Bible witnesses to human depravity through disobedience. Human sin has had and continues to have repercussions for all of creation. The inherent good of creation is masked by sin and rebellion against God since the Fall. Through redemption in Christ, God reconciles humanity and creation to himself (Romans 3:24 and Ephesians 1:7). Only through redemption can humanity and the world become what the creator intended at creation. Vines fails to account for the effects of sin in his argument.

Celibacy for gay persons is of a different order than that prescribed for heterosexual followers of Jesus. Single heterosexuals have the hope of marital union. Gay persons who seek to live according to the Gospel do not. While celibacy denotes a lack of physical sexual intimacy, it does not exclude all physical, emotional or spiritual intimacy. The same Bible that prohibits homosexual behavior teaches that God desires a personal

35. Ibid., 45-46.

relationship with each person including the provision of other communal relationships (Romans 12:4-5). Being desired by God provides a path for spiritual transformation.³⁶ Celibacy, like marriage, may witness to the fruition of the Kingdom of God in an eschatological pointing to creaturely fulfillment.³⁷

Vines argues that the sacrifice demanded by celibacy removes one from God; it puts an obstacle between the celibate person, gay or straight, and the Lord.³⁸ This on its face contradicts the sacrificial witness of Jesus Christ, the call to follow God above all other things and the Christian imperative to surrender all desires to the Lord (Romans 12:1). Gregory Coles, as a gay Christian who lives out his faith in celibacy, offers a rebuttal. He notes that following Jesus obediently implies cost and sacrifice. The sacrifice a gay person makes to live a life in celibacy, while significant, is minor compared to the sacrifice of Jesus Himself.³⁹ Living a celibate lifestyle in submission to Jesus offers far more gain than cost to followers of Jesus, either unmarried straight or gay believers.

Wesley Hill, a celibate gay theologian, has written extensively about the ramifications of celibacy for believers. He has presented “spiritual friendship” as a means for gay believers, and single heterosexual believers, to live in celibate communities that offer commitment, care, and love for one another.⁴⁰ Humans desire and seek to be

36. Rowan Williams, “The Body’s Grace,” *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Eugene Rogers (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 311.

37. Song, *Covenant and Calling*, xi.

38. Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 147

39. Coles, *Single Gay Christian*, 38-39.

40. Wesley Hill, *Spiritual Friendship: Finding Love in the Church as a Celibate Gay* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2015), 76.

desired; this is a theological recognition of a universally personal truth. In intentional communities built upon spiritual friendship, celibate persons may fill these needs.⁴¹ Communities geared toward living life together may redirect erotic desire into a manifestation of deep friendship and commitment. The church may provide opportunities for non-sexual intimacy through other forms of community. A life without sex is difficult; a life without intimacy is damaging.⁴² Spiritual friendship or life within intentional communities provides and allows for intimacy. A life in singleness does not exclude intimacy and love.⁴³ Celibacy is not a sentence to living a solitary or lonely life. While lacking the possibility of marriage as God intended, gay persons may discover other forms of intimacy that fill deep needs for connection and bonding.

Intentional communities of this sort must stand upon several biblical and theological insights. One is that God does not equate love with sex (Matthew 5:28). This understanding contradicts much of our current societal understanding of sex and love.⁴⁴ It also views celibacy and singleness not as a fallback or consolation prize but as a biblically based vocation in and of itself with specific offerings and gains not available to married couples (1 Corinthians 7:7).⁴⁵ Too many churches, whether explicitly in sermons or implicitly in practice, make singles feel as pre-marrieds. The church must begin to

41. Hill, *Washed and Waiting*, 103.

42. Coles, *Single Gay Christian*, 79-80.

43. Ibid., 89.

44. Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved*, 167.

45. Ibid., 173.

value singleness and provide places for singles to grow in their faith; intentional communities may provide this.

Within intentional communities built upon spiritual friendship, gay persons may witness to the glory of God while remaining faithful to a confession of Jesus as Lord.⁴⁶ The posture of spiritual friendship is obviously different from that of married couples. C.S. Lewis notes that friends do not stand in a posture facing one another.⁴⁷ Rather they stand shoulder to shoulder facing life's challenges and enjoying life's triumphs side by side. While the positioning, metaphorically and literally, is different, friendships like marriages are entered into voluntarily. Like marriage relationships, spiritual friends share disappointments, struggles, celebrations and joys.⁴⁸ The church is a prime place to both elucidate these theological truths and illustrate them to a hyper-sexualized and skeptical culture. The church may offer renewal to singles—gay and heterosexual—demonstrating the worth of this path.⁴⁹ Celibacy under this biblical and theological understanding provides a path to Christian wholeness not unlike marriage. While heterosexual couples know sexual intimacy, marital commitments may limit a spouse's ability to know members of their own gender with the depth and honesty that gay persons do. Marriage offers many gifts; it also makes demands. As there is a loss of sexual intimacy in celibacy, there is also an opportunity for unique gain that non-sexual relationships may provide to these committed individuals.⁵⁰ The intimate relationships are different from

46. Sprinkle, *Two Views on Homosexuality*, 145.

47. C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, (NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1960), 91.

48. Hill, *Spiritual Friendship*, 98.

49. *Ibid.*, 107-108.

50. Coles, *Single Gay Christian*, 95.

those of married couples; the difference does not mean that these intimate relationships are deficient to those of married couples. Different does not mean better or worse.

Those who affirm homosexual behavior as godly often parallel this issue with the church's historical stances on slavery and women in ministry. In linking these three issues, those proponents hope to show that the church's historical change in its understanding of slavery and women in ministry opens the door to a reconsideration of the biblical warrant against homosexual behavior. Per the Great Commandment in Matthew 19:19 and the lack of biblical endorsement, most if not all churches today disavow slavery. However, during the colonial period of the United States, and during the colonizing period of Europe, Scripture was used to justify slavery as passages were taken out of context, misinterpreted and spoken so as to tolerate slavery as an institution.⁵¹ Those with a hermeneutic of progressive revelation argue that just as Christians for a time misunderstood biblical passages on slavery, so too Christians now misunderstand passages on homosexual behavior. This is an invalid comparison that does not make the argument supporters of homosexual behavior intend.⁵² The church did at times use Scripture to justify slavery; the church owns this sin. However, pro-slavery arguments from Scripture could at best find verses tolerant of the practice; there are not verses that explicitly promote and advocate for slavery. By contrast, there are any number of biblical verses that witness to physical and spiritual freedom in Jesus Christ as well as the equality of all human beings before the throne of God, both as sinners and as potentially redeemed believers (Romans 8:20-21, 2 Corinthians 3:17, Galatians 5:1 and 13 and 1

51. Verses that appear to tolerate slavery include Leviticus 25:44, Ephesians 6:5-11 and Colossians 3:22-4:1.

52. Gagnon and Dan Via, *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 45.

Peter 2:16). Regarding homosexual behavior, in contrast, the Bible contains explicit passages in the Old and New Testaments and Jesus' own words regarding the gendered purpose of marriage that both prohibit homosexual practice and promote monogamy between a man and woman. A progressive revelation seeking to justify homosexual behavior would have to deny outright specific passages of the Bible. Pro-slavery advocates relied upon scriptural tolerance; pro-homosexual behavior does not even have this thin ledge upon which to stand.

Others seek to make a link between the evolution of the church's views on women in ministry and the affirmation of homosexual behavior. In both the Old and New Testaments, God placed women in positions of leadership often against the prevailing cultural view of women at those times.⁵³ The church has not had universal affirmation of women in ministry. The disputed interpretations of 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15 provide the primary sources for ecclesial disagreement on the role of women in the church. Even taking these passages into account—and interpreting them as universally valid rather than as contextually specific—the weight of Scripture is toward gender equality, not against it (Galatians 3:28). There are positive examples of women in leadership in both testaments. There is not a parallel between women in ministry and affirming homosexual behavior since there are no affirmations of homosexual behavior in either testament and there exist specific prohibitions against homosexual behavior in both.⁵⁴ Regarding women in ministry, a progressive reading on this issues arises from

53. These include Numbers 27:1-11, Judges 4:4-5, Esther 4:15-17, Luke 8:1-3, 10:38-42, John 4:1-26, Acts 1:12-14, 18:24-26, 21:7-9 and Romans 16:1-3.

54. For more on analogizing and the progressive revelation hermeneutic see William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2001).

within Scripture, not outside of it, given the frequency of women placed in ministry in the Bible. The same cannot be said for justifying homosexual behavior. Any progressive revelation supporting gay marriage must come from outside the biblical warrant, in explicit contradiction to the biblical warrant itself. An analogy between supporting women in ministry and affirming homosexual practice is therefore untenable. Within the Christian tradition and Scripture, arguments against slavery and for women in ministry do not lend support to an argument affirming homosexual practice.

The acceptance or denial of homosexual behavior as godly unavoidably represents a faith community's view of Scripture.⁵⁵ Churches that affirm homosexual behavior must rely upon a biblical hermeneutic of progressive revelation. Experience here corrects the biblical material as intellectual and societal findings offer alternatives to the imperatives of Scripture.⁵⁶ The biblical revelation yields its authority to human sensibilities and attitudes based on the spirit of the times forcing churches to choose which verses to leave out of their Bible studies and preaching. This hermeneutic diminishes the Bible's ability to confront and challenge believers. Instead of informing a congregation's theology and practice, the Bible becomes a document supporting what a congregation believes and does after the fact. This hermeneutic lacks consistency, evidence, and does not fit within the Jewish or Christian understanding of canon. It does not fit within an evangelical understanding of the Bible as set forth earlier in this chapter.⁵⁷

55. Stanley Grenz, *Welcoming but Not Affirming* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 89. Matthew Vines disagrees vehemently. He argues that one can affirm the authority of Scripture and support homosexual behavior (2).

56. Schmidt, *Straight & Narrow?*, 58.

57. Some would argue that our twenty-first century understandings of the universe, psychology, anthropology, etc. contradict the biblical witness. As we learn more about homosexuality—and sexuality in general—Bible readers should expect to disregard verses that contradict human knowledge. Isn't this what

What does Christian tradition say regarding homosexuality? Though not Christian himself, Josephus was one of the earliest Christian-era writers to denounce homosexual behavior.⁵⁸ His stance on this had nothing to do with gay relationships lacking an ability to procreate. Rather, Josephus wrote that homosexual behavior and gay relationships defiled the gendered complementarity laid out in Genesis 1 & 2.⁵⁹ His view was in lockstep with the biblical mandate. The Alexandrian author Philo also wrote that homosexual behavior contradicts the Bible and Christian practice.⁶⁰ He used much the same reasoning as Josephus. The Patristic writers who followed Josephus and Philo continued this line of reasoning as they also prohibited homosexual practice.⁶¹ For the most part, this instantiated both the prevailing biblical interpretation against homosexual behavior and Christian tradition thereafter.

Having shown a consistent and unequivocal biblical message, confirmed by church tradition, what are the theological underpinnings of a prohibition of homosexual

the church has done with verses that allude to a three-story universe or a cosmology that assumes a seven-day creation? What then hinders the employment of a similar hermeneutic with regard to prohibitions of homosexual behavior?

I argue that there are profound differences between accepting literal interpretations that contradict archaeological and cosmological findings and taking scriptural prohibitions against homosexual practice at face value. The Bible does not present itself as a history book or a book about the inner workings of the universe. Rather, the Bible presents itself as book telling the story of God and how God's story impacts the story of every living person. Belief in God's story does not depend upon one's cosmology; it does depend upon one's relationship to God through grace and obedience. The message of grace and the call to obedience come through the biblical witness of Jesus Christ, inclusive of biblical commands concerning personal conduct. This includes prohibitions against homosexual behavior.

58. William Loader, *Making Sense of Sex: Attitudes towards Sexuality in Early Jewish and Christian Literature* (Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 2013), 135. Josephus, *Against Apion Book II*.

59. Furnish, *The Moral Teaching of Paul*, 67.

60. Loader, *The New Testament on Sexuality*, 33. Philo, *Volume VII*.

61. Grenz, *Welcoming but Not Affirming*, 64. Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 27; Cyprian of Carthage, *Letters* 1:8; Eusebius of Caesarea, *Proof of the Gospel* 4:10; John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Titus* 5, *Homilies on Matthew* 3:3, *Homilies on Romans* 4.

behavior? At its core, the issue centers upon identity. Within the consideration of identity, both the doctrines of creation and redemption come into play.

For gay persons, their homosexual attraction dominates and defines their identity.⁶² Reasons for this abound. Church rejection may lead a greater identification with the root of that rejection. Likewise, our culture's obsession with sexuality has made sexual identification more primary. And personal situations of an injurious nature may lead gay persons to greater unity with other gay persons. For gay persons, their sexuality provides them their identity. By contrast for Jesus, the worth of a person does not come out of that person's sexuality (John 8:1-11).⁶³ As human beings we are sexual beings. But the Bible says that we are much, much more than a collection of urges and hormones (John 1:12). We are greater and beyond our sexuality. The challenge for the church, as with its primary witness, is to communicate God's offer of transformation through love, grace and redemption. Identity for a believer in Jesus comes from Jesus, not from a facet of personal humanity inflated and stretched to cover the whole person as sexuality does for those who utilize it as a defining identifier.

While Scripture prohibits homosexual behavior, it does not explicitly condemn homosexual attraction. This point does not have total agreement within evangelical circles. There is agreement that engaging in homosexual behavior is sinful. As stated previously, gay persons may live faithful, celibate lives in accordance with God's will.

62. Andrew Marin, *Love is an Orientation: Elevating the Conversation with the Gay Community* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2009), 38.

63. Loader, *Sexuality and the Jesus Tradition*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 45.

The Bible rejects homosexual behavior; it does not explicitly reject those with homosexual attraction per se.⁶⁴

The culture has taken on a “born gay so it’s ok” attitude.⁶⁵ Welcoming and affirming churches have adopted this mantra, finding its source within the doctrine of Creation. Since God made people with an attraction to members of the same-sex then that attraction must be within God’s purposed intention. Sexual desires are so deeply ingrained within human beings that they are involuntary. God would not have deliberately created creatures with a bent toward unholy desires if God considered acting upon those inherent desires wrong. These churches welcome gay persons into their midst and invite them to remain as they are, per this understanding of the doctrine of Creation.

This understanding confuses homosexual attraction and homosexual behavior. Homosexual attraction may be biological—a point neither proven nor disproven—making this a scientific issue. Homosexual behavior on the other hand is a thoroughly theological issue.⁶⁶ All humans have sexual thoughts and impulses that arise in a spontaneous manner. This evidences the Fall and our inherent sinfulness. Jesus preached that dwelling on these thoughts and impulses is sinful; and certainly following through on them is also sinful (Matthew 5:27-30). Churches that welcome and affirm homosexual behavior falsely equate attraction and behavior, merging a natural urge with actual practice.⁶⁷

64. For arguments that homosexual orientation is inherently sinful see Denny Burk and Heath Lambert, *Transforming Homosexuality: What the Bible Says about Sexual Orientation and Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015). For a rebuttal on this point, see Nate Collins, *All but Invisible: Exploring Identity Questions at the Intersection of Faith, Gender and Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017).

65. Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved*, 130.

66. Ibid., 130-132.

67. Marin, *Love is an Orientation*, 38.

Some argue that opposing a natural biological impulse, the attraction, damages the self; gay persons should therefore engage in homosexual behavior rather than face waves of self-loathing by suppressing these urges. Denying one's natural desires results in inauthentic living and a denial of being who one truly is.⁶⁸ This is the understanding of creation that supporters of homosexual behavior hold.

This position is theologically problematic in ways beyond its regard for homosexual practice. Any argument basing human behavior upon authenticity—being true to oneself—contradicts the Gospel (Matthew 16:24).⁶⁹ Natural and innate desires do not determine Christian behavior. Married couples know that impulses and desires for persons who are not spouses arise. But these urges are suppressed, ignored or extinguished for the good of the marriage covenant. Is denying these impulses inauthentic? Perhaps. Denying the allure of an extra-marital affair may not describe authentic living, but it does characterize faithfulness. Our authenticity itself needs remaking through redemption in Jesus Christ.

My subjectivity tells me of the worth, beauty and goodness of gay persons, those I know of and those I know personally as friends and neighbors. Personal experience however does not serve as a counter-argument to the Bible in terms of justifying the holiness of a specific behavior. We do not seek the good or a good that may exist within creation; we seek something higher called holiness that is beyond the power of creation to grant. John Webster does not write about experience per se in his work *Holiness*, instead

68. Jonathan Grant, *Divine Sex: A Compelling Vision for Christian Relationships in a Hypersexualized Age* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2015), 142.

69. Matthew 16:24, Luke 9:23, Mark 8:34 and Colossians 3:10.

he contrasts divine revelation and reason.⁷⁰ However, his arguments about the lofty position often afforded reason match our contemporary treatment of experience, and its reliance upon a misguided understanding of the doctrine of creation. To paraphrase, arguments that seek to sanctify experiences of what is—in this case homosexual attraction and its behavioral extension of homosexual practice—have removed experience from the “economy of God’s dealings with his creatures.”⁷¹ Experience attains the highest position as the criterion for judgment. The characteristic of being natural and authentic supersedes other criteria, including divine revelation and biblical mandates. One’s nature then determines one’s morality. That morality is individually based upon each person’s experiences, authentic desires and impulses. This makes modification of one’s desires and rebuke of subsequent behavior unjustifiable. Webster argues that reason does not stand above God’s revelation but rather serves that revelation, even to the point of reason being rejected in the face of revelation. Again, for this purpose, experience—and its roots within the doctrine of creation—also serve God. Experience is not a master. God summons experience, like reason, before his throne as a servant.⁷² Our experience needs redeeming and remaking. It offers creatures neither perfection nor holiness. God’s revelation, inclusive of the biblical witness, serves as the basis for behavior and judgment (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

The orthodox doctrine of creation does not stand on its own unrelated to the work of God thereafter, namely redemption through Jesus Christ. Creation has a *telos*, which is

70. Webster, *Holiness*, 11.

75. *Ibid.*

72. *Ibid.*, 17.

Jesus Christ.⁷³ Jesus is the culmination of creation. Jesus is the work of God to reconcile humanity.⁷⁴ Jesus is the atonement (Romans 3:21-25 and 1 John 2:1-2).

This understanding of creation presupposes a recognition of fallen humanity. As creation points toward Jesus, creation points toward reconciliation. The doctrine of Creation elucidated by those affirming homosexual behavior fails to include a notion of sinful humanity or redemptive purpose. Present creation is not as God originally intended it; the world is broken; humanity is flawed (Romans 8:18-23). These defects affect every facet of humanity—mental, emotional, physical and spiritual. This depravity includes sexual attraction. Gay oriented sexuality is broken and flawed; heterosexuality is broken and flawed.⁷⁵ All of humanity is broken and flawed (Romans 3:23). Peter in Acts 2:38 invites hearers to repent and be made new. Jesus himself called followers to come and be changed in Matthew 4:17. God did not arrive on earth incarnate to instantiate humanity as it was but to bring new life (2 Corinthians 5:17).⁷⁶

Humanity's imperfection does not mean that we as flawed creatures should accept and abide within our sinfulness tacitly accommodating it.⁷⁷ While everyone's sexuality is

73. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III/1* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958), 24.

74. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/1* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2001), 22.

75. Coles, *Single Gay Christian*, 46 and 55.

The life of faith provides a means for the justification and sanctification of broken sexuality within heterosexual marriage. Heterosexual marriage can redeem heterosexual attraction. Scripture affirms heterosexual attraction within heterosexual marriage. Neither homosexual attraction nor homosexual behavior are affirmed in Scripture.

76. Jesus Christ, *vere deus, vere homo*, identifies with sinners. Jesus remains perfect and his sacrifice provides atonement for sinners through the crucifixion. As he identifies with sinners, his resurrection provides sinners with new life and transformation.

77. For an argument along this line see David P. Gushee, *Changing Our Mind*, 2nd edition (Canton, MI: Read the Spirit Books, 2015).

broken, Scripture expressly prohibits homosexual behavior while promoting heterosexuality within marriage. Rather than leading to a stance of moral equivalence, the doctrine of redemption provides justification and a path toward sanctification for followers of Jesus. That path of sanctification involves following biblical imperatives, not sinful impulses (Romans 6:1-4).

I do not know of a Christian leader who would advise an alcoholic to drink alcohol because the alcoholic desires it authentically and deeply. Who would advocate that heterosexuals have sex whenever hormonal desires arise simply because they arise? Does authenticity justify such behavior? Affirmation of human desires entails discipline and limitations; this includes parameters and boundaries for sexual expression and enactment (1 Timothy 4:6-10).⁷⁸ The *is* of creation is not the *is* of God's intentions. This applies to all persons, not just gay persons. Becoming Christ-like involves rejecting those things that damage our relationship with Jesus. We do not find our true selves except through Christ dwelling within us (Ephesians 3:17).

Jesus presented an eschatological message of transformation. This eschatology is not fully realized. While the Kingdom of heaven has come near, it is also not yet (1 Corinthians 13:12). Jesus meets people where they are; he does not then leave them in their predicaments (Mark 2:17). To suggest otherwise is to preach a false Gospel that H. Richard Niebuhr warned against: "A God without wrath brought men without sin into a Kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a Cross."⁷⁹

78. Thomas Breidenthal, "Sanctifying Nearness," *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Eugene Rogers (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 352.

79. H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (Fishers, IN: Wesleyan, 1988), 193.

The doctrine of Creation, inclusive of human depravity, points toward a doctrine of Redemption. God accepts us into a divine embrace; God then transforms us, lifting us above and beyond our sinfulness.⁸⁰ This is the Gospel. Jesus died to save us from our sins. As believers justified through the crucifixion and resurrection of the Son of God, we travel a path of sanctification, being made holy, as we become disciples of Jesus. Christ redeems us from our sins. This includes a redemption of our sexuality and, most importantly, our identity. The opposite of homosexual is not heterosexual; it is healed and whole.⁸¹

Scripture provides pathways by which sexuality may seek sanctification. One is marriage between a man and a woman. Within this covenant, spouses may freely offer themselves in complete vulnerability to one another. They may also freely accept the offer of the other in that same vulnerability. Another pathway is celibacy. Paul advocates for the latter, while allowing for the former in 1 Corinthians 7:7. The Bible does not offer alternatives outside of heterosexual marriage and celibacy.

While gay persons may hold as their primary identifier a homosexual attraction, salvation through Jesus transforms human identity into a new identity.⁸² Redemption re-identifies those who know the love of God. Jesus does not view his followers as homosexual or heterosexual. He does not view his followers as married or single. He views them as disciples.⁸³ This call to discipleship may involve leaving prior

80. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 213.

81. Marin, *Love is an Orientation*, 70.

82. Sprinkle, *Two Views on Homosexuality*, 162.

83. Grenz, *Welcoming but Not Affirming*, 105.

Special thanks to Michelle and Brent Cornelius, past students of Grenz, for sharing additional insights.

relationships (Luke 14:26); it may involve taking up new relationships (Acts 2:42-47). Disciples find their primary identity in Jesus Christ. They are remade, reborn, redeemed. This does not entail present perfection, utter absence of sin, or complete holiness; however, it entails that Christ has repurposed each follower to live in submission to the will of God. “According to the Christian confession, the space in which human living is undertaken is created and reconciled space which is on the way to its final perfection.”⁸⁴

Christian Hospitality

Many evangelical churches, while holding clear understandings of Scripture and a redemptive Gospel message, have failed to account for hospitality, as either a theological necessity or a Christian practice. Rather than welcoming sinners into a place where they might hear the message of Jesus and his offer of liberation from sin, many evangelical churches have demonized and ostracized gay persons. Instead of preaching a gospel of love and offering a message of grace, clergy have cast derision and exclusion. Rather than witnessing a posture of open arms, gay persons have encountered clenched fists and folded arms.

What is hospitality? What are aspects of congregational welcome and care for others? How does the church appropriately welcome the stranger into its midst? From where does this impetus derive and how is it sustained within a defined community of faith? How does the hospitable community remain a community as it welcomes new people into that community?

84. Webster, *Holiness*, 104.

Hospitality is at the core of what it means to follow Jesus Christ (Acts 2:44-45).⁸⁵

Hospitality means welcoming someone into your presence or your community. That someone offers nothing tangible to the host; hospitality stands in stark contrast to a *quid pro quo* relationship. The host offers hospitality simply for the sake of offering it, expecting nothing in return. Hospitality derives from genuine interest in that person. It means responding to that person's presence with enthusiasm and greeting. Jesus welcomed any who would hear him. The religious leaders of his day considered many of those welcomed by our Lord to be outcasts, sinners beyond reach and defiled people.⁸⁶ Jesus responded to these people of the margins with compassion, love and attention. As imitators of Jesus, Christians are to live lives of hospitality toward others.

Hospitality comprises more of an attitude and orientation than a mechanism or formula of actions.⁸⁷ Oden argues that hospitality is a mode of being, not a set of rehearsed undertakings. Hospitality begins with an intention, a disposition and an attitude; then, hospitality flows outward to others through physical acts. Having received the welcome of God through Jesus, believers become purveyors of hospitality to others. Hospitality originates with God; believers are recipients. This witnesses to the salvation of the host—having received God's hospitality as an unearned gift. It witnesses and seeks to mimic the ultimate host, Jesus himself, who relieved visitors, strangers and outsiders of

85. Amy G Oden, *God's Welcome: Hospitality for a Gospel-Hungry World* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2008), 11.

86. Ibid., 35-37.

There are other typological stories of welcome found in Scripture. These include Joshua 2 and 6, Ruth, 1 Kings 17:7-24, Matthew 4:18-22, Matthew 22:1-14, Matthew 25:31-46, Luke 5:1-11, Luke 14:1-14, and John 4:1-26.

87. Amy G. Oden, *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 14.

the burden of their sins through his open arms. The hospitality from God then is redirected toward others--strangers, non-believers, and those known—from an overflow of joy, assurance and peace (Hebrews 13:2). Hospitality is a physical and tangible testimony of the Gospel arising from God's spirit of grace and mercy.⁸⁸

The early church considered hospitality as one of its chief attributes and missional tools. Hospitality was not a category for action but rather an attitude and orientation toward strangers.⁸⁹ In its first few centuries, pagans and non-believers knew of Christianity through the hospitality of Christians. This hospitality toward others contributed to the rise of the church in the Roman Empire. The early church patriarch Tertullian offers several quotes that illustrate the force of hospitality: "To no less a post than this has God called them, and they dare not try to evade it. We have filled up every place belonging to you—islands, castles, caves, prisons, palace, city forum. We leave you your temples only."⁹⁰ And again: "It is our care of the helpless, our practice of loving kindness that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents. 'Only look,' they say, 'look how they love one another!'"⁹¹

This openness to relationships with strangers and the non-utilization of people presented to the ancient Mediterranean world a new dynamic of grace and mercy through hospitality. The early church offered hospitality to non-believers in a manner that was

88. Oden, *God's Welcome*, 15.

89. Oden, *And You Welcomed Me*, 14.

90. Tertullian, "Apology," *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 45.

91. *Ibid.*, 46.

non-threatening and inviting.⁹² The church clearly took stances against many cultural practices including infanticide, the treatment of the poor and economic stratification but the early church welcomed each person who wanted to encounter the Risen Jesus.

Hospitality as a spiritual practice has its origin in the worship of God. As one welcomes, greets, and provides care to another, that host honors God. The Christian host acknowledges the *imago dei* within each human being so that the host serves God through serving others.⁹³ Hospitable believers offer praise and adoration to God through the care of strangers. Love towards the stranger is love of God. The Reformers utilized this theological link between hospitality and recognition of the Creator within his creatures.⁹⁴

While hospitality treats others as ends in themselves, it also encapsulates promise and hope. Christians do not offer welcome and love to strangers to get them to join the church or the community. They offer hospitality to introduce the recipient into a relationship with God.⁹⁵ Hospitality comes from God to humanity and seeks to return humanity to God.

Parker Palmer makes a point about the public and private dynamics of hospitality. Hospitality brings hosts into public contact with strangers. As attitude and action, hospitality then initiates a private relationship whereby the host and stranger come to

92. Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 1999), 69.

93. Pseudo-Clementine, "Recognitions of Clement," *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 8 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 148-149.

94. Pohl, *Making Room*, 63.

95. Oden, *God's Welcome*, 12.

know one another. This relationship often has a public manifestation. Hospitality links public and private life through care and love.⁹⁶

Our contemporary culture is one of “stranger-danger” and suspicion towards people we do not know. This brings forward a consideration of the costs of hospitality. Opening oneself to a stranger, inviting that person close, has inherent risk.⁹⁷ It is dangerous. Hospitality exposes the host. When one stands with arms wide open, either literally or metaphorically, one takes on a vulnerable posture. This vulnerability extends beyond physical peril--the host risks receiving the very sentiment that hospitality is designed to combat: rejection. Others may well spurn Christian hospitality. The open arms of embrace may leave followers of Jesus exposed and vulnerable.

Jesus Christ embodies both the host and guest (Luke 24:13-35).⁹⁸ Jesus welcomes and is the one welcomed. Jesus makes space for others and is the one for whom we make space. He stands as the ultimate example of rejection, bearing the rejection of God and humanity on the cross. He also stands as the ultimate example of hospitality given that humanity’s rejection of him does not have the final word. The cross provides the bridge so that humans “are no longer foreigners and strangers” (Ephesians 2:19). The resurrection offers us reconciliation; it provides the means and goal for our offering hospitality. As we offer hospitality, God brings us closer to himself. Our dependence

96. Parker Palmer, *The Company of Strangers: Christians & the Renewal of America’s Public Life* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983), 72.

97. Pohl, *Making Room*, 94.

98. Ibid., 17.

upon God increases. With arms wide open, exposed and assailable, hosts rely upon God for protection.⁹⁹

Protection maintains the status of the host; it keeps those offering hospitality from harm. Hospitality is not a static power but rather transformationally dynamic. Hospitality enhances and builds up the host. It does so because God's presence is in hospitable action. We witness God at work through our vulnerability (2 Corinthians 12:9).¹⁰⁰

Hospitality makes space for another. This gets to underlying contradictions within hospitality. It provides space to strangers, who by definition are dislocated and without proper space. It provides a place of peace to the welcomed during times of chaos for those displaced.¹⁰¹ This ongoing action of reconciliation profoundly impacts the host--be it an individual or for the purposes of this project a community--from which the hospitality arises. As others are welcomed into the community, hosts must allow space for those welcomed. The community changes as it encounters new people. As seats are offered to strangers at the table by the host, the table expands, seats are added, and so forth. The community invariably shifts. Oden terms this de-centering.¹⁰²

De-centering allows the community to offer grace and truth. It also enables the community to receive wounded strangers into its midst. This nimbleness affords strangers a receptive community offering grace and growth.¹⁰³ This dynamic has the potential to,

99. Jean Vanier, *Encountering the Other* (New York: Paulist Press, 2006), 54.

100. Oden, *God's Welcome*, 19.

101. Pohl, *Making Room*, 10.

102. Oden, *And You Welcomed Me*, 15.

103. Jean Vanier, *From Brokenness to Community* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 17.

and frankly likelihood of, contributing conflict to the community.¹⁰⁴ Adding new elements creates unease. As the table expands and new people are added to the community, this forces a reorientation of older members. This de-centering is a cruciform process. It is also the path to reconciliation and new life for a community.

Hospitality brings people together in community. To this point, it may sound as though de-centering obligates only the host. The hospitality offered welcomes strangers into a defined and distinct community. Hospitality invites the welcomed into a relationship with another entity that has content and identity, commitments and pre-existing relationships.¹⁰⁵ While the community makes space for recipients of the welcome, it does not lose the marks that formed and bound the community in the first place. The welcomed, through hospitality, enter the space of the community as well as its traditions, language and values. There is an obligation upon the welcomed to move toward the community even as the community offers hospitality and open arms to the welcomed.¹⁰⁶ The hospitable community is a place offering far more than mere indulgence and comfort. It offers insight, change and transformation.

The change does not come from the community per se, either as a demand or catalyst. The community is simply the conduit through which the new member, who has received welcome and hospitality, encounters God (Hebrews 10:24-25). The community simply communicates the message of Christ's welcome to the stranger, offering a witness of the love of Jesus to the outsider. The community provides social hospitality but only as

104. Ibid., 29-30.

105. Pohl, *Making Room*, 83.

106. Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 77.

a means to direct the welcomed into divine hospitality through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Jean Vanier has written extensively about this dynamic. The community through its hospitality invites the welcomed to belong. That belonging is not an end in itself. It is a welcome in order to become. Hospitality offers the stranger an opportunity to become more. It welcomes the stranger into a safe space to grow and receive transformation.¹⁰⁷ It also beckons the welcomed to leave their space—their understandings, identity and worldview—and enter into the culture of a hospitable community.

Christian hospitality that offers welcoming and affirmation devoid of transformation is not true hospitality. Community within the Christian tradition does not exist as an end in itself.¹⁰⁸ Community for the sake of community is idolatrous and false. Christian community has as its origination and purpose the love of God. God's love provides the foundation and impetus for community. This same love is the goal of the community. Only God can provide healing; only God can provide redemption and true growth. Only God can do this. Community is therefore a means toward reconciliation, both on vertical and horizontal planes. Community builds connections between people. More importantly, community provides a connection between people and God.

Christian community offers hospitality, welcome and much more. It invites strangers to come as they are in order to receive and be made new (2 Corinthians 5:17). That reception, as an outgrowth of accepting a welcome, is to grow into the people God intended, just as the hosts seek to do within that community. God binds people together

107. Vanier, *From Brokenness to Community*, 10.

108. *Ibid.*, 49.

through community and that community comes by way of hospitality. As Parker Palmer writes: “Community is finally a religious phenomenon. There is nothing capable of binding together willful, broken human selves except some transcendent power.”¹⁰⁹

Vanier notes non-Christian ideas of hospitality often involve a condition.¹¹⁰ If you change, then you are welcome to join me in my community. Conform and belong. Agree with us and we will embrace you. To be with us, you must be like us.

Faith in Jesus Christ, as recipients of God’s hospitality and welcome, flips this dynamic on its head. The hospitable welcome from Christ is to say, “If I love you, you will change and I too will change.”¹¹¹ The hospitable church proclaims in word and deed a message of a “welcoming and mutually transforming” relationship with God and one another.¹¹² The transformation is not one-sided; it affects the welcomed and the welcomers. The goal of the community is not to become like other members of that community but to become like Jesus Christ. Rather than having outsiders strive to be like insiders, the Christian community invites non-believers to seek after God as the community members themselves seek after God.

Christian hospitality is part and parcel of the Christian faith (Acts 2:46). It embodies the worship of God. Hospitality involves exposing oneself and one’s community to welcome the stranger. This openness also opens the community to new relationships. These new relationships shift the community but do not untie it from its

109. Vanier, *Community and Growth*, 44, quotation from Parker J. Palmer, *A Place Called Community* (Pendle Hill Publishing, Philadelphia, 1977), 18.

110. Vanier, *From Brokenness to Community*, 31-32.

111. Vanier, *Encountering the Other*, 38.

112. Hirsch, *Redeeming Sex*, 196.

distinctive moorings. Hospitality pushes the hospitable community to enlarge its space to potentially incorporate the welcomed into its midst.¹¹³ The path toward this incorporation, the simultaneous enlarging and maintaining of boundaries is complicated and not without difficulty.¹¹⁴ The welcomed are not simply welcomed to a vacuous space or into an amorphous entity. The welcomed through hospitality are welcomed to *something*. Acknowledging difference and distinction, definitions and identities does not negate or nullify hospitality; it offers a deeper platform from which relationships arise.¹¹⁵ A community secure in its identity and mission will navigate these difficult spots. This navigation will rely in large part upon those essential practices within the community that help to define it.

The success or failure of the navigation of hospitality for a community may well rest upon an understanding of covenant.¹¹⁶ The community relies upon God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit for its vision, values and mission (Romans 12:1-2). Within this identity is the command to go forth loving God and others (Mark 12:29-31). From the perspective of the welcoming community, hospitality is both a reliance upon and a following of God. Through implication, this covenant extends beyond Lord and servant. It branches out to extend hospitality, and covenant love to non-believers, strangers and those outside the covenant community. In this way, hospitality becomes pro-active, rather than just exhibiting a reactive dynamic. The welcome is extended to bring others into

113. Pohl, *Making Room*, 39.

114. Ibid., 127.

115. Ibid., 135.

116. Ibid., 136.

covenant. The hospitality of the community implies an offer for the stranger to enter and be changed through the transformative power of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Hospitality offers reconciliation through the offer of belonging, which is an offer to become in like manner to those already part of the hospitable community.

Elizabeth Newman and Untamed Hospitality

Elizabeth Newman in *Untamed Hospitality* offers a theologically sound and biblically based understanding of what it means for a community of faith to welcome others into its midst. Congregations, as the body of Christ, are called to participate in building relationships on both vertical and horizontal axes through hospitality (1 John 3:14-17). The vertical relationship impacts the horizontal witness just as the horizontal application of hospitality toward others affects the dependence and reliance of the congregation—certainly encompassing individual believers—upon its Lord and Savior. Newman emphasizes that hospitality is not enacted by individuals; Christian hospitality comes out of a community and a community standing upon a tradition. Hospitality therefore is not simply a behavior; it is intentional. The doing of hospitality comes from an acknowledgement of the gifting of God’s hospitality toward the congregation and believers therein.¹¹⁷ The mission of hospitality precedes its horizontal enactment and offer to strangers. The vertical reception of hospitality precedes its mission.¹¹⁸

117. Elizabeth Newman, *Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), 28.

118. Newman theologically grounds hospitality within the fellowship of the Trinity. I ground hospitality Christologically, avoiding inherent dangers of social Trinitarianism. Social Trinitarianism seeks to model human interaction after the inner life of the Trinity; followers of Jesus are to live together in ways that emulate the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. My strongest objections to this model are qualitative—we cannot emulate the inner life of the Trinity—and noetic—we cannot fully know the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The noetic concern does rest partially upon the qualitative concern.

Newman laments the current theological understanding of what Christian hospitality is and is not. Whereas secular incarnations of hospitality focus upon self-actualization, entertainment and catering to the perceived needs of individual customers, God calls the church to offer something far more substantial.¹¹⁹ Christian hospitality is not based upon a thin civility but rather a rich Gospel truth (1 Peter 4:8). Only as an outgrowth of sincere worship of Jesus Christ can true hospitality emerge. As noted previously, hospitality goes from the church to the stranger(s) as a gift in the same way the church originally received hospitality as a gift from God. The church acts as a conduit for this gift, which encompasses the truth of the Good News in a transformative welcome to strangers.

The theological and practical error of many contemporary churches involves a distortion of hospitality cheapening it into a benign inclusivity.¹²⁰ The Gospel of Jesus Christ welcomes all sinners into His arms (John 3:16-17); that welcome includes a call to repent, be healed, and lead a changed life. The message of Jesus in Matthew 4:17 begins with “Repent!” Trumpeting inclusivity as an end in itself exhibits a theological error of monumental proportions. Christian hospitality is rooted in transformation. It welcomes the stranger fully but that welcome initiates a process of change; the welcome is not the end or culmination of the new relationship; rather hospitality begins a gifting with the goal of becoming Christ-like. Jesus calls and that call includes expectations of transformation.

119. Ibid., 26.

120. Ibid., 43.

Hospitality necessarily means speaking the truth in love—offering grace with the goal of redemption.¹²¹ The Great Commission of Matthew 28:16-20 commands as much.

Inclusivity is a secular version of hospitality. Whereas hospitality points both the host and the guest to God, inclusivity points only to its own internal virtue.¹²² That virtue fails to include a transcendent element or a submission to something greater than itself. The horizontal welcoming is not possible without the vertical welcome acting as an impetus. Once that vertical welcome is received by a community of faith, that community of faith may then open itself to welcome the stranger as the stranger is. This horizontal welcome puts the stranger in touch with the same transformation experienced by the community of faith through the gifting of God (Romans 15:7).

Newman continues with this critique. As hospitality has a fundamental distinction from inclusivity, it also contrasts with diversity.¹²³ While each individual is different, under the cross of Jesus all individuals, no matter how distinct, find equality through omnipresent sinfulness. Jesus offers each individual grace, love and redemption. Newman utilizes the ubiquitous *imago dei* to ground the universality of human depravity and God's offer of hospitality. This shared theology, tradition and practice unites hosts and strangers on a higher plane of being. Individual sinners become the body of Christ through Christian hospitality. Diversity is absorbed in the dynamic of God's reconciliation of humanity—a vertical relation—and the sanctification of sinners—a horizontal relation.

121. Ibid., 144.

122. Ibid., 188.

123. Ibid., 33.

The church offers Christian hospitality freely to all. Accepting that hospitality fully entails transformation of the sinner. This is an order of welcome beyond mere inclusivity or the false idol of diversity. It is a model built upon the Gospel message of Jesus Christ.

Church Hospitality to Gay Persons

Section One showed that the Christian affirmation of homosexual behavior contradicts Scripture, ecclesial tradition and theological coherence. Section Two showed that hospitality is a primary trait of the Gospel and the church. Within a Christian context, affirming homosexual behavior fails to witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ by denying transformation; denying a welcome to gay persons also fails to witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ by denying hospitality. While these errors come from opposites ends of the theological spectrum, both fall short of a Christian testimony and embodiment. A partial gospel is no Gospel at all.

Many evangelical churches have exhibited a fear of welcoming gay persons, wrongly conflating welcoming with affirmation. A community of faith cannot maintain biblical integrity without offering hospitality to those in need of the Gospel (John 12:26). The practical and theological dilemma inherent in offering hospitality to gay persons seems to be boundaries. At what point does a welcome become an affirmation? Where are the limits of welcoming without repentance or change? Can a congregation welcome well while maintaining its theological convictions? This may be asked of all orthodox congregations, not simply evangelical churches.

This section will provide a theological method by which evangelical churches can offer hospitality to gay persons without affirming, or confusing their hospitality as

affirming, homosexual behavior. I will utilize the work of Miroslav Volf, with particular reliance upon *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*.¹²⁴ After this examination, I will provide a practical application of this and conclude with an exegesis of Luke 15:1-3 and 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 to illustrate porous boundaries.

Miroslav Volf and Porous Boundaries

Miroslav Volf provides a conceptual framework for offering hospitality without losing identifiable boundaries in his 1996 book *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*.¹²⁵ He argues that identity and otherness should go alongside the categories of justice, rights and ecology.¹²⁶ One's identity and by extension that differentiation from the identities of all others impacts one's relationships. These relationships help to determine what justice, rights and ecology look like. Justice is only an abstraction and thus meaningless without a contextual application; that contextual application comes through bringing distinct individuals—or groups—into just connections. How does one enter a place of meeting to begin putting flesh and bone onto categories like justice, rights and ecology? Furthermore, how can social agents transcend particularities in order to encounter one another? Of greater practical concern, how can those social agents who identify one another as enemies rise above hatred and exclusion?

124. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

125. Ibid., 10.

126. Ibid., 17-18.

Borrowing from Moltmann's *The Spirit of Life*, Volf argues that the cross provides solidarity.¹²⁷ Volf is not utilizing human depravity as a theological category here, at least not overtly. He does acknowledge that however distinct individuals are from one another, including groupings of individuals, they share a universal need for rescue. Under the shroud of enmity, both the oppressed and their oppressors need liberation. This is an ontological truth. Jesus Christ provides that freedom.¹²⁸ The solidarity of humanity rests in both its sinfulness (Romans 3:23) and God's provision for salvation (John 3:16-17). Jesus Christ therefore provides a means to reinterpret identity and relation with another under enmity.

The self-giving of Christ—literally with arms nailed wide—offers both the hope of transformation to Christians and a stature to embody for his followers. The Cross presents communion, peace, and purpose; it also demands vulnerability and trust. Volf utilizes the image of embrace as a metaphor for initiating the welcome of others.¹²⁹ Embrace opens oneself to the other; it is a gesture of hospitality and solidarity. When I offer embrace to you, I open myself to you; I am vulnerable and literally exposed. I also exhibit a willingness to trust, if not you, then my God. When you embrace me, I encounter a greeting of safety. There is welcome and the offer of connection, both physical but more importantly relational. The act of embracing is an act of grace, modeled after Christ's gracious self-donation on the cross. Forgiveness, atonement, reconciliation and liberation are connected to truth and justice. Embrace brings out this

127. Ibid., 22. Jurgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 211-212.

128. Ibid., 25.

129. Ibid., 29.

asymmetrical tie. Embrace does not begin with an accounting for offenses. It begins with welcome. As the embrace gives way to a more mature and deeper relationship, justice and truth then come forward in tangible ways.

Some may worry that embrace amounts to affirmation or inclusion. Can a community of faith offer embrace to those outside the community of faith without affirming behaviors of those outsiders? Are boundaries antithetical to embrace? The cultural drive towards inclusion and tolerance has as its end the elimination of all boundaries and differences. Inclusion for Volf is not synonymous with embrace.¹³⁰ Boundaries allow for embrace and connection. This flagrantly contradicts the prophets of inclusion who see all boundaries as judgmental. The boundaries of a community provide conditions for entrance into that community. Some would have churches exist as non-conditional uber-inclusive entities. Volf notes the fatal flaw in this conception: “Without boundaries we will be able to know only what we are fighting against but not what we are fighting for. . . Intelligent struggle against exclusion demands categories and normative criteria that enable us to distinguish between repressive identities and practices that should be subverted and non-repressive ones that should be affirmed.”¹³¹

130. Ibid., 66.

131. Ibid., 63.

Here lies a valid critique of inter-faith work, which has inclusion as a primary focus. The groups that join together for inter-faith endeavors do so only to join together, not to truly know one another. Member organizations refrain from talking about who they are and/or what they are about among other member organizations for fear of offending or being offended by one another. In this joining together, the constituent organizations lose their uniqueness, identity and specificity. Inclusion here, rather than building connections that are strong enough to handle difference and distinction between member groups, offers a cheap substitute for true hospitality and welcome in the form of generic syncretism.

Volf wants to show that individuals or groups may make non-exclusionary judgments.¹³² Universal inclusion does not allow for judgments of any kind, save for its organizing principle that anything intolerant or exclusive is evil, which in and of itself is intolerant and exclusionary. Within creation, Volf finds a Creator who separates and connects, pulls apart and brings together. Thus, differentiation and connection are necessary parts of societal organization and human relating. “We are who we are not because we are separate from the others who are next to us, but because we are *both* separate *and* connected, *both* distinct *and related*; the boundaries that mark our identities are both barriers and bridges.”¹³³ Exclusion in its typical understanding is to stand away from others seemingly in a position of independence and superiority. Volf argues that exclusion has another side—the reduction of all boundaries and differences.¹³⁴ This reduction disallows individuals, or groups, to truly connect as separate and distinct entities. This reduction disallows embrace as an open and free connecting.¹³⁵ Embrace therefore does not eliminate differences or boundaries.

In his essay “‘The Trinity is Our Social Program’: The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement,” Volf offers more detail on boundaries.¹³⁶ Human agents are not defined simply through relations with other social agents. The self is something other and beyond its relations; the self does include those relations but it is

132. Ibid., 65.

133. Ibid., 66. Author’s italics.

134. Ibid., 67-68.

135. Ibid., 67.

136. Mirolsav Volf, “‘The Trinity is Our Social Program’: The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement,” *Modern Theology* 14, no. 3, (July 1998), 412.

greater than their sum. Boundaries provide delineation of the self from others known through those relations. Boundaries offer some definition of the self. But, the self cannot be defined simply by opposition to other non-selves. The self cannot be defined in exclusion from those relations. Volf therefore provides porous boundaries as the means through which differentiation and connection, identity and community may occur. Porous boundaries provide a basis for the identity of the self, or group, while also providing space by which embrace may offer connection and solidarity to another.

To offer a brief recap of this material, embrace does not entail abject inclusion or blanket tolerance. Nor does embrace entail outright exclusion. In embrace, a defined entity opens itself to a different entity. This embrace comes from the solidarity of universal sin and grace offered through Jesus Christ. The embrace does not entail assimilation or the loss of identity. Rather, through porous boundaries, the embrace offers the opportunity for a new relationship while maintaining the distinctions of both parties.

Returning to *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, embrace affords transformation. To use proximity as part of the embrace metaphor, when one enters embrace the two parties relocate position. The embracer and the embraced find a new location together while in the embrace. This new location shows the power of connection.¹³⁷

Volf points to the Apostle Paul as a prime example of being embraced through his conversion in Acts 9:1-6. Paul's transformation from Saul didn't happen through some solitary or inward exercise of Paul. The change in him did not occur by an interior movement. Rather, Paul found a new identity outside himself through the suffering

137. Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 71.

Messiah Jesus Christ. The embrace of Christ offered this. Jesus re-named and re-made Paul. Jesus re-names and re-makes all followers. God models embrace in bringing sinful humanity into divine communion; this is the model for followers of God to utilize to bring others into fellowship.¹³⁸

The church, to live out its call of obedience, must open its arms to sinners (1 Peter 4:11). It must extend an invitation to those who do not know Christ to enter into fellowship and discover liberation. Jesus did not offer tolerance; he demanded repentance. Christ did not hand over acceptance; he granted forgiveness. Forgiveness necessarily follows confession of and repentance for sin. Forgiveness is forgiveness for offenses. The church, as the Body of Christ, provides hospitality in welcoming gay persons into a relationship. This relationship is a vehicle to bring sinners to Jesus for reconciliation and transformation.

Embrace does not amount to assimilation. It is not tacit affirmation. It is a welcoming, an offering of hospitality. The porous boundaries allow the church to maintain biblical and theological integrity while opening itself to a genuine and sincere relationship. Recipients of God's grace must become agents of that grace.¹³⁹ It begins with the embrace. For Volf, the elements of embrace sequence as opening one's arms, waiting, embracing the other and opening one's arms again.¹⁴⁰ The movement of the self to the other and back has no end.

138. Ibid., 72-73.

139. Ibid., 129.

140. Ibid., 141.

Volf utilizes the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-32 to illustrate embracing. The father did not need to hear the prodigal son's confession before embracing him because the embrace from the father was not based on the moral performance of the son.¹⁴¹ It was a reception, an invitation, and a welcome return. By contrast, the older son failed to embrace his brother and thereby un-son-ed himself from the father. The younger son did not receive reinstatement to former privileges through the embrace; the porous boundaries provided admission but those boundaries remained in effect. Rather, the son received the ring of the father and the feast as acts of generosity; but all the property was and remained the older son's. The father reconfigured the order and embraced the younger son. The father didn't destroy the order nor did he exclude the younger son. The only means for reconciliation was to offer embrace and thus encounter the other in a stance of openness. Relationships begin anew.

Volf has confronted the issue of difference head-on. Embrace offers a biblical and theological model to provide connection and begin relationships without losing one's identity or opportunity for the other to experience transformation. Embrace offers a critical starting point for evangelical churches to provide hospitality to gay persons and thereby welcome them into fellowship with Jesus Christ. This embrace differs from affirmation and relies upon the transcendent power of Jesus Christ to transform.

Before proceeding, most evangelical churches have not made a major or concerted effort to offer hospitality to gay persons. We are more known for taking dogmatic positions that lay out a biblical and theological stance against homosexual

141. Ibid., 159-161.

practice.¹⁴² Christians have demonized, ostracized and condemned gay persons for centuries. The Westboro Baptists out of Arkansas provide the most obvious and recent example in the United States. Some might argue that this cult/church represents a caricature. Evangelical churches may not have picketed funerals for AIDS patients or protested with signs that read “God Hates Fags,” but the lack of hospitality or welcoming initiative from these churches to gay persons has subtly communicated a very similar message. In my opinion, evangelical churches—and I consider myself a pastor of an evangelical church—have much to repent for in this regard as Christian action, inaction and callous rhetoric have driven those who might find transformation in the loving arms of Jesus Christ away from a community that claims to offer hospitable welcome to all (3 John 7-8).

As congregations seek to provide hospitality to gay persons, evangelical churches have a reputation and history of denunciation to overcome. In conversations with gay persons regarding their interaction with Christians and the church, Andrew Marin has found two common threads: grief and visceral pain. Many gay persons feel alone in their search for God.¹⁴³ According to a recent survey, non-Christians have three primary perceptions of Christians: they are 1) anti-gay, 2) judgmental and 3) hypocritical.¹⁴⁴ This perception contrasts sharply with Peter’s admonition to believers in 1 Peter 4:7-11.

142. The recent Nashville Statement serves as a timely example. To read it in its entirety, see Appendix E.

143. Marin, *Love is an Orientation*, 20.

144. *Ibid.*, 100.

The church is to welcome gay persons exactly as the church welcomes all persons (Hebrews 13:1-3).¹⁴⁵ The church is made up of sinners—sinners of all kinds. Purity—or any arbitrary standard of holiness—is not a requirement for admission (Matthew 9:9-13). The church is a refuge from the storms of life and a place of transformation; this is true for all who enter its doors; homosexuals are not an exempt class excluded from God’s offer of healing.¹⁴⁶ No one comes to the church pristine or perfect (Romans 3:23); rather we come to the church to work out our salvation in “fear and trembling” within a community of others seeking to do the same (Philippians 2:12). The church is intended to be a place of gathering, not exclusion (Zechariah 11:16 and Luke 15:1-7). The church must ask, and help gay persons to answer, how believers with homosexual attraction may live in surrender and faithfulness to Jesus Christ.¹⁴⁷ Some churches have treated gay persons not unlike first century Jewish religious leaders treated tax collectors; Luke 19 serves as a reminder that Jesus welcomed Zacchaeus and even went to his house.¹⁴⁸

Andrew Marin shares nine concerns that gay persons have of evangelical Christians: 1) relating to Christians in a church environment; 2) sexuality as the sole identifier in church; 3) invitation to church groups and activities; 4) concern that Christians think homosexuality is a special sin; 5) belief that being gay is a choice; 6) fear that friendship will be misinterpreted as flirtation; 7) fear of being labeled a pedophile; 8) fear of being labeled HIV positive; and 9) fear of being kicked out of the church.¹⁴⁹ The

145. Grenz, *Welcoming but Not Affirming*, 2.

146. Ibid., 133.

147. Hill, *Washed and Waiting*, 16.

148. Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved*, 77.

149. Marin, *Love is an Orientation*, 31-32.

church must address these concerns with tact and love. Hospitality reminds believer that conversion is an act of God, not of humanity nor of the church. The willingness of a church to provide hospitality to gay persons centers upon love and welcome; the work of conviction, repentance and conversion remains under the auspices of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵⁰

It is much easier to remain behind solid partitions than to allow openings for others to enter one's space. Those partitions may be barriers of brick and mortar or obstacles of words and practice. Having a completely defined space that delineates between those in and those out provides a simpler life. A church of porous boundaries does not provide that stark contrast. But it allows for the Holy Spirit to come forth, offering mutual transformation of the welcomed and welcomers, the stranger and the community (Galatians 5:13).

The issue for evangelical congregations fulfilling their mission to offer hospitality to all sinners concerns porous boundaries. Does Scripture provide assistance with working out porous boundaries? Does it offer a means to provide hospitality to gay persons without compromising the faith integrity of the community? Does the Bible offer limitations to the porous nature of congregational boundaries? Luke 15:1-3 and 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 may answer these questions.

Joseph Fitzmyer calls chapter 15 the "heart of Luke."¹⁵¹ It contains one parable told three different ways: a lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost son. These images reinforce a single point—God rejoices over the salvation of lost sinners. The occasion that warrants

150. Ibid., 108.

151. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV: Introduction, Translation and Notes*, The Anchor Bible, 28A, Chapters 10-24, 2 (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1985), 1071.

these images comes in verses 1-2. Jesus overhears the muttering of the religious leaders against him concerning his hospitality toward religious outcasts. The complaints against Jesus' fraternizing with tax collectors and sinners began in Luke 5:30. They are two-fold in nature: Jesus shows hospitality to these outsiders who by their sinfulness and impurity deserve none and Jesus dines with them. The Pharisees lumped tax collectors within the same category as robbers, evildoers and adulterers.¹⁵² They failed to meet the holiness standards of the Mosaic law. They also failed to abide by the strict rules and regulations of the Pharisees themselves. They do not therefore deserve welcome or hospitality, until they repent and change their lifestyles. That Jesus would dine with these impure people only solidified the complaint. Table fellowship was an important art of Ancient Near Eastern culture. It was one thing to feed the downtrodden and sinners; it was quite another to dine with them. Sharing a meal implied acceptance and solidarity.¹⁵³ John the Baptist called sinners to repentance; Jesus dined with those same sinners. Jeremias writes: "[T]o invite a man to a meal was an honour. It was an offer of peace, trust, brotherhood and forgiveness . . . The inclusion of sinners in the community of salvation, achieved in table-fellowship, is the most meaningful expression of the message of the redeeming love of God."¹⁵⁴

In response to grumbling of the Pharisees and keepers of the Law, Jesus offers a parable. The message of the parable is that God revels in the recovery of the lost. David

152. David Garland, *Luke*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 611.

153. Kenneth Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke*, Combined Edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 1423.

154. Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus* (New York: Scribner, 1971), 115f.

Garland notes that the objections to Jesus' inclusion of tax collectors and sinners was not the only cause for friction with the religious leaders; they also objected to the celebratory nature of Jesus' proclamation.¹⁵⁵ The religious caste sought to keep out the impure, the irreligious, those who had made poor decisions and defiled themselves. The religious leaders exhibited a fear that the impurity of sinners would somehow infect them and impact their own personal/communal holiness. Tax collectors and sinners had a religious 'leprosy' keeping them out of and away from holy people.

Jesus by contrast was not afraid of being tainted by his association with these outcasts. He sought out sinners to bring them into relationship with God, lacking any hesitation or concern that his own personal piety would suffer. The Pharisees avoided sinners and tax collectors. They understood repentance as a precondition for grace; in this chapter Jesus reorders salvation so that repentance occurs as a response to grace.¹⁵⁶

Several points from this passage speak to porous boundaries. First, Jesus did not lower his standards toward sin by associating, hosting and eating with those the Pharisees excluded. He maintained a message of holiness and obedience. But, this message went forth to those most in need of it. Second, Jesus did not act as though his offer of hospitality to these sinners would negatively impact his relationship to God. Rather, he demonstrated the opposite. His relationship with God influenced and transformed many of those the Pharisees considered outside of God's love. Finally, Jesus sought out the lost by offering them hospitality; he did so without affirming their sin. Jesus modeled porous

155. Garland, *Luke*, 608.

156. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 155.

boundaries in seeking the lost. He maintained strict holiness and piety while allowing sinners and tax collectors to taste the Kingdom of Heaven.

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul advocates that the church in Corinth cast out a believer who was involved in an immoral relationship, arguing that continued association with this sinner will infect and damage the entire Corinthian church. Upon first reading, one might parallel Paul's stance with that of the Pharisees and keepers of the Law in Luke 15:1-2. Paul and Jesus are not at odds. 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 offers some clarity as to this issue and demonstrates that Paul's argument does not contradict Jesus' hospitality toward sinners but in fact follows that example.

Following his admonition for the expulsion of the young man now sleeping with his father's wife, Paul specifies the audience of his argument. Paul argues that the church must expel believers who act immorally because they sully the name of Christ and threaten the holy distinctiveness of the Christian community. Paul makes a distinction here between insiders and outsiders.¹⁵⁷ Insiders who call themselves Christian but act no differently from non-believers dilute the distinctiveness of the Christian community. The faith community is to send those nominal believers out of the community; this includes exclusion from table fellowship and the Lord's Supper. Outsiders who do not claim the name of Christ are not judged by the same standard as insiders. The faith community does not condemn non-believers for their behavior; rather the Christian community has the mission to share the Gospel with those non-believers.

157. Robert Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2011), 87.

Paul offers a first century contrast between the early church and the Qumran community. The Qumran followers withdrew from the world, seeking to place a geographic boundary between themselves and outsiders.¹⁵⁸ This boundary would preserve the holiness of the Qumran community from the impurity of the secular world around them. Paul finds this solution to the challenge of preserving pious distinction absurd and impossible. He does not advocate building a hard and firm barrier to keep out non-believers. He does expect Corinthian Christians to have hard and firm barriers to insiders who live immoral lives.

The hard and fast boundaries that necessitate exclusion apply to believers within a believing community. Nominal Christians must leave the faith community. Their continued presence harms the larger community. Porous boundaries however remain for those outside the faith community, including the “immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters.” To these, the Christian community offers hospitality and embrace.¹⁵⁹

Luke 15 and 1 Corinthians 5 provide biblical foundations for porous boundaries. New Testament expulsions apply to lapsed believers, not to those outside the faith. The mandate to reach the lost continues. Hospitality then is as much a hallmark of Christian piety as is the prohibition against homosexual behavior found within Scripture. Porous boundaries provide the means to maintain the both/and dynamic of hospitality to gay persons and affirming biblical truth.

158. Hays, *First Corinthians*, 87.

159. The practical work of determining where boundaries are and are not porous will depend in some part upon individual churches. Baptism, membership, leadership, communion and volunteering are all levels of participation. Subsequent chapters offer data upon these demarcations.

Church is the place for relationships built on grace and truth to grow and live. Through the offer of hospitality, gay persons may come to know transformation and comfort. Those offering hospitality may come to know that love and correction are not mutually exclusive but instead are complementary.¹⁶⁰ Jesus offers a model for seeking relationships with gay persons—mutually transforming, deep and meaningful relationships. In this connection, evangelical believers and gay persons may come to know that the love of Jesus is neither permissive nor conditional.¹⁶¹

As one moves closer to the center of a church, the boundaries become firmer and less porous. Expectations and community standards become gates. This maintains the identity of the community.

A church with a theological foundation anchored to biblical truth—truth about the prohibition of homosexual behavior and the mandate to offer hospitality—will exhibit porous boundaries strong enough to maintain a community’s identity with Christ and porous enough to allow sinners and outcasts to come forward. In this way, the evangelical church may welcome gay persons into the embrace of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that homosexual behavior is contrary to the Bible. As God calls the church to speak truth regarding homosexual behavior, God also calls the church to offer hospitality to gay persons. This hospitality has a depth and maturity greater than and beyond mere inclusion or diversity. Gospel hospitality involves love and truth, not one without the other. The means by which a congregation can offer hospitality while

160. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 34.

161. Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved*, 82.

maintaining biblical integrity involves porous boundaries. Those openings allow strangers to enter the congregation; those boundaries allow the church to maintain its allegiance to Jesus Christ. A church actively and openly offering hospitality to gay persons aligns itself with the Bible and its mandate to love the lost. Through this perspective and practice, God may bring transformation to gay persons, heterosexual believers and the church itself.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Methods

Introduction

God calls the church to speak truth and grace, to warn of sin and welcome into fellowship. The church does this all through the telling of the story of Jesus Christ. The Bible clearly prohibits homosexual behavior in both the Old and New Testaments. The Bible also clearly mandates that followers of Jesus are to welcome sinners into his presence. Chapter 2 examined these assertions. May these biblical tenets co-exist? This project addresses the issue of how evangelical churches that take the Bible seriously—in both its prohibitions and directives—may show hospitality to gay persons in a manner that upholds the truth of the Gospel and invites gay persons to encounter the transformative love of Jesus Christ. The question at hand is to ascertain what practices evangelical churches have undertaken to welcome gay persons into their congregations and determine where the limits of those practices exist. This included how a specific church, First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, could offer hospitality to gay persons in its community.

Description

For Research Question 1 [RQ1], I designed a survey [Appendix B] to ascertain how evangelical churches are or are not showing hospitality to gay persons.

For Research Question 2 [RQ2], I designed an intervention with six parts. Part one of the intervention began with an introduction of the overall study including the

central problem. I also defined relevant terms in order to have common language for discussion. Those terms were *evangelical church*, *homosexuality*, *sexual orientation*, *hospitality* and *porous boundaries*. Session One concluded with participants taking a variation of the RQ1 survey [Appendix C] in order to provide a baseline for their attitudes and thoughts regarding this issue.

Session Two examined the relevant biblical texts on homosexuality. These are Genesis 19, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10. The exegesis focused on these verses within their context. The session continued with a look at the Christian tradition's understanding on homosexuality. We concluded the time together noting differences between sexual orientation and sexual behavior.

Session Three considered the biblical mandate on hospitality and how the church does and does not exemplify this. The work of Elizabeth Newman assisted in this. We then exegeted Luke 19:1-10. We discussed hospitality theologically including the difference between hospitality and acceptance or tolerance.

Session Four centered upon theological reflection of the doctrines of creation and redemption. Thereafter we watched and discussed Preston Sprinkle's Vimeo: *Dear Church: I'm Gay*. This illustrated the difficulty that the evangelical church has had in showing hospitality to gay persons through the words and thoughts of gay persons who have left the church.

Session Five focused upon the concept of porous boundaries utilizing the work of Miroslav Volf. We exegeted both Luke 15 and 1 Corinthians 5. Following this, we discussed the application of porous boundaries as it relates to gay persons for the church

universal. Our final and sixth session moved to the application of the preceding work at First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, in very detailed terms. For the last exercise, the sample group re-took the initial survey in order to determine any changes in thinking and attitudes.

Statement of Research Questions

Two research questions guided the inquiry into the effectiveness of this project:

1. What boundaries must be in place to secure the identity of the community as it welcomes gay persons?
2. What openings must be in place to allow a congregation to offer hospitality to gay persons?

Description of Methodology

The Research Question 1 sought to ascertain how churches are and are not welcoming gay persons into their midst including limits to inclusion. For RQ1, I designed a survey [Appendix B] that asked, in the first portion, respondents to rate the receptivity of gay persons at their churches between (5) Strongly Disagree to (1) Strongly Agree at various levels of participation from attendance to baptism to membership to volunteering and finally leadership. For instance, “My church has gay/lesbian persons attending services.” Another asks “My church would allow a non-celibate gay/lesbian person to become a congregation member.” One more reads “My church would allow a celibate gay/lesbian person to serve in church leadership, such as an elected board member.”

The second portion of the survey asked open-ended questions regarding the church’s position on homosexuality overall, how it arrived at that position and how this position has been communicated internally and externally to the congregation. An

example follows: “How would you characterize your church’s position on homosexuality?” Another reads “What has been the greatest difficulty within your congregation surrounding homosexuality?” These questions provided both a framework to retain the focus of the research and a space for the experiences of the participants.

The survey provided an appropriate methodology for several reasons.¹ The surveys provided data directly from respondents. This provided a means to obtain subjective information from respondents regarding their inner feelings and thoughts. The survey allowed me to structure questions to obtain specific data. Utilizing a range of pre-determined answers as well as specified open-ended questions, provided control to utilize the data within this project. According to Vogt, the data obtained through surveys typically reflects honest answers from the respondents and thus provides reliability.

The Research Question 2 sought to ascertain the attitudes of members of a particular church relating to this issue and then measure any changes following a six-week period of study. For RQ2, I chose a panel design. The RQ1 survey was adapted and utilized as part of this longitudinal study [Appendix C]. The RQ2 survey asked participants in the first portion to rate the receptivity of gay persons at First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, between (5) Strongly Disagree to (1) Strongly Agree at various levels of participation from attendance to baptism to membership to volunteering and finally leadership.

Example questions included: “First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, would baptize a non-celibate gay/lesbian person,” and “First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, would hold a dedication service for the adopted or biological child of a

1. W. Paul Vogt, Dianne C. Gardner, and Lynne M. Haeffele, *When to Use What Research Design* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2012), 16-19.

gay/lesbian couple,” and “I would invite a gay friend/neighbor/co-worker to First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona.”

The second portion of the RQ2 survey asked open-ended questions regarding First Baptist Church’s position on homosexuality overall, how it arrived at that position and how this position has been communicated internally and externally to this congregation. Example questions included: “What has been the greatest difficulty within First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, surrounding homosexuality?” and “What makes First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, hospitable to gay persons?” and “What hinders gay persons from finding hospitality at First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona?”

The panel survey provided an appropriate methodology to study change over time of a group of participants.² While the longitudinal study was limited to a short time period, the panel survey provided data to determine if the participants in the program changed their beliefs or feelings as a result of the curriculum used. This method allowed for a diagnostic of the group at the outset of the intervention and again at the conclusion of the program.

For RQ1, I utilized an online company to conduct the survey. I was the only one collecting the data. For RQ2, I collected data through multiple means, including discussion, reflections and comments during the course of study, as well as through the survey. Furthermore, I utilized inductive data analysis to gather themes, relevant comments, categories and patterns.

2. Vogt, Gardner, and Haeffele, *When to Use What Research Design*, 23.

Sample

Concerning RQ1, I utilized judgment sampling. The church I serve, First Baptist Church of Scottsdale, Arizona, is affiliated with the American Baptist Church USA denomination [ABCUSA]. Our region within that denomination is ABCOFLASH (American Baptist Churches of Los Angeles, the Southwest and Hawaii). This region is primarily evangelical within a moderately evangelical denomination. Homosexuality has become a topic among pastors and congregations within ABCUSA and this region in particular since the mid-2000's. I received approval from Executive Director Dr. Sam Chetti of ABCOFLASH to send this survey to all English speaking ABCOFLASH churches via email. ABCOFLASH represents 151 churches. Of these 88 are predominantly English language speaking. Of those English language ABCOFLASH churches, I received 57 replies, yielding a response rate of 65%.

This pool allowed for a criterion based purposive sample. ABCOFLASH provided a pool evangelical churches to utilize as the sample. The invitation to participate came directly from the ABCOFLASH office through email. The survey went to Lead or Senior Pastors at ABCOFLASH churches via an online link. The survey was entirely voluntary. Replies were not identified by pastor or church. All replies were received anonymously. This allowed for responses uninfluenced by the researcher. After eight weeks, I had received 57 replies.

For RQ2, I utilized a stratified random sample method. The sample intentionally included a selection from three distinct groups within the congregation: staff, lay leaders and laity. I enlisted the assistance of my church office staff in providing the random sample. To do this, they formed three sets sequentially numbering the staff set, the lay

leaders set and the active membership set by last name alphabetically. They then used a random number generator online to produce two participants from staff, three from the lay leadership and twenty-five from membership. An invitation letter went to each person detailing the purpose, dates, times and schedule.

Summary of Data Collection Process

I collected data through multiple means. For RQ1, the online survey tool was sent out to ABCOFLASH churches on June 30, 2017. It remained active until September 30, 2017. The online survey provided aggregated responses to the questions with standardized replies by question number. The online survey tool provided verbatim comments to each open-ended question. The responses to these surveys were kept confidentially and anonymously. Each respondent answered the same questions without influence from the researcher.

For RQ2, I administered the survey during Session One, asking each participant to write their initials at the top right corner. I collected the surveys and they remained in my possession. The responses to these surveys were kept confidentially, though not anonymously. Each respondent answered the same questions without influence from the researcher. I re-administered the same survey at the conclusion of Session Six, again asking each participant to write their initials at the top right corner. I collected the responses personally and they remained in my possession. The six in-person meetings allowed for the collection of reflections from each participant at the end of each session.

Data Analysis

For RQ1, I made a comprehensive list of responses to garner best practices from this survey referenced for each question. I utilized coding to supply key themes and ideas from respondents. This led to memoing, which provided patterns and data on best practices. From here, I utilized diagramming to ascertain levels of inclusion and exclusion of gay persons within church communities.

For RQ2, I compared the results from the initial survey with the results of the second, which took place at the conclusion of the study. This material provided the primary data. The initial results for each survey were compared with the final results of each survey for each person with differences notes. I kept reflection notes for each session, noting relevant comments. The primary data for RQ2 was the comparison of the surveys; notations from the six sessions provided insight into those changes over time. I compared the primary and secondary surveys of each participant to measure any and all changes. From the open-ended questions, I coded, memoed and finally diagrammed responses to determine what the porous boundaries at First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, would be as it comes to offering hospitality to gay persons.

Validity and Reliability

For RQ1, the survey structure supplied validity and reliability. Each respondent answered the same question as every other respondent. Given the voluntary and nature of the invitation and anonymity of participants, respondents were motivated to supply open and honest answers.

As stated previously, the ABCUSA denomination is home to many evangelical congregations. My target church for this study is evangelical, and neither liberal—

meaning welcoming and affirming of homosexual practice—nor fundamentalist—meaning exclusionary toward any outreach to gay persons. Within ABCUSA, ABCCOFLASH has a higher percentage of evangelical churches as a region than do other ABCUSA regions, per the acumen of ABCOFLASH Executive Director Dr. Samuel Chetti. This provided a valid and reliable pool from which to determine best practices as it came to welcoming gay persons into a congregation.

For RQ2, the survey structure supplied validity and reliability. All respondents answered the same questions. Given the voluntary nature of the invitation, respondents were motivated to supply open and honest answers.

The possibility of bias for the RQ2 intervention was present. I took specific steps to mitigate this possibility. As Lead Pastor of First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, I am a known leader to the participants. I began Session One by noting that the study was diagnostic in nature. There was not an intended destination for their individual attitudes and thoughts. The goal of the intervention was to measure any changes to those individual attitudes and thoughts as a result of the study, even if there will be no measureable changes. There were no wrong answers within the structure of this intervention. I also made it known at the first session that I would not intentionally interject my own thoughts or opinions into the discussion and would intentionally refrain from doing so. When asked for an opinion, I reminded the inquirer and the group that I would share my thoughts after the conclusion of the intervention. I facilitated the group; I did not direct it.

Ethics

For RQ1, participation was voluntary and responses were received anonymously. I received implied consent from respondents by their responses; those who did not wish to participate simply did not participate. I included the purpose and an introduction to the project with the survey invitation, thus participants supplied informed consent by their responses. It was highly unlikely that these questions caused hurt or anxiety among the invitees or the respondents.

There are benefits in identifying best practices for welcoming gay persons into churches seeking to do so. This has potential to affect the denomination region, the denomination itself and larger groups of evangelical churches. The Executive Director of ABCOFLASH viewed this project as a benefit to the region. Baylor University IRB considered this survey a business practice; therefore, the survey did not fall under Baylor University IRB's auspices.

The data from RQ1 was stored by the online survey company with a log-in and password that only I knew. As well, once the data was downloaded, it was stored on my personal computer which is also password protected. To state once again, the survey respondents remained anonymous throughout the process. For RQ2, participation was voluntary. The group agreed to keep all discussions and comments between participants confidential. While the researcher knew the survey results for each participant, those individual responses would not be published with attribution. I undertook every safeguard possible to insure the safety and care of the participants. Baylor University IRB approved the structure for RQ2 as laid out. My office staff knew which First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, individuals received an invitation to participate in the intervention.

Only I knew who responded affirmatively to join the group. The first survey for RQ2 was kept by me in a locked filing cabinet in my locked office within the Administration building at First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona. The only identifying marker upon those surveys were the initials of the participants. I kept the second taking of the RQ2 survey in the same locked filing cabinet in my locked office within the Administration building at First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona. Once I gathered all data from the comparison of the first and second takings, I shredded both sets of RQ2 surveys.

Conclusion

The goal of this research was two-fold. How are evangelical churches welcoming gay persons into their hospitable faith communities and what type of porous boundaries are necessary to provide welcome and safeguard for those faith communities? I collected data utilizing survey and panel design. The data of RQ1 came from anonymous respondents of ABCOFLASH. The data of RQ2 came from a stratified random sample of participants of First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, using a longitudinal study. RQ1 and RQ2 provided data to answer both of the research questions.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

The evangelical church faces a dilemma. Biblical truth mandates a rejection of homosexual behavior. The same biblical truth mandates church hospitality toward those who do not know the Gospel. How may a congregation offer hospitality to gay persons in such a way as to bring those individuals—and couples—into a relationship with Jesus Christ that excludes tacit or active acceptance of homosexual behavior?

Two research questions guided the inquiry into the effectiveness of this project:

RQ1. What boundaries must be in place to secure the identity of the community as it welcomes gay persons?

RQ2. What openings must be in place to allow a congregation to offer hospitality to gay persons?

For RQ1, I designed a survey [Appendix B] that asked, in the first portion, respondents to rate the receptivity of gay persons at their churches between (5) Strongly Disagree to (1) Strongly Agree at various levels of participation. The second portion of the survey asked five open-ended questions regarding the church's position on homosexuality overall, how it arrived at that position and how this position has been communicated internally and externally to the congregation.

The church I serve, First Baptist Church of Scottsdale, Arizona, is affiliated with the American Baptist Church USA denomination [ABCUSA]. Our region within that denomination is ABCOFLASH (American Baptist Churches of Los Angeles, the Southwest and Hawaii). This region is primarily evangelical within a moderately evangelical denomination. Homosexuality has become a topic among pastors and

discussion points for congregations within ABCUSA and this region in particular since 2000. I received approval from Executive Director Dr. Sam Chetti of ABCOFLASH to send this survey to all English speaking ABCOFLASH churches via email.

ABCOFLASH represents 151 churches. Of these 88 are predominantly English language speaking. Of those English language ABCOFLASH churches, I received 57 replies, yielding a response rate of 65%.

Boundaries

The results from the first section of RQ1 are in Table 1 below. The left column provides each question. The adjacent rows provide the percentage of responses within the five categories.

Table 1: ABCOFLASH Church Survey

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. My church has gay persons attending services	29%	24%	22%	16%	9%
2. My church would baptize a celibate gay person.	36%	29%	15%	11%	9%
3. My church would baptize a non-celibate gay person.	18%	6%	18%	18%	40%
4. My church would allow a celibate gay person to become a member of the congregation	35%	30%	17%	7%	11%
5. My church would allow a non-celibate gay person to become a member of the congregation.	18%	9%	18%	15%	40%
6. My church would hold a dedication service for the adopted biological child of a gay person.	17%	7%	30%	13%	33%
7. My church would allow a celibate gay person to serve as a church volunteer, such as participate in the choir.	34%	40%	11%	2%	13%

8. My church would allow a non-celibate gay person to serve as a church volunteer, such as participate in choir.	22%	13%	11%	25%	29%
9. My church would allow a celibate gay person to serve in church leadership, such as an elected board member.	26%	27%	22%	9%	16%
10. My church would allow a non-celibate gay person to serve in church leadership, such as an elected board member.	9%	6%	13%	17%	55%
11. My church would allow a staff member to conduct a gay wedding.	11%	2%	5%	20%	62%
12. My church would host a gay wedding.	9%	4%	5%	18%	64%

Of note, questions 7, 11, and 12 had the most agreement. Question 7 had 74% either “Strongly Agree” or “Agree.” An additional 11% gave an ambivalent response. Only 15% answered this question regarding a celibate gay person volunteering negatively. Question 11 and 12 showed even greater agreement, though from a different perspective than Question 7. For Question 11, only 13% positively answered the query. 5% answered indecisively and 82% answered negatively. The results for Question 12 almost match those of Question 11. For Question 12, only 13% answered positively that their church would host a gay wedding. 82% answered either “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree.” A small sample, 5%, answered indecisively.

Also of note, questions 6 and 8 showed the most disagreement for respondents. Question 6’s inclusion of an adopted child into the consideration of church practice toward gay persons illustrated the difficulty of making these decisions. 24% of respondents answered positively toward a child dedication; 30% were undecided; and 46% answered negatively. Question 8 showed more balance on both poles. Concerning

the participation of a non-celibate person as a volunteer, 35% answered positively. 54% answered negatively. 11% answered ambivalently.

Beginning with survey question 13, section two of RQ1 asked five open-ended queries. Question 13 asked *How would you characterize your church's position on homosexuality?* 81% of the respondents espoused a view aligning with biblical Christianity. 15% of respondents admitted to an ambiguous or ill-defined position. 4% of respondents hold a position that affirms homosexual behavior.

Question 14 asked *How did your church arrive at this position?* Of the respondents, 17% shared that the journey to a church understanding involved struggle and difficulty. One respondent wrote, “[f]ighting—firing the pastor—living in factions.” Another commented, “[w]ith pain and many departures.” Another telling answer said, “[b]lood, sweat, and tears.” Two of the respondents confessed to intentionally ignoring this issue and avoiding it. Nine respondents relayed that their churches had undertaken intentional study to come to a unified church understanding on homosexuality.

Question 15 asked *How has this position been communicated internally within the church?* 22% of respondents expressed that their churches had not communicated a position on homosexuality well or adequately. One respondent shared, “[p]oorly.” Other respondents answered that church leadership had communicated the church position from the pulpit and through church documents and/or policies.

Question 16 asked *How has this position been communicated externally outside the church?* 56% of the respondents indicated that the position had not been communicated to the public at large. Others shared that their church's position was

available online at the church's website and through church policies and other documentation available to non-members.

Question 17 asked *What has been the greatest difficulty within your congregation surrounding homosexuality?* This question elicited a number of intriguing and forthright responses. A quarter of respondents said that their primary difficulty was in educating the congregation theologically so that they could welcome gay persons without accepting homosexual behavior. One comment received said, “[c]oming from a Bible conservative position, the hardest thing has been to convince the church that accepting the tension between welcoming gays while not condoning their sexual preference is what we believe Jesus and the apostle command.” Another wrote, “[a]greeing that it’s a sin like any other—especially greed, obesity, pride and lying—and realizing that people change after they become disciples not before.” Still another commented, “[w]e are a fairly small church and I think part of the struggle has been proper training on the struggle of what a person that wants to follow Christ but has homosexual tendencies or is homosexual goes through.” A final word on this aspect of church struggle, one pastor wrote that the most difficult hurdle was “[e]stablishing we were all sinners, once we accepted that fact it was easy to allow everyone else in.”

I noted an additional thread within the responses to Question 17 regarding providing safe and open space within which to discuss the theological and ecclesiological implications of homosexuality and hospitality. This included for one respondent “[l]etting people know it is safe to share their fears and concerns.” Another pastor confessed, “Having a conversation that does not devolve into cable news. I have to teach my

congregation how to have a theological conversation. They...also could learn to handle conflict better.”

While no individual response used the phrase *porous boundaries*, 18% of respondents alluded to the concept and its need. Among these were “[w]hen and how to draw the line of involvement of homosexuals” and “[m]aintaining the balance that anyone struggling with lusts/pornography and sex outside of marriage is all the same, regardless the specifics of each one.” Another wrote, “[w]here lines are drawn for acceptance into the church and leadership. Other sins are often cited to ‘equalize’ non-celibate gay acceptance into the church and in leadership positions.” One respondent offered “hospitality versus truth.”

A final comment from this question sums up opportunity and challenge for the evangelical church. One pastor shared, “[w]e have a large portion of the congregation who believes it’s not at our church. They enjoy living in denial rather than having the challenging conversations. The topic is not just a theology issue, it is present and real and comes with lives. Denial cannot work.”

Summary of Boundaries

The survey results from RQ1 provide both encouragement and cause for concern as the evangelical church seeks to offer hospitality and transformation to gay persons. From data of RQ1, I summarize the major findings regarding boundaries:

First, celibacy both as an aspiration and description provides an important theological detail. The majority of surveyed churches focused upon behavior as opposed to orientation for gay persons. These churches expressed a willingness to allow the hypothetical celibate gay person to enter into all substratum of the congregation. This

welcome dropped drastically and with increasing succession for non-celibate gay persons as the questions asked about interior layers within the church.

Second, this celibate aspect had relevance within the second section of the survey. The churches who are seeking to offer hospitality to gay persons without affirming homosexual behavior make the theological connection between the sin of homosexual behavior and other sinful behavior. Underlying this practical theological application is a deeper theological truth of the fallenness of all of humanity. While Christians confess to sin and profess repentance, we are not perfected to righteousness in this life. The church is a gathering place for sinners, regardless of the type of sin. While scripture clearly denotes homosexual behavior as sinful, far more attention is given to sins of greed, dishonesty and injustice. Connecting homosexual sin within the context of sin per se provided a larger context for congregants to take up hospitality without having that initiative morph into acceptance and affirmation of homosexual behavior.

Third, churches must intentionally and safely discuss this issue. For those that have had this conversation, the survey revealed the struggles inherent to the process. However, as was noted earlier, “[d]enial cannot work.” Churches, pastors and lay leaders need assistance and guidance in how to do this well so as not to cause internal damage to themselves, ignite fear within the congregation, and/or quash hospitality. Denominations, associations and other ecclesial entities must provide assistance in this process.

Fourth, a number of respondents indirectly referred to the concept of *porous boundaries*. The references indicated both a need to theologically understand the concept as well as a means to put it into application.

Openings

The results from the first section of RQ2 are in the table below. The left column provides each question. The adjacent rows provide the percentage of responses within the five categories. Within each cell under the top row are the percentages of the answers given. The top percentage within each cell is the percentage answered at the first taking of the survey during Session One. The middle percentage signifies the percentage for the final taking during Session Six. The bottom percentage represents the change in percentages from Session One to Session Six. These figures are in bold.

Table 2: First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, Survey

		SA	A	N	D	SD
1. First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, has gay persons attending services	T1	40%	27%	27%	6%	0%
	T2	73%	27%	0%	0%	0%
	Change	33%	0%	-27%	-6%	0%
2. First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, would baptize a celibate gay person.	T1	27%	40%	20%	13%	0%
	T2	60%	40%	0%	0%	0%
	Change	33%	0%	-20%	-13%	0%
3. First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, would baptize a non-celibate gay person.	T1	6%	40%	20%	6%	27%
	T2	27%	33%	13%	20%	6%
	Change	21%	-7%	-7%	13%	-21%
4. First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, would allow a celibate gay person to become a member of the congregation	T1	40%	47%	6%	6%	0%
	T2	67%	27%	6%	0%	0%
	Change	27%	-20%	0%	-6%	0%
5. First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, would allow a non-celibate gay person to become a member of the congregation.	T1	13%	33%	20%	20%	13%
	T2	33%	47%	6%	13%	0%
	Change	20%	14%	-13%	-7%	-13%
6. First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, would hold a dedication service for the adopted biological child of a gay person.	T1	13%	27%	20%	27%	13%
	T2	13%	13%	20%	40%	13%
	Change	0%	-14%	0%	13%	0%
7. First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, would allow a celibate gay person to serve as a church volunteer, such as participate in the choir.	T1	27%	33%	13%	13%	13%
	T2	20%	53%	13%	13%	0%
	Change	-7%	20%	0%	0%	-13%

8. First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, would allow a celibate gay person to serve in church leadership, such as an elected board member.	T1	0%	27%	33%	20%	20%
	T2	6%	27%	13%	27%	40%
	Change	6%	0%	-20%	-7%	20%
9. First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, would allow a staff member to conduct a gay wedding.	T1	13%	0%	6%	33%	47%
	T2	0%	0%	13%	27%	60%
	Change	-13%	0%	7%	-6%	13%
10. First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, would host a gay wedding.	T1	6%	0%	13%	27%	53%
	T2	0%	0%	0%	33%	67%
	Change	-6%	0%	-13%	6%	13%
11. A gay person would be welcome at First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona,.	T1	47%	40%	6%	6%	0%
	T2	67%	27%	0%	0%	0%
	Change	20%	-7%	-6%	-6%	0%
12. A gay person would be welcome at any Worship service at First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona,.	T1	40%	47%	6%	6%	0%
	T2	60%	27%	0%	6%	6%
	Change	20%	-20%	-6%	0%	6%
13. A gay person would be welcome at any Grow Group at First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona,.	T1	33%	40%	13%	13%	0%
	T2	47%	40%	0%	6%	6%
	Change	14%	0%	-13%	-7%	6%
14. A gay person would be welcome at any Serve Team at First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona,.	T1	13%	40%	20%	20%	6%
	T2	20%	6%	33%	27%	13%
	Change	7%	-34%	13%	7%	7%
15. I would invite a gay friend/neighbor/co-worker to First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona,.	T1	27%	47%	13%	6%	6%
	T2	53%	47%	0%	0%	0%
	Change	26%	0%	-13%	-6%	-6%
16. I do not see any hindrances to a gay person feeling welcome at First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona,.	T1	0%	47%	27%	27%	0%
	T2	6%	40%	20%	27%	6%
	Change	6%	-7%	-7%	0%	6%

There are several major findings from this data. Per questions 2, 3, and 4, the group has a working theology that offers hospitality to gay persons at First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, through porous boundaries. Celibacy clearly mattered in terms of involvement within the church. Answers to questions 9 & 10 illustrate the limits of these openings as hospitality gives way to expected transformation. Question 14 shows

continued confusion as to First Baptist Church's porous boundaries with a wide dispersion of responses.

Beginning with survey question 17, section two of RQ2 asked six open-ended queries. Question 17 asked *How would you characterize First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, 's position on homosexuality?* The responses from the Session One surveys included the following: "that they are probably welcome"; "I don't really know"; "this is largely unknown to me"; "silent"; and "ambiguous".

The responses from Session Six surveys included the following: "not accepting but welcome them"; "chooses the Bible as its final authority"; "it is sin"; "welcome a person with an understanding that we are all growing closer to Christ"; and "porous boundaries".

Question 18 asked *What has been the greatest difficulty within First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, surrounding homosexuality?* The responses from the Session One surveys included the following: "lack of clarity"; "ambiguity"; "addressing it head on"; "the silence"; and "ignorance".

The responses from Session Six surveys included the following: "boundaries"; "clarity...what we allow"; "ignorance"; "conflict between biblical truth and biblical mandate to be hospitable"; "silence"; and "an avoidance of the issue".

Question 19 asked *How might First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, offer hospitality to a gay person?* The responses from the Session One surveys included the following: "openness to their participation"; "I don't know"; and "we need to be open, honest, and biblically sound about our position on this".

The responses from Session Six surveys included the following: “the same way we offer hospitality to everyone”; “welcome them”; and “building relationships”.

Question 20 asked *How might you offer hospitality to a gay person?* The responses from the Session One surveys included the following: “same as anyone else”; “show grace”; and “break bread with them”.

The responses from Session Six surveys included the following: “interact”; “like I would anyone”; “listening to their journey”; and “build genuine friendship”.

Question 21 asked *What makes First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, hospitable to gay persons?* The responses from the Session One surveys included the following: “not sure it is particularly”; “welcoming culture”; “an attitude of love and openness”; “the fact that we recognize our brokenness”; and “come as you are”.

The responses from Session Six surveys included the following: “no one is asked to disclose sins to attend”; “clear understanding on what the Bible says about hospitality”; “not there yet but trying”; and “we believe that God loves people, all people”.

Question 22 asked *What hinders gay persons from finding hospitality at First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona,?* The responses from the Session One surveys included the following: “stereotype of a Baptist church”; “fear of not being welcome”; “there aren’t any here”; “the church’s reluctance to come forward and address the issue”; “lack of clarity leads to mixed messages”; and “I don’t know”.

The responses from Session Six surveys included the following: “fear of being rejected”; “that a gay lifestyle is incompatible with biblical teachings”; “ability to grow with the church”; and “ignorance”.

Additionally, I recorded comments from participants during the various sessions. During Session Two, there was unanimous consensus that the Bible prohibits homosexual behavior. The Session Four Vimeo *Dear Church, I'm Gay* elicited a great deal of feedback and fostered greater awareness of the complexity of the issue and struggle involved with it. This video was mentioned in both Session Five and Six by participants as having broadened their understanding of the church's exclusion of gay persons and lack of hospitality shown to gay persons in the past. I facilitated a time for final thoughts during Session Six, just before the survey was re-taken. One participant said the church has a "grand lack of clarity" on this issue. Another noted that it is not our "job to judge but to invite and let the Holy Spirit work."

Summary of Openings

The survey results from RQ2 provide data on how a specific church may engage with gay persons in a way that adheres to the biblical prohibition of homosexual behavior and the biblical mandate to offer hospitality. From the RQ2 data, I draw these the major findings regarding openings.

First, the concept of celibacy and its theological implications became more prominent after six weeks of study. Based upon the change in percentages between the first and second taking of the survey, celibate gay persons would encounter very few barriers to full church participation. The exceptions to this trend concerned serving in church leadership and on serve teams [serve teams is the nomenclature used at First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, for missions and outreach]. It is possible that these exceptions have to do with public representation of the church rather than internal hesitation. This demands more study.

Second, the desire and mandate to invite gay persons to church and welcome them once they come increased significantly between survey takings. The idea that hospitality is a biblical mandate seemed to have an effect upon the overall attitude and welcoming application of the study group.

Third, this congregation needs more clarity regarding homosexuality. It appears from the survey data and the comments that, while the study was a start in the right direction, more conversations, exegesis, prayer and discussion are needed.

Fourth, pairing hospitality with a discussion of homosexuality, including exegesis of passages related to both, changed the dynamic of the discussion. One participant noted that too often a discussion of homosexuality devolves into heterosexuals telling gay persons what God doesn't want them to do. The hospitality aspect turned this expected course around. Hospitality provides a biblical and necessary mandate for heterosexuals. This alters the discussion so that everyone has skin in the game.

Fifth, the discussion time during the sessions proved fruitful. The sessions provided safe space for the expression of a variety of opinions. Consensus was made on several aspects of this subject. Even with some divergent opinions [in keeping with Baptist polity], the disagreement was respectful. Amid minor disunity of thought, the group showed unity of purpose and proclamation.

Conclusion

The study achieved its purpose in seeking to answer questions of boundaries and openings, essentially what porous boundaries look like for a congregation seeking to adhere to the biblical truth of prohibitions of homosexual behavior and commands for hospitable welcome. Celibacy matters and essentially functions as a means for porous

boundaries. The discussion of homosexuality must include study of Christian hospitality; this provides flexibility and strength for the congregation. Congregations cannot ignore the issue as it pervades the culture, families and most church pews.

Pastoral leadership is essential in navigating this process for congregations. In my role within the intervention group, I facilitated the discussion. I deferred when asked direct questions concerning my thoughts on the matter. It is possible, and likely, that if I had served in a more active role the final survey results would have appeared differently. As a Baptist, pastors are not the sole arbiters of church doctrine or practice. However, pastors should have a place in leading a healthy discussion of the biblical prohibition toward homosexuality and the biblical mandate toward hospitality.

CHAPTER FIVE

Reflective Conclusions

This Doctorate of Ministry Project sought to provide a pathway by which evangelical, Bible-believing churches may show hospitality to gay persons in order to facilitate a climate of transformation for those persons. While I would hope to change the minds of those clergy and believers who have implicitly (or explicitly) rejected the Bible's clear denunciation of homosexual behavior, this is not my goal. The theological left has erroneously determined that the Bible is wrong and irrelevant, at least in its references to homosexual behavior. The need for clarity of thought and explication of the doctrines of creation and redemption remains. The call to submit to something beyond our own individual (and at times communal) desires continues to sound. The questions asked in this project are not new; many have sought to reconcile how to love sinners while hating sin. That this project casts the divine initiative within the context of hospitality may be new.

Is failure of exegesis a greater ecclesial sin than a failure of invitation? Is lack of clarity concerning major doctrines worse than a lack of clarity concerning with whom Jesus would fellowship? The church, and its constituting members of both the theological left and right, have much to confess. As the left has failed to speak biblical truth to gay persons by affirming homosexual behavior, the right has failed to speak love to those same gay persons through hospitality. Until the evangelical church takes up its call to offer welcome, invitation and hospitality to gay persons under the larger rubric of offering welcome, invitation and hospitality to all sinners, then it will fail to fulfill the

Great Commandment (Matthew 22:36-40) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20).

How might evangelical churches utilize embrace to offer hospitality to gay persons? How can churches understand the necessary requirements of hospitality to welcome those different from themselves while also maintaining the biblical and theological integrity of their community of faith? How may faith communities set porous boundaries to welcome gay persons while insuring the cohesion of the community itself? Many churches have struggled to live out their call faithfully: remaining true to the scriptural warrant as it comes to homosexual behavior while answering Jesus' mandate to welcome sinners.

As stated in the introduction, my relationship with Jesus Christ informs me that the message of the Gospel is for all, sufficiently redeems all and must be shared with all. The same Bible that prohibits homosexual behavior commands that believers offer hospitality to sinners (Mark 12:30-31). The same Bible that commands hospitality offers transformation from who we are—sinners—to who God intends us to be—redeemed disciples (Romans 12:2). I do not believe that God set up an impossible dilemma for churches as it comes to gay persons. Many churches have made a false choice; some choose to ignore the scriptural truth prohibiting homosexual behavior; others choose to ignore the imperative to welcome others to the message of Christ.

There was one particular insight that I gained through this study that I had not expected. I expected criticism from the theological left; the point of this project was not to call them into biblical truth about homosexual behavior. While I pray that this happens, it was not the goal. Rather, this project sought to call the evangelical church into biblical

truth about hospitality. I did not expect the criticism from the theological right as it related to hospitality toward gay persons. Some reacted to the ABCOFLASH survey, including some who refused to participate, with suspicion and disgust over the issue of welcoming gay persons even being raised. Others rejected hospitality to gay persons outright, offering welcome hypothetically only after those sinners repent and sufficiently redeem themselves.

I find this unexpected insight tragic. Redemption is found within the arms of Christ alone (Romans 3:23-25). Christians are to be conduits to Christ, not obstructive barriers. The reaction noted above only illustrates the need for a theological grounding in hospitality and its application—presented within this project through the concept of porous boundaries.

As was shown in Chapter Two, the Bible prohibits homosexual behavior without equivocation. The Bible also mandates hospitality toward sinners for the purpose of bringing those sinners into a redeeming relationship with Jesus Christ. The church has a mission and responsibility to speak truth and offer grace (2 Corinthians 4:13-15). Theologically constructed porous boundaries offer a means to do this.

As Chapter Three and Four demonstrated, porous boundaries come about only intentionally and specifically. Pastoral and lay leadership must set a course to move congregants into a theological understanding of the biblical truth about hospitality and homosexuality. Once the congregation has the theological foundation set, it may begin to talk about what welcoming gay persons into a relationship with Jesus Christ looks like within that church's context. As with most ministry, congregations will make missteps; these unintentional errors could prove harmful to the congregation itself, to gay persons

through a poor witness of Gospel hospitality, or both. However, failing to show hospitality to those in need of Jesus is more than an unintentional error; it is sin.

Understanding hospitality as participation with Jesus Christ, worship of Jesus Christ and finally commanded by Jesus Christ, will provide a congregation with the indicative necessary to move toward the imperative of offering hospitality (Matthew 28:19). Christians may only offer hospitality because they have first received it from God (Romans 12:1-2). Current members of the church did not deserve God's welcome; they did not earn God's embrace; yet through grace and love, God extended hospitality to each of them (Ephesians 2:8). The church therefore is God's house; God is always and ever present as its Host to all (Ephesians 2:19-22).

Living out one's faith in hospitality entails actively looking for opportunities to engage and welcome gay persons into a church. This manifests itself as receptivity to gay persons entering a congregation for worship. It comes alive as personal invitations for gay persons to join worship, small groups or other church activities. It is a mandate for a community of faith and individual believers. A church is expected to seek these occasions to connect and grasp them wholeheartedly (Mark 1:32-34, 1:40-42, Luke 5:27-32, and 15:8-10 to name a few). The charge to do this begins with pastoral leadership teaching and modeling to a congregation how to love and provide hospitality to gay persons.¹

Having heard the charge from church leadership, the laity may adopt hospitality as a vocation. There are some easy bridges that evangelical churches can make with gay persons, including education to dispel misunderstandings about homosexuality, understanding the biblical function of hospitality as it relates to homosexuality, and

1. Chad Thompson, *Loving Homosexuals as Jesus Would* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), 11.

committing to serve God through welcoming gay persons.² A church that is ready to welcome gay persons into its midst—into God’s loving embrace—may start with this both to test its convictions as well as its practices. Richard Rohr reminds us that changing paradigms, as this does, only happens when we live it out: we can’t “think ourselves into new ways of living, we live ourselves into new ways of thinking.”³

Hospitality implies joyous reception and an eagerness to engage. Expect these occasions. When gay persons show up or receive a proper welcome, the church must celebrate and rejoice!⁴ This is an integral part of hospitality and readiness.

Hospitality inherently carries risk. As Jesus welcomed believers unto himself, he risked and ultimately gave his life (Mark 3:1-6). As the church opens its doors and leaves its familiar confines to actively seek out gay persons, there is uncertainty and anxiety. Opening one’s arms to embrace another leaves the host exposed and vulnerable. The host also risks rejection if those welcomed refuse to enter the host’s space.

There will be successes and there will be failures. This type of risk is not well managed; but it may be well experienced. Will a congregation risk mistakes? Will a congregation bear rejection? Will a congregation remain in a stance of embrace knowing that embracing the other will result invariably in change of that congregation and a repositioning of one’s stance or place? Without a fair assessment of this risk, even as the risk specifics are undefined, a congregation may shrink from porous boundaries and

2. Thompson, *Loving Homosexuals as Jesus Would*, 62-63.

3. Grant, 216, from Richard Rorty, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer* (NY: Crossroad, 2003), 19.

4. Marin, *Love is an Orientation*, 79.

instead react to the inherent difficulty of the mandate of hospitality by insulating itself.

Entering upon this path of hospitality carries risk.

As well, the faith community risks its identity when it welcomes outsiders. Porous boundaries must allow for strangers to enter; the identity of a community must have some elasticity to make room for new people. But inherent identity must also retain strength so that the community is not overwhelmed by the welcomed. The boundaries must hold. Welcoming outsiders risks this tension—both the porous openings and the firmness of the boundaries. Exceptions to a community’s rule—its theology and practice—do not truly threaten that community unless the exceptions become the rule.⁵ A congregation that does not have a theological and biblical basis including the why and what of its hospitality risks both its welcome to gay persons and its own identity.

The end of hospitality is not to be hospitable; it is to bring others into a relationship with Jesus Christ (Acts 17:27). Hospitality is not constructed of finite occasions; it is an ongoing enterprise. Offering welcome does not stop. Its frequency does not end. Its depth continues. The Gospel compels the evangelical church to enter into deep connections with gay persons. This means that the evangelical church can no longer view gay persons as caricatures or two-dimensionally.⁶ This will only happen as the church views gay persons as sons and daughters of God, people God desperately wants to reach and redeem. For this to function, believers must know gay persons. This may happen through living life together, sharing in the ups and downs and the struggles and

5. Stanley Hauerwas, “Gay Friendship: A Thought Experiment,” *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Eugene Rogers (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 301.

6. Marin, *Love is an Orientation*, 21.

celebrations of living under a gracious God in a fallen world. Here the mutuality of knowing and being known, embracing and being embraced, may come to fruition. The connecting builds lasting relationships; it is not evangelism or conversion; it is friendship and bonding. The purpose of hospitality is to build horizontal and vertical relationships.⁷ This means connecting lives, not moments. Through these relationships, Jesus Christ will build his kingdom.

This project, as with many courses of study that demand both great time and attention, comes from a personal place. I want D., G., T., and others to have Christian community that will love them, support them in their struggles and provide a witness to Jesus in their lives. The church is a place for sinners to come and be transformed through the power of Christ (1 Timothy 1:12-16). It has always been that for me; it may be that for gay persons. There is profound tension and real human pain as the church seeks to navigate a path that upholds biblical integrity and Christian hospitality for gay persons. Only by finding and following this path will the church become a place of redemption and liberation for all God's people as it was intended to be.

I want the Bride of Christ to welcome all into its midst. I want to lead First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, into a place of porous boundaries so that we may show hospitality to all people, including and intentionally gay persons. By this, First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, may provide a home for D., G., T. and others so that they may grow in their faith and relationship with God. By this, Christ will grow First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, in its faith and relationship with God.

7. Marin, *Love is an Orientation*, 59.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Biblical Exegesis of Passages Referencing Homosexuality

There is no shortage of exegesis on the six passages that relate to homosexuality. I have included within this appendix the scholarship of these verses that most impacted my study.

Genesis 19:1-29

Within the context of the cycle, this passage details the contrast between depraved humanity and faithful Abraham. These verses also garner the most controversy as to its applicability to the project discussion. Hays argues that the passage has nothing to do with a prohibition of homosexual behavior and is thus irrelevant to the debate.¹ The sin of Sodom detailed here exceeds mere sexual sin; the sexual sin referenced, in this case intentional gang rape of males by males, highlights violence and the rejection of the cultural mandate to provide hospitality to strangers. Hays cites the other biblical references to Genesis 19 to bolster his position: Ezekiel 16:49-50 and 2 Peter 2:6-7. Ezekiel does not explicitly mention sexual sins within the list of Sodom's transgressions. Jude 7 does explicitly name sexual infractions as a cause for judgement, though homosexuality is not stated specifically. Outside of this verse in Jude, Hays finds nothing of use for the homosexuality discussion within Genesis 19 itself or within the other two references to Genesis 19.

Sprinkle agrees, noting that this has nothing to contribute to discourse on

1. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 381.

consensual homosexual behavior.² Vines agrees with Hays and Sprinkle. The issue in Genesis 19 concerns gang rape; homosexuality is an ancillary feature to the intended degradation of the angelic strangers visiting Lot.³

Gagnon makes the opposite case arguing that homosexuality is a prominent feature of this passage. The degrading nature of homosexuality adds an element of shame to the violence intended upon the visitors by the male citizens of Sodom.⁴ Gang rape is a main component of the passage. Homosexuality, whether consensual or coerced, is a main component of that gang rape and should not be overlooked.

The verb in 19:5 translated in the NIV as “can have sex” comes from the Hebrew word *yada*, יָדָע, which means to know intimately. The NRSV translates this as “may know them.” In contrast to some other commentators including Boswell, Gagnon argues that this knowing refers to sexual behavior explicitly in accord with the NIV translation. Gagnon reads *yada* as pointing to homosexual sin within the larger sin of gang rape. The perversion of homosexual behavior is a key element of this story. Brueggemann argues that *yada* does not usually refer to homosexuality, citing its use in Judges 19:22-25 for evidence.⁵

Hamilton notes that *yada* and its derivatives occur 1,058 times in the Old Testament. The verb form is used 948 times; 15 of these refer to knowing within a sexual context. In the other instances of *yada*, abuse and violence are not connoted in its usage.⁶

2. Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 42.

3. Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 65.

4. Via and Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 71.

5. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 164.

6. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 33-34.

Hamilton, utilizing verse 8, argues that homosexuality does play a part in this given the force of Lot's offer of his daughters. The rejection of them indicates that sexual intercourse per se is not the issue. The men want to have sex with these visiting men, not simply have sex per se.

Disputing Hays, Gagnon argues that Ezekiel 16:49-50 posits the sin of Sodom as homosexual behavior explicitly in verse 50 with the word "detestable" which comes from the Hebrew *tow'ebah*, תועבה. This noun may also be translated as "abomination." He interprets this as a reference to homosexual behavior. Likewise, he reads 2 Peter 2:7 and the Greek *aselgeia*, ἀσελγεία, as inclusive of homosexual behavior in its translation as "sensuality." Jude 7 makes explicit the sexually sinful component of Sodom including an explicit reference to perversion, referring to homosexuality according to Gagnon.⁷

This passage, in distinction from the other five that follow, presents the most ambiguity. I believe that Gagnon's more expansive interpretation of the sins of Sodom fits the context better than other interpretations and adds to the gravity of its transgressions. However, the point of the story is not primarily to argue against homosexual behavior. The pendulum of scholarship once held that this passage was about little else. Then the pendulum swung so that homosexuality had nothing to do with this passage. The proper interpretation in my opinion lies in the middle. The story concerns human wickedness and divine wrath. Homosexuality is a part of that wickedness and thus a cause of that wrath. But, homosexual behavior is not the primary agent for God's judgement here. This text therefore is not a primary text for the discussion of the prohibition of homosexual behavior. It may serve as a secondary text.

7. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 58.

Leviticus 18:22

Hays, Sprinkle and Gagnon all conclude that this verse explicitly rejects homosexual behavior without qualification or condition and do so absolutely.⁸

Vines asks the question why only male-male sexual behavior is condemned and not female-female sexual behavior here.⁹ His question seeks to undercut the view that homosexual behavior per se is prohibited and instead offer a counter that scripture directs this prohibition against a specific occasion of homosexual behavior, offering the suggestion that the Levitical writer aims this prohibition against Israelites participating in male cultic prostitution. However, ancient Israel was a patriarchal society. Women lacked the liberty to engage in homosexual behavior at will. This verse did not have to address lesbian behavior because lesbian behavior was outside the realm of possibility at that time. Sprinkle argues against this verse having anything to do with male cultic prostitution because of the unconditional force of the verse itself. The issue here is not participating in idol worship through homosexual practice but rather the prohibition of homosexual practice itself.¹⁰

Leviticus 18-20 is an expansion of the Ten Commandments from Exodus 20. Chapter 18 details forbidden sexual relations. These include adultery, incest and bestiality [child sacrifice does not fall within sexual sins but is mentioned as an abomination before God in this chapter]. This verse is part of the Holiness Code in Leviticus. This code set out markers for Israel's distinctiveness and specificity from other Canaanite peoples, both

8. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 381. Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 45. Via and Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 63.

9. Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 90.

10. Sprinkle, *People to be Loved*, 46-47.

in identity and practice.

Gagnon argues that 18:22b illustrates a level of revulsion beyond what one might expect from other infractions.¹¹ This additional clause appears almost as commentary to the preceding prohibition, marking a deeper level of disgust with this practice. Given that the Holiness code is designed to sanctify Israel, this prohibition details personal, communal and spiritual degradation that occurs in male homosexual behavior. Hays asks the question on behalf of the church whether the Holiness Code is purity law or moral law? And if it is purity law, does Christ's justification of sinners then impact the church's understanding of these verses?¹²

This verse is specific and absolute. The secondary clause also increases the weight of this verse. Those who argue that this seemingly absolute prohibition is tailored only to a specific cultic practice do not have the weight of the evidence on their side.

Leviticus 20:13

This verse is similar in substance to Leviticus 18:33 with one very notable exception. This verse includes the death penalty for the parties involved in this transgression. It is categorical in its rejection of male-male homosexual practice. It is also absolute in its punishment.

Gagnon notes that this penalty was unusual within the context of other ancient near eastern cultures. In other societies contemporary to early Israel, the punishment for male-male homosexual behavior was castration; it was not death. The Holiness Code of

11. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 113-116.

12. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 382.

Leviticus 18-20 rejected many Canaanite practices explicitly. In this case, Israel's societal norms not only align with the other cultures surrounding them, the punishment for transgressing that norm exceeds that of the cultures around Israel.¹³ He notes that the commentary clause regarding the detestable nature of the sin is also without parallel in other Canaanite legal codes.¹⁴

Kaiser raises the point that the punishment here is deemed perfectly just. The scales are balanced; the sentence fits the crime according to the Holiness Code.¹⁵ The text itself makes this pronouncement. If there is shock over the judgement, it does not come from the text itself. As the sentence does not include additional verbiage to justify its capital punishment, one may presume that the original hearers would not have heard this sentence as unfair or unjust.

As with Leviticus 18:33, this verse does not mention female-female homosexual behavior. Gagnon offers this reasoning. Sexual intercourse at this time was defined primarily as penetration. With penetration as the qualifier, female-female homosexual behavior would not rise to the level of detestable activity.¹⁶ The absence of an explicit reference to female-female homosexual behavior does not imply an endorsement of those practices. It simply means that the writer had male-male homosexual behavior in mind per the cultural definition of intercourse at that time.

The penalty marks Leviticus 20:13 from its companion verse in Leviticus 18:33.

13. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 113-114.

14. *Ibid.*, 156.

15. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Leviticus*, New Interpreter's Bible: Genesis to Leviticus, Volume 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 1142.

16. *Ibid.*, 144.

The extreme and final nature of the penalty increases the gravity of this prohibition. Homosexual behavior warranted permanent expulsion of the practitioners from their community and from every community through a death sentence. Gagnon's research on homosexual prohibitions within other Canaanite communities may surprise Bible readers. I grew up with the idea that non-Israel cultures promoted sexual libertinism. The evidence says this was not true concerning homosexual behavior. All of Israel's neighbors had legal codes denoting male-male homosexual behavior as criminal. As notable, the punishment detailed in Leviticus 20 for the Israel community exceeded the punishment for this behavior codified among Israel's neighbors. The Holiness Code distinguishes Israel from its neighbors where there are distinctions to be made. Here, there is agreement upon the danger of homosexual practice in clear and unambiguous language and an excess in prescribed punishment.

Romans 1:26-27

These verses occur within the larger pericope of Romans 1:18-32. That pericope occurs within a cohesive section in which Paul makes a theological argument about depraved humanity and humanity's inability to become righteous: 1:18 – 3:26. Given the placement of Romans 1:26-27 within a sophisticated theological argument about human sinfulness and unrighteousness, this passage may provide a more thorough explanation for the rejection of homosexual behavior than the other passages that refer to homosexuality. Hays suggests that this is the most crucial text for determining what the Bible says about homosexuality; Wright likens this section to a courtroom scene about God's righteousness with homosexual behavior acting as a witness; Fitzmyer argues that this section portrays humanity apart from the Good News of Jesus Christ; Vines also

notes the importance of this passage within scripture's message about homosexuality.¹⁷

Beginning with 1:18, Paul makes a case that humanity has sinned knowingly and chosen self-interest and self-fulfillment over praise and gratitude toward the Creator. Humanity rejected God; humanity rebelled against God; humanity exchanged the worship of God for the worship of itself. As a result, God allowed humanity to sink deeper into the depths of sin. Paul charges humankind with idolatry through verse 25.

Verses 26-27, continuing through the conclusion of Romans 1, illustrates the result of this idolatry. Within this theological context, homosexual behavior comes from idolatry. It also contributes to idolatry. Homosexual behavior therefore is more than just a perversion of anatomical and physical bodies. Homosexual behavior is an outward manifestation of spiritual rebellion.¹⁸

Sprinkle highlights Paul's phrasing here.¹⁹ Female-female homosexual behavior is referenced here explicitly. As well, both males within male-male homosexual behavior are noted, not simply the passive partner. The terms used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 refer literally to the passive partners within male homosexual activity [for more on this see commentary on these verses below]. Paul does not use those terms here and instead indicts both participants. This means that the sin is not related to males acting like females; it is about homosexual behavior.

Sprinkle continues. Paul has Genesis 1 and 2 in the background of these verses as

17. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 383. N. T. Wright, *Romans*, The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume 10 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 428. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, The Anchor Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 269-270. Vines, *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships*, 96.

18. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 276.

19. Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved*, 91.

the Apostle makes the case that God's intention for creation includes gender complementarity. Paul refers to homosexual behavior, of both genders, as rebellious departure from that intention. Gagnon concurs. Paul has Genesis 1:26-27 in the background as he writes in Romans 1:26-27. Paul contrasts God's intended compatibility through the creation of two genders with human waywardness and descent into idolatry. Homosexuality amounts to humanity seeking to re-create God's creation.²⁰

Paul uses a phrase at the conclusion of verse 26: "for unnatural ones." The Greek is *para physin*, παρὰ φύσιν. The preposition *para* denotes opposition to or against. *Physin* is "nature" or "natural order of things." Homosexuality is not in alignment with the nature of creation; it is in opposition to the natural order of things. Does Paul classify homosexual behavior as a form of human rebellion because it does not offer the possibility of procreation? Is Paul talking about gay persons with a homosexual orientation trying to live as heterosexuals and thus denying their natural urges and desires?

Vines, while acknowledging the plain sense of the verses, argues that Paul's meaning is not so obvious. Paul refers to homosexual behavior in 26b after leading that verse with a reference to shameful lust. Would Paul include monogamous same-sex relationships under the heading of shameful lusts?²¹ For Vines, the answer is no. In a similar vein, Vines notes that Paul does not acknowledge nor appear to conceive of same-sex attraction and orientation. If someone was created with a sexual attraction to

20. Dan Via and Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 79-80.

21. Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 99, 103.

members of the same gender, would that person be acting *against nature* to fulfill that urge and drive or would that person be acting in accordance with their personal nature?

Vines arguments about *para physin* give one pause. However, Paul never uses *para physin* to refer to immoral forms of heterosexual intercourse. Paul utilizes other phrasing for incest, adultery and sinful heterosexual activity. Only in verse 26 does Paul use the phrase *para physin* and only in reference to homosexuality.²²

Of note, verse 26 is the only verse within the Bible to refer to lesbians explicitly. Paul moves from female-female intercourse to male-male intercourse in the following verse. Gagnon has a point to make about this inclusion and it relates to Vines arguments. Gagnon reads Paul's explicit reference to both types of homosexual behavior as a statement about non-exploitive homosexuality. This would include voluntary monogamous same-sex relationships as well as the homosexual orientation. Paul's expansive reference here is meant to include all reasons and forms of homosexual behavior. Gagnon argues that for Paul the orientation itself comes from humanity's sinful perversion.²³ Homosexuality in all its forms and occurrences is idolatrous and an extension of humanity's rebellion against its Creator.

Is the *para physin* of homosexuality so because homosexual activity does not have the potential of procreation, as Vines has suggested? In 1 Corinthians 7:2-5, Paul says that marriage is a means of avoiding sexual immorality. He does not state that marriage is for procreation. The *para physin* that Paul has in mind here does not relate to

22. Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved*, 97.

23. Dan Via and Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 79-80.

procreation. In fact, Paul never mentions procreation and marriage together in his writing.²⁴

N.T. Wright offers Paul's logic here. Humankind mars the divine imprint that the Creator placed upon humanity. Homosexual behavior is a mechanism or instrument for distorting God's mark. Followers of Jesus—those who truly worship God—have the *imago dei* restored through grace.²⁵ This restoration involves understanding sinful rebellion and fleeing it in all its forms. Paul's argument advances past his illustrations of human sinfulness. As human wickedness enslaves, it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ that liberates and frees humanity, enabling God's creations to be what their Creator intended. Homosexuality does not have a place within this liberated life.

Hays notes that Paul's original readers would have understood his meaning. Paul uses homosexuality, along with other vices, to illustrate human depravity. The force of the larger theological argument is not about homosexuality per se; however, this illustration presents the Roman believers with a powerful reminder that following Jesus contrasts sharply with a Roman culture of sexual libertinism and homosexual behavior.²⁶ The Gospel makes claims on how believers live. Paul presents an expectation that followers of Christ live lives in accordance with, rather than in rebellion against, God. This includes avoiding the sin of homosexual behavior.

1 Corinthians 6:9

These verses occur within a section wherein Paul admonishes the Corinthian

24. 1 Corinthians 7:1-41, Ephesians 5:22-33 and Colossians 3:18-4:1.

25. Wright, *Romans*, 433-435.

26. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 386.

believers for relying upon secular courts to mediate disputes between church members. Paul presents a contrast between those who will inherit the Kingdom and those who will not. This vice list repeats the one he offered in 1 Corinthians 5:11 with several additional vices. Two of these additions concern homosexuality.

The terms malakoi, μαλακοὶ, and arsenokoitais, ἀρσενικοίταις, occur in verse 9. Several Bible commentators argue that these terms do not refer to homosexuality. Boswell argues that malakoi should be translated as “masturbators.”²⁷ Martin suggests translating malakoi as “effeminate.”²⁸ He derives this through the literal meaning of malakoi, which is “soft ones.” Scroggs suggests that Paul here refers to pederasty not to homosexuality.

Hays notes that malakoi is not a technical term. In Paul’s day, malakoi was Greek slang for the passive partner in male intercourse.²⁹ This term referred to boys in pederastic relationships and male prostitutes. Sprinkle adds that the word carried connotations of men attempting to be female. Malakoi were men who were penetrated sexually.³⁰ Philo uses the term for homosexual behavior. Specifically, he refers to the feminization of receptive male partners that takes place within male homosexual intercourse.³¹

27. John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 92, 163.

28. Dale Martin, “Arsenkoites and Malakos: Meanings and Consequences,” *Biblical Ethics and Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture*, ed. Robert L. Brawley (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1996), 117.

29. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 382.

30. Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved*, 107.

31. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 302.

Garland asks those who say that Paul signifies pederasty here, as opposed homosexual behavior, why Paul does not utilize the Greek term for pederasty, παιδεραστία? Had Paul meant pederasty, he could have easily used this term instead of malakoi. Talbert adds that the early Christian church understood this reference to homosexual behavior, not to male prostitution nor to pederasty, in no small part because there are other terms to clearly signify an intended meaning of male prostitution or pederasty.³² The Didache and Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Basil the Great and Chrysostom all interpret this text as referring to homosexual behavior.³³ Furthermore, in the Old Testament, the phrase “lying with a male” denoted a general concept for all forms of homosexual behavior.³⁴ Garland suggests translating malakoi as “those males who are sexually penetrated by males.”

Arsenokoitais refers to male prostitutes, according to Boswell.³⁵ Hays asserts that this is a general term for homosexuality and not as specified as Boswell suggests. Paul utilizes a Greek version of a rabbinic phrase in writing the compound word

32. Charles Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smith & Helwys, 2003), 41. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks, Book II*; Tertullian *On Modesty*; Basil, *Letters 217:62* and *The Renunciation of the World*.

33. *The Didache* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 5. Justin Martyr, “First Apology,” *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 1, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 172. Clement of Alexandria, “The Instructor,” *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 1, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 276-277. Basil the Great, “Letters,” *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Volume 8, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 257. Chrysostom, “Homilies on Romans,” *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Volume 8, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 355-359.

34. David Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 213-214.

35. John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*, 333.

arsenokoitais.³⁶ Arsenokoitais is not used in any existing Greek text outside of 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10. It comes from a combination of words used in the Septuagint translation of Leviticus 20:13. The Hebrew phrase mishkab zakur, מִשְׁכַּב זָכָר, describes male homosexual behavior. The LXX version of this phrase is ἄρσενος κοίτην, arsenos koiten.³⁷ Given this correspondence, Paul intended arsenokoitais to refer to homosexual behavior, not male prostitution, linking verse 9 with the Levitical prohibitions in chapters 18 and 20.

Paul affirmed the Holiness Code regarding homosexuality. His use of an imprecise term malakoi and a word derived from the Greek translation of Hebrew in Leviticus makes the point that he expected his readers to understand his meaning. The original readers read a prohibition of homosexual behavior in 1 Corinthians 6:9. Paul's intended meaning has not changed over 2000 years.

1 Timothy 1:10

This section corresponds to those who break the law. Paul writes to oppose false teachers of the gospel, seeking to offer guidance to Timothy. The law is intended to secure the community by restraining vice. Oden notes that the thrust of the passage, verses 3-11, makes the argument that godly living comes as an implication of the Gospel.³⁸ Those that know Christ will not act unrighteously.

36. Robert Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2011), 97.

37. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 67.

38. Thomas C. Oden, *First and Second Timothy, Titus*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1989), 41.

Paul again uses the Greek word *arsenokoitais*, ἀρσενοκοίταις, to refer to homosexuals. The reference occurs within the vice list of verses 9-10. Within this vice list, homosexuality seems to stand aside from other forms of sexual immorality. It appears as a different category of sexual sin. The larger category for Paul, including other vices, is anything against sound teaching. This makes the basis for the prohibition theological, not sociological or psychological. Homosexual behavior exhibits bad theology.

Hays argues that this verse for Paul presupposes the Holiness Code prohibitions in Leviticus.³⁹ Paul is in line with Jewish thought as he provides counsel for the early Christian church. Both Sprinkle and Gagnon argue that this verse reinforces both Paul's terminology usage and intended meaning in 1 Corinthians 6:9.⁴⁰ Here, Paul is consistent with both Judaism and his other pronouncements on homosexual practice. His words call the church to consistent truth as well.

Consistent truth comes from the Gospel. Refraining from crime, murder, perversion, homosexuality, enslavement and blasphemy occurs naturally for the Christian.⁴¹ Solid teaching is a result of faith. Living according to that sound doctrine is both an expectation of believers and a consequence of the relationship between those believers and Jesus Christ.

39. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 383.

40. Sprinkle, *People to be Loved: Why Homosexuality is Not Just an Issue*, 117. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 332.

41. James D. G. Dunn, *I Timothy*, *The New Interpreter's Bible: Second Corinthians – Philemon*, Volume 11 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 792.

APPENDIX B

ABCOFLASH Church Survey

Please respond to the following items using the scale: 1) strongly disagree, 2) disagree, 3) neither disagree nor agree, 4) agree, 5) strongly agree.

1. My church has gay/lesbian persons attending services. _____
2. My church would baptize a celibate gay/lesbian person. _____
3. My church would baptize a non-celibate gay/lesbian person. _____
4. My church would allow a celibate gay/lesbian person to become a congregation member. _____
5. My church would allow a non-celibate gay/lesbian person to become a congregation member. _____
6. My church would hold a dedication service for the adopted or biological child of a gay/lesbian couple. _____
7. My church would allow a celibate gay/lesbian person to serve as a church volunteer, such as participate in choir. _____
8. My church would allow a non-celibate gay/lesbian person to serve as a church volunteer, such as participate in choir. _____
9. My church would allow a celibate gay/lesbian person to serve in church leadership, such as an elected board member. _____
10. My church would allow a non-celibate gay/lesbian person to serve in church leadership, such as an elected board member. _____
11. My church would allow a staff member to conduct a gay/lesbian wedding. _
12. My church would host a gay/lesbian wedding. _____

Please answer the following questions in the textboxes provided.

13. How would you characterize your church's position on homosexuality?
14. How did your church arrive at this position?

15. How has this position been communicated internally within the church?
16. How has this position been communicated externally outside of the church?
17. What has been the greatest difficulty within your congregation surrounding homosexuality?

APPENDIX C

First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, Survey

Please respond to the following items using the scale: 1) strongly disagree, 2) disagree, 3) neither disagree nor agree, 4) agree, 5) strongly agree.

1. First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, has gay/lesbian persons attending services. _____
2. First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, would baptize a celibate gay/lesbian person. _____
3. First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, would baptize a non-celibate gay/lesbian person. _____
4. First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, would allow a celibate gay/lesbian person to become a congregation member. _____
5. First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, would allow a non-celibate gay/lesbian person to become a congregation member. _____
6. First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, would hold a dedication service for the adopted or biological child of a gay/lesbian couple. _____
7. First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, would allow a gay/lesbian person to serve as a church volunteer, such as participate in choir. _____
8. First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, would allow a celibate gay/lesbian person to serve in church leadership, such as an elected board member. _____
9. First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, would allow a staff member to conduct a gay/lesbian wedding. _____
10. First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, would host a gay/lesbian wedding. _____
11. A gay person would be welcome at First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona,. _____
12. A gay person would be welcome at any Worship Service at First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona,. _____

13. A gay person would be welcome at any Grow Group at First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona,_____
14. A gay person would be welcome at any Serve Team at First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona,_____
15. I would invite a gay friend/neighbor/co-worker to First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona,_____
16. I do not see any hindrances to a gay person feeling welcomed at First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona,._

Please answer the following questions in the space provided.

17. How would you characterize First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona,'s position on homosexuality?
18. What has been the greatest difficulty within First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, surrounding homosexuality?
19. How might First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, offer hospitality to a gay person?
20. How might you offer hospitality to a gay person?
21. What makes First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona, hospitable to gay persons?
22. What hinders gay persons from finding hospitality at First Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Arizona,?

Initials:_____

These surveys will be kept confidentially until the completion of the study at which time they will be shredded.

APPENDIX D

The Nashville Statement

The Nashville Statement was released on August 29, 2017, by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, an evangelical organization begun in 1987. At the time of its publication, it had 150 evangelical pastors and professors as signers.

Preamble

Evangelical Christians at the dawn of the twenty-first century find themselves living in a period of historic transition. As Western culture has become increasingly post-Christian, it has embarked upon a massive revision of what it means to be a human being. By and large the spirit of our age no longer discerns or delights in the beauty of God's design for human life. Many deny that God created human beings for his glory, and that his good purposes for us include our personal and physical design as male and female. It is common to think that human identity as male and female is not part of God's beautiful plan, but is, rather, an expression of an individual's autonomous preferences. The pathway to full and lasting joy through God's good design for his creatures is thus replaced by the path of shortsighted alternatives that, sooner or later, ruin human life and dishonor God.

This secular spirit of our age presents a great challenge to the Christian church. Will the church of the Lord Jesus Christ lose her biblical conviction, clarity, and courage, and blend into the spirit of the age? Or will she hold fast to the word of life, draw courage

from Jesus, and unashamedly proclaim his way as the way of life? Will she maintain her clear, counter-cultural witness to a world that seems bent on ruin?

We are persuaded that faithfulness in our generation means declaring once again the true story of the world and of our place in it—particularly as male and female. Christian Scripture teaches that there is but one God who alone is Creator and Lord of all. To him alone, every person owes glad- hearted thanksgiving, heart-felt praise, and total allegiance. This is the path not only of glorifying God, but of knowing ourselves. To forget our Creator is to forget who we are, for he made us for himself. And we cannot know ourselves truly without truly knowing him who made us. We did not make ourselves. We are not our own. Our true identity, as male and female persons, is given by God. It is not only foolish, but hopeless, to try to make ourselves what God did not create us to be.

We believe that God’s design for his creation and his way of salvation serve to bring him the greatest glory and bring us the greatest good. God’s good plan provides us with the greatest freedom. Jesus said he came that we might have life and have it in overflowing measure. He is for us and not against us. Therefore, in the hope of serving Christ’s church and witnessing publicly to the good purposes of God for human sexuality revealed in Christian Scripture, we offer the following affirmations and denials.

Article I

WE AFFIRM that God has designed marriage to be a covenantal, sexual, procreative, lifelong union of one man and one woman, as husband and wife, and is meant to signify the covenant love between Christ and his bride the church. WE DENY that God has designed marriage to be a homosexual, polygamous, or polyamorous relationship. We also deny that marriage is a mere human contract rather than a covenant made before God.

Article 2

WE AFFIRM that God's revealed will for all people is chastity outside of marriage and fidelity within marriage. WE DENY that any affections, desires, or commitments ever justify sexual intercourse before or outside marriage; nor do they justify any form of sexual immorality.

Article 3

WE AFFIRM that God created Adam and Eve, the first human beings, in his own image, equal before God as persons, and distinct as male and female. WE DENY that the divinely ordained differences between male and female render them unequal in dignity or worth.

Article 4

WE AFFIRM that divinely ordained differences between male and female reflect God's original creation design and are meant for human good and human flourishing. WE DENY that such differences are a result of the Fall or are a tragedy to be overcome.

Article 5

WE AFFIRM that the differences between male and female reproductive structures are integral to God's design for self-conception as male or female. WE DENY that physical anomalies or psychological conditions nullify the God-appointed link between biological sex and self-conception as male or female.

Article 6

WE AFFIRM that those born with a physical disorder of sex development are created in the image of God and have dignity and worth equal to all other image-bearers. They are acknowledged by our Lord Jesus in his words about "eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb." With all others they are welcome as faithful followers of Jesus Christ and should embrace their biological sex insofar as it may be known. WE DENY that ambiguities related to a person's biological sex render one incapable of living a fruitful life in joyful obedience to Christ.

Article 7

WE AFFIRM that self-conception as male or female should be defined by God's holy purposes in creation and redemption as revealed in Scripture. WE DENY that adopting a homosexual or transgender self-conception is consistent with God's holy purposes in creation and redemption.

Article 8

WE AFFIRM that people who experience sexual attraction for the same sex may live a rich and fruitful life pleasing to God through faith in Jesus Christ, as they, like all Christians, walk in purity of life. WE DENY that sexual attraction for the same sex is part of the natural goodness of God's original creation, or that it puts a person outside the hope of the gospel.

Article 9

WE AFFIRM that sin distorts sexual desires by directing them away from the marriage covenant and toward sexual immorality— a distortion that includes both heterosexual and homosexual immorality. WE DENY that an enduring pattern of desire for sexual immorality justifies sexually immoral behavior.

Article 10

WE AFFIRM that it is sinful to approve of homosexual immorality or transgenderism and that such approval constitutes an essential departure from Christian faithfulness and witness. WE DENY that the approval of homosexual immorality or transgenderism is a matter of moral indifference about which otherwise faithful Christians should agree to disagree.

Article 11

WE AFFIRM our duty to speak the truth in love at all times, including when we speak to or about one another as male or female. WE DENY any obligation to speak in such ways that dishonor God's design of his image- bearers as male and female.

Article 12

WE AFFIRM that the grace of God in Christ gives both merciful pardon and transforming power, and that this pardon and power enable a follower of Jesus to put to death sinful desires and to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. WE DENY that the grace of God in Christ is insufficient to forgive all sexual sins and to give power for holiness to every believer who feels drawn into sexual sin.

Article 13

WE AFFIRM that the grace of God in Christ enables sinners to forsake transgender self-conceptions and by divine forbearance to accept the God-ordained link between one's biological sex and one's self-conception as male or female. WE DENY that the grace of God in Christ sanctions self-conceptions that are at odds with God's revealed will.

Article 14

WE AFFIRM that Christ Jesus has come into the world to save sinners and that through Christ's death and resurrection forgiveness of sins and eternal life are available to every person who repents of sin and trusts in Christ alone as Savior, Lord, and supreme treasure. WE DENY that the Lord's arm is too short to save or that any sinner is beyond his reach.

APPENDIX E

Fr. James Martin's Response to the Nashville Statement

The Reverend James Martin, a US based Catholic priest, offered this response to The Nashville Statement on August 30, 2017. Martin has written and blogged extensively about outreach and hospitality to gay persons.

- I affirm: That God loves all LGBT people. I deny: That Jesus wants us to insult, judge or further marginalize them.
- I affirm: That all of us are in need of conversion. I deny: That LGBT people should be in any way singled out as the chief or only sinners.
- I affirm: That when Jesus encountered people on the margins he led with welcome not condemnation. I deny: That Jesus wants any more judging.
- I affirm: That LGBT people are, by virtue of baptism, full members of the church. I deny: That God wants them to feel that they don't belong
- I affirm: That LGBT people have been made to feel like dirt by many churches. I deny: That Jesus wants us to add to their immense suffering.
- I affirm: That LGBT people are some of the holiest people I know. I deny: That Jesus wants us to judge others, when he clearly forbade it.
- I affirm that the Father loves LGBT people, the Son calls them and the Holy Spirit guides them. I deny nothing about God's love for them.

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