

Homosexuality – The Line in the Sand by Jana Harmon

'The world judges what is natural from its present state. Christianity judges what we see as not normal but abnormal, fallen. The world judges divine revelation by human experience. Christianity judges experience by divine revelation.'¹ Peter Kreeft

Each generation brings with it an issue that demands allegiance. Today's culture has drawn a line in the sand. Either you are for or against her. From the legislature to media to education, the message is clear - homosexuality is not only normal, but it is good. It is to be celebrated. Failure to do so is an automatic indictment of your inability to love, to accept those who are different, to deplore diversity. But it is more than that. It is intolerant, bigoted, and hate-filled. Celebration of traditional union of man and woman in marriage, preservation of sex within the heterosexual marriage bed alone is outdated and closed-minded. Degrading homosexuality as anything less than a beautiful, mutual exchange of love, somehow, is not what Jesus would do.

"Anti-homosexual" is the dominant perception of Christians by culture according to a survey published in 1995. David Kinneman surveyed US young adults on their 'outsider' views of Christians in his book *unChristian*. Kinneman states:

The perception that Christians are "against" gays and lesbians – not only objecting to their lifestyles but also harboring irrational fear and unmerited scorn toward them – has reached critical mass. The gay issue has become the "big one," ...surfacing a spate of negative perceptions: judgmental, bigoted, sheltered, right-wingers, hypocritical, insincere, and uncaring. Outsiders say our hostility toward gays – not just opposition to homosexual politics and behaviors but disdain for gay individuals – has become virtually synonymous with the Christian faith.²

The perception of being antihomosexual or "homophobic" was the number one negative or positive attribute associated with Christians to the tune of 91% of those who responded to the survey.

What is the implication of this perception? Kinneman surmises:

When you introduce yourself as a Christian to a friend, neighbor, or business associate who is an outsider, you might as well have it tattooed on your arm: antihomosexual, gay-hater, homophobic. *I doubt you think of yourself in these terms, but that's what outsiders think of you.*³ (emphasis mine)

Granted, some warrant is given for this extreme perspective due to scattered injurious Christian voices. However, this wide-spread negative view of Christians is no longer isolated to 'outsiders.' It now pervades Christian teen and young adult perspectives. Many

¹ Peter Kreeft, *Christianity for Modern Pagans, Pascal's Pensees*.

² David Kinneman, *unchristian*, 1995, 92.

³ *Ibid.*, 93.

within Christian youth culture now believe that same-sex relationships are acceptable and feel pressured either to accept their friend or to accept their faith.

What are we to make of this paradigm shift? How do we as Christians tread this emotionally-laden cultural mine-field while still standing firm on biblical boundaries regarding the holiness and celebration of sex only within the covenanted heterosexual marriage bed? Do we need to compromise in order to gain credibility with the world, to even receive a hearing? We begin to question ourselves and our influence. We begin to question the authority of Scripture in light of such strong opposition. And, Uncle Screwtape laughs with delight.

Before we address the issue of where do we go from here, it begs the question: How did we get to this swamp of moral mire in the first place? Much of the shift in cultural mores is due to the swift current ushered in by the tide of postmodernism. Loss of universal truth and loss of overriding authority were happily met with subsequent gain of individualism, autonomy, and self-determination of what is true, including moral truths. All truths became equally valid, teflon-coated, freed from critique. Moral judgment became an arrogant power-play, an act of superiority intended toward manipulation and control.

What did this post-modern mindset mean for Biblical truths, especially when it spoke to morality and sexual behavior? The Bible became a book of writings that may have been accessible and relevant for the cultures in which they were written. But, we as 21st century Westerners live in a different time, place, and culture. We are simply unable to access, much less understand, what each author truly intended. So much has been lost in translation, culturally speaking. But that's okay because we gain a better understanding of truth and morality based upon our own understanding and interpretation through our own community's lens. We simply need to realize our own limitations, acknowledge our own local, cultural understandings and let it serve as the authority that dictates our interpretation of scripture. Or so postmodern culture says.

Rob Bell recently proclaimed, "I think the ship has sailed and we need to affirm people wherever they are'. 'I am for fidelity and commitment and love and monogamy. We need to move ahead in this area. It's time for the Church to acknowledge that we have brothers and sisters who are gay.'"⁴ His basic premise is that 'this is where the culture is' and 'this is where the church needs to be,' having bought into the need for moral evolution and revolution within the body of Christ in order to reach culture in the name of love.⁵ He is not alone.

In the traditional view of Scripture, however, the perspective of the author is primary. That is, even though we live in a distinctly different time and culture as the writer, that there remains a degree of accessibility, of understanding that which the author intended to communicate. While human limitations and fallenness are irrefutably at play in interpreting Scripture, its message is not inaccessibly 'lost in translation.' The transcendent One who superintended the writing of Scripture is also the One who supercedes our limitations and leads us into all truth, including moral truth, especially when we honestly examine the whole counsel of God.

⁴ Justin Brierly quoting Rob Bell, "The Evolution of Rob Bell," *Christianity Today*, June 2013.

⁵ *Unbelievable* podcast, April 20, 2013,

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/unbelievable/id267142101>

Who, then, is God in this postmodern perspective? More often than not, God is shaped into the image and desires of man rather than vice-versa. God desires our happiness, and His love extends to approve our longings. It is not the love that seeks our best, but rather enjoys our pleasure. In the traditional view, God is our ultimate authority, infinite in all of his attributes – in holiness and in love – through which He protects us in establishing boundaries for gender, sexual and moral behavior.

Who are we? In the postmodern mindset, we create ourselves according to our own likeness. We do not have to submit to natural gender boundaries and sexual guardrails, but are rather free to explore and blur the lines, manipulating nature to conform to our own desires, to be true to ourselves. After all, God made us this way (with homosexual attraction), loves us the way we are, loves authenticity, and does not judge. More than that, our homosexuality is genetic and unchangeable, so it is not legitimately subject to moral judgment of any kind.

Compare this revisionist perspective with the more traditional view in which we are created distinctively male and female, in the image and likeness of God. We are subject to God-determined boundaries and loving authority which confines sexual union within the covenant of marriage. We are beautiful yet broken because of our rebelliousness and sin, in need of salvation, reconciliation, restoration and renewal. God is not obligated to fulfill all of our fleshly desires, but rather promises to fill the deep, spiritual desires of our heart through Christ as we submit to Him. He honors those who submit to His loving commands toward sexual purity.

What does the Bible specifically say about homosexuality in the postmodern view? It affirms same-sex relationships – not only in scriptural narrative, but for today as well. Pro-gay theologians proclaim that Paul only knew of the Greco-Roman practices of promiscuous homosexual acts within the religious temples or between men and boys. He did not know of the loving monogamy that can be exchanged between same sex couples in a committed relationship. They promote an argument from silence, that Jesus never said anything against homosexuality. In fact, Jesus tacitly affirmed same-sex relationships by his healing of the Roman Centurion's servant (who were engaged in a homosexual relationship). They elevate many friendships found in scriptural narratives to the level of sexual partnerships, not only David and Jonathan, but also Ruth and Naomi, Samuel and Eli, as well as others. Certainly all should be able to clearly see God's approval of genuine coupling love, regardless of gender. Genuine affection and commitment proves to be the stamp of approval. 'Love' conquers all, as long as it is mutual, beneficial, and well-intended. Who are we to say otherwise? This pro-gay interpretation of Scripture lands a far distance from what has been considered orthodox throughout the history of Judeo-Christian faith.

We have reached a precarious place, but there is nothing new under the sun. Paul's letters are filled with admonition to stand firm against railing cultural opposition, to stand firm with moral clarity, purity, with a clear conscience so that the name of Jesus would stand.

This tension became soberingly clear as I was preparing to discuss homosexuality on an all-women's campus which has been declared a "safe zone" for sexual diversity. LGBTQIQ is celebrated.*⁶ Fifty-percent of the student body is lesbian. Transgendered students had

⁶ Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgendered, Questioning, and In-Questioning

recently expressed offense at the standard female icon which hung outside of campus bathrooms, so they were removed. In this culture where diversity and tolerance reign supreme, Christian students felt lost as to how to navigate these turbulent waters without compromising or capsizing.

Through the preparation, it became clearer with each passing article, book, and story, that homosexuality is, first of all, a complex issue. As Christians, it is easy to declare it a sin, a willful choice against God that simply just needs to be repented of and changed. Examination of the issue reveals that the roots underlying this lifestyle course very deep. Choice is not what most homosexuals feel that they have, just as those with heterosexual attraction. If they could simply choose, many homosexuals would never have chosen same-sex attraction. In fact, a significant increase in psychoemotional difficulties arise because of the internal struggle, their desire to be accepted by family and friends. Depression and suicidal rates are above the norm. As Alan Shelmon says, "Same-sex attraction is not a choice. People choose *behaviors*, but they don't choose *desires*."⁷

That is not to say that there is no choice in the matter. Studies of genetic influence have been, on the most part, inconclusive in spite of the press that otherwise advocates genetic predetermination of same-sex attraction. As more information is gained, it is becoming clearer that developmental issues that arise in childhood profoundly affect tendencies toward homosexuality, that multiple factors are involved. As Christians, it is important to gain some understanding as to how such tendencies can develop so as to be more effective and compassionate ambassadors for Jesus.

For women, Anne Paulk in her book *Restoring Sexual Identity* reveals that over 90% of young girls have experience some form of sexual (60%), emotional (70%), and/or verbal (>50%) abuse at the hands of a male.⁸ Their subsequent desire, then is to find a safe emotional zone in the relationship of another female. Some young girls have not suffered abuse first hand, but have been the witness of a mom who suffered at the hands of a controlling, abusive man. With such experience, the girl then determines to never be victimized in the same way. She also seeks relational respite in the safety of another woman. Some suffer lack of attention, affirmation, acceptance and/or affection from their mother.

Interestingly, statistics bear out the reality that most lesbian relationships are not sexual in nature, but rather primarily emotional. The two women often become deeply emotionally immeshed, often in unhealthy ways. Some women are, by personality, more prone to tom-boyish behaviors and self-perception and maintain this persona as they mature. Some adopt a more masculine appearance in order to avoid victimization from men. Some innocently seek female solace and emotional support in dealing with their heterosexual relationships and find more than they were initially seeking. Legitimate needs are met in illegitimate ways.

For men, complex emotional developmental issues also contribute toward homosexuality. Emotionally unavailable or weak, physically absent, and/or abusive fathers contribute to longings for acceptance from another male and/or the need to identify with safer females.

⁷ Alan Shelmon and Greg Koukl, *Solid Ground*, "Homosexuality: Nature or Nurture?" July 1, 2013, 3-9: <http://www.str.org/publications/nature-or-nurture#.UdRDHRYWxVh>

⁸ Anne Paulk, *Restoring Sexual Identity*, 49-71.

These generalizations reflect that this issue is much more than coping with altering sexual behaviors, it often pervades deeply into issues of self-identity and unmet emotional needs. Not all homosexual behavior is tied to gender-confusion issues, however. It is indeed complex, but complexity is not enough to justify much less celebrate same-sex attraction, it only serves to help explain it.

For an excellent summary explaining primary developmental influences as well as growing scientific evidence against the 'born-gay' theory, see a recent article from Stand to Reason.⁹ Homosexuality is 'made,' not 'born,' and here's their bottom line:

Gender identity, like personality, is a non-physical trait. It's a person's subconscious belief about what sex he is. Though everyone is born *biologically* either male or female, *psychologically* their gender identity develops over time, primarily between early childhood and puberty.

Here is the key factor: A person is always attracted to the *biological* sex that is the opposite of his or her *psychological gender identity*. A male gender-identified person (either male or female) will be attracted to a female body. Likewise, a female gender-identified person (either female or male) will be attracted to a male body. *Opposites always attract...*

A heterosexual's gender identity *matches* his biological sex. A homosexual's gender identity is *opposite* his biological sex. Because male homosexuals psychologically identify as female, they're sexually attracted to other males. They don't *consciously* think they're girls (though some may). Rather their gender confusion is *subconscious*.¹⁰

It is important to note that although someone is predisposed, developmentally and experientially, toward same-sex attraction – this predisposition does not mean that someone will necessarily be predetermined to become gay in orientation. Again, this is a complex issue, but one which requires insight and compassion when addressing with truth and grace.

What about the homosexual lifestyle? According to Dr. Thomas Schmidt who looked closely in 1995, drug abuse is more prominent (51% use, 3x normal), alcohol abuse is elevated (47% use, 1.5x normal); depression, anxiety and suicide attempts are significantly more prevalent, STDs and chronic viral infections notably increased. Promiscuity is rampant in the culture despite popular claims otherwise. The American Public Health Association reported an average of 49 partners per lifetime for homosexual men; 8-12% reported >500 partners in a lifetime. Even in relationships with lifetime sexual partners who sustained an average of 1-37 year partnership, not one partnership - *none* - sustained a monogamous relationship. Even in cultures where homosexuality is accepted (e.g., Sweden), divorce rates in same-sex marriages are 50% greater.

According to a longevity study of homosexuals conducted by the Family Research Institute in Washington, DC, results of this lifestyle are sobering. A survey of 6,574 obituaries from 18 homosexual journals over thirteen years revealed that the median lifespan of a

⁹ Alan Shelmon and Greg Koukl, *Solid Ground*, "Homosexuality: Nature or Nurture?"

¹⁰ Alan Shelmon and Greg Koukl, 4.

practicing (non-AIDS) homosexual male is 42, with less than 9% dying old (65 or older). For males who died of AIDS, the median age of death was 39 (*only 1% died old*), regardless of whether the individual had a long-time sexual partner. Heterosexual males, by comparison, died much later. The median age of death of a married heterosexual man was 75 (80% died old), or unmarried heterosexual man was 57 (32% died old). Similarly, the abbreviated median age of death for female homosexuals was 44 (20% died old).¹¹ In light of this data, the health of this lifestyle is objectively questionable.

In light of these harsh realities and complexities, in light of increasing cultural pressures to conform, how then are we to stand firm? What does the Bible say about homosexuality? How did Paul advise the first century church, those who were called to live in the world but not of it? What does it really mean to love, to desire what is best for the other, and to speak the truth in love?

Those questions were coursing through my mind as the evening of my college presentation began. Two unexpected guests arrived for the forum, notebooks and pens in their hands. They began to write as the praise songs were being sung, recording the words on the screen. It became quickly apparent that they were looking for something to bring offense. My heart began to race, but I felt compelled to offer what was soberly and graciously presented in scripture.

Six references in scripture specifically address homosexuality - three in the Old Testament, three in the New. And yes, both Jewish law and the new covenant declare homosexuality as a sinful practice, something to be avoided without qualification. There is no provision for its acceptance within a loving, monogamous relationship, just as there is no provision for any sexual union outside of the marriage covenant. But, there is hope for grace, for change.

It is extraordinarily important to look at all of these passages within the context of which they were written, within the larger narrative. Upon examination of Scripture, a noticeable pattern develops. Recognize that homosexuality, as with all sin, is viewed in the context of the gospel. Sexual sin, in all of its forms, stands bookmarked between law and redemption.

The Old Covenant expressed the holiness and love of God to his people Israel. He first introduced the creation intent for sex between a man and a woman in Genesis 2 as a blessing within the relationship of marriage. Jesus later affirmed sexual faithfulness within covenanted marriage between a man and a woman.¹²

In the Levitical law, Moses laid out specific dietary, civil, ceremonial, and moral guidelines in order to maintain purity, order, and separateness of the Hebrew people. In Leviticus

¹¹ **The Longevity of Homosexuals: Before and After the Aids Epidemic** Paul Cameron ^{A1}, William L. Playfair ^{A1}, Stephen Wellum, Family Research Institute, Inc., Washington, D.C. Although the U.S. Surgeon General characterized homosexual sex as "normal" and "healthy," homosexuals and IV drug abusers have suffered disproportionately from the AIDS epidemic. Homosexuals may have experienced a short lifespan for the last 140 years; AIDS has apparently reduced it about 10 percent. Such an abbreviated lifespan puts the healthfulness of homosexuality in question. See: *OMEGA – Journal of Death and Dying*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 1994.

<http://baywood.metapress.com/app/home/contribution.asp?referrer=parent&backto=issue,6,6;journal,150,264;linkingpublicationresults,1:300329,1>

¹² Matthew 19:1-12; Mark 10:1-10.

chapters 18 and 20, standards and consequences for unlawful sexual relations were given. These included mandates against practices often observed in the surrounding pagan religions and cultures: incest, adultery, bestiality, and homosexuality.¹³ To participate in any of those behaviors was to defile themselves and dishonor God. Holiness was the goal. To be set apart, to be righteous.

The law makes us conscious of sin, according to Paul.¹⁴ The Lord knew that His chosen people would sin, would stand guilty before Him, so He set up a sacrificial system in order to provide temporary cleansing for their sin and guilt. That sacrificial system was in place *prior to* the giving of the law to demonstrate His great love, mercy and grace to a rebellious people. Under the Old Testament law, homosexuality was a sin, one among a list of sexual sins. There was no exception. Homosexuality, whether in a religious pagan temple or otherwise, was considered to be an act of rebellion and defilement. Consequences were severe, but there remained hope for forgiveness through the atonement of bulls and goats, even then.

Pro-gay advocates, however, scoff at using the outdated Levitical law today. Those that do suffer the hypocrisy of ongoing admonition against homosexuality in light of the reality that scripture no longer prohibits the wearing clothing of two kinds of material, eating shellfish, or planting two kinds of seed in a field. In their minds, it is either all or nothing. However, that view does not account for the differences in the discrete types of law held within Jewish culture. While the universal, moral law persisted into the New Covenant, the dietary, civil and ceremonial laws no longer applied. Sexual fidelity within heterosexual marriage remains the standard.

The familiar story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18-19 is also traditionally used as an admonition against homosexuality. Pro-gay advocates advise that the great sin in Sodom was not one of sexual deviance but rather one of inhospitality. Interestingly, the destruction of Sodom is mentioned in passages of both Old and New Testament scripture. Upon a broad reading of the texts, it becomes clear that destruction was intended for the city due to its wickedness *prior to* the maltreatment of the visiting angels. Texts such as Jude 7 place the story in perspective: "In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire." While inhospitality may have been at play, it was not the primary reason for its rendered judgment.

What of the New Covenant? Pro-gay theologians suggest that Paul knew nothing of a loving, committed, monogamous relationship. In the Greco-Roman culture, pagan temple homosexual acts were commonplace as well as between men and boys; but an ongoing, caring coupling of same-gendered couples was virtually unknown. Surely, if Paul had known, he would have made exception, they argue.

Three passages directly address the issue of homosexuality in the New Testament texts. Paul's letter to the Romans is the most comprehensive and worth citing in length to

¹³ Leviticus 18:22, "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable." Leviticus 20:13, "If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable."

¹⁴ Romans 3:20.

maintain contextual integrity:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

Therefore, God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen.

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.¹⁵

The letter goes on to then list many more unrighteous behaviors all of which, in Paul's view, deserve death. It is sobering to note that the guilty are not just the ones who commit such sins, sexual or otherwise, but also those who "approve of those who practice them."¹⁶

On its face, this passage seems very clear in its prohibition of homosexuality among other disobedient, unholy attitudes and behaviors. The Pro-gay advocate responds by asserting that the sin of homosexuality here was for those who were heterosexual and yet were partaking in 'unnatural' relationships with men. The indictment of homosexuality was not against gay men or women who pursued 'natural' same-sex relationships with other men or women. They were being true to their natural desires, so it was not considered a sin.

This pro-gay interpretation, however, does not hold up when taken with the whole of the counsel of God. Homosexuality in all of its forms, among other acts of sexual impurity, is sin. Period. Notice, however, the argument that Paul lays out in his Roman letter: Knowledge of God. Law against sin. Rebellion of man. Consequences of death. Forgiveness of sin through Christ.

Yes, homosexuality is a blatant form of unrighteousness and fearless rebellion against God. But, all have sinned. None are righteous in the eyes of God. God is just. And, he is the Justifier – not through the law, but through grace given through Jesus Christ. The declaration of homosexuality as sin is couched within the grace and hope of the gospel to

¹⁵ Romans 1:18-27.

¹⁶ Romans 2:28-32.

forgive and redeem.

Two other letters written by Paul uphold and affirm the reality of homosexuality as sin. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul speaks of behaviors that are “contrary to sound doctrine.”

We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, *for those practicing homosexuality*, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.¹⁷

After this list of sins, however, in his next breath Paul transparently admits his history as a blasphemer and violent persecutor, the worst of sinners who acted out of ignorance and unbelief. Paul then goes on to praise the Lord for His abundant patience, mercy, and grace poured out upon him. Law, sin, and rebellion remedied through the gospel of Christ!

Those who practice homosexuality have the same opportunity and privilege – to recognize it for what it is, an act of disobedience against the God who loves with an everlasting and deep love, to repent and receive forgiveness and grace through the cross.

This pattern of law, brokenness and grace also repeats in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. Out of clarity and compassion, he again brings to light ongoing ungodly behaviors that are associated with wickedness:

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes *nor homosexual offenders* nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.¹⁸

Then hope for redemption, for grace immediately follows:

And *that is what some of you were*. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God.

The gospel is powerful, life changing when a life is submitted to the One who provides salvation over sin. Paul then calls us to flee from sexual immorality, that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, and as such it should be honored, to stand firm in truth and in grace.

Is change possible for those with same-sex desires?

Many are those who have recognized the sinfulness of homosexual behavior and have experienced this washing, submitting to the ongoing sanctifying work of the Spirit in their

¹⁷ I Timothy 1:8-11.

¹⁸ I Corinthians 6:9-10.

lives. One beautiful example of this is found in the life of Rosaria Butterfield, a self-proclaimed secular, liberal, lesbian activist and university English professor who represented the gay agenda on campus. To her, the Bible was oppressive and outdated, worthy of scorn; that is, until she read it, and then read it again, and again. Through the faithful, thoughtful, intentional friendship of a neighbor and pastor, Rosaria's walls began to come down. She found in Ken and his wife a safe, unpressured place to ask questions, to explore Christian faith. Rosaria also genuinely appreciated and respected the way that Ken did not compromise on his understanding of truth, as many often did, but accepted and loved her throughout the process. She eventually came to see the truth of Scripture, the waywardness of her thinking and lifestyle. She is now married to a pastor, has children, and is a faithful, dedicated follower of Christ. Read her story in the recently published book *The Secrets of an Unlikely Convert*.

However, it is important to understand that while some have experienced a thorough-going removal of same-sex desires and have gone on to find the fullness of a heterosexual marriage, some have not. There are also those who have dedicated their lives to Christ, fully understand the call for sexual purity, the creation intent for sex within a heterosexual marriage, but who still struggle with same-sex attraction. They have made a conscious decision to remain celibate, to not act upon their continued desires and temptations in order to honor their bodies and to honor Christ. Wesley Hill is a pastor who has transparently revealed his story and his struggle through his book *Washed and Waiting*. He wrote the book in order to encourage others who wrestle with their sexual identity to find hope in their promised redemption.

For recent statistics regarding potentiality for change, see Shlemon and Koukl's article.¹⁹

How should we, as Christians, respond to those engaged in homosexuality? Just as we would with those engaged in any other sin. Just as we want to be engaged in addressing our own sin - with understanding, truth, clarity, compassion, courage, grace and hope.

Listen to these powerful words written in an open letter to the church from a lesbian:

When the word "homosexual" is mentioned in the church, we hold our breaths and sit in fear. Most often this word is followed with condemnation, laughter, hatred, or jokes. Rarely do we hear any words of hope. At least we recognize our sin. Does the church as a whole see theirs? Do you see the sin of pride, that you are better than or more acceptable to Jesus than we are? Have you been Christ-like in your relationships with us? Would you meet us at the well, or restaurant, for a cup of water, or coffee? Would you touch us even if we showed signs of leprosy, or aids? Would you call us down from our trees, as Christ did Zacchaeus, and invite yourself to be our guest? Would you allow us to sit at your table and break bread? Can you love us unconditionally and support us as Christ works in our lives, as He works in yours, to help us all to overcome?

To those of you who would change the church to accept the gay community and its lifestyle: you give us no hope at all. To those of us who know God's word and will not dilute it to fit our desires, we ask you to read John's letter

¹⁹ Shlemon and Koukl, 7-9.

to the church in Pergamum...You are willing to compromise the word of God to be politically correct. We are not deceived. If we accept your willingness to compromise, then we must also compromise. We must therefore accept your lying, your adultery, your lust, your idolatry, your addictions, YOUR sins. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

We do not ask for your acceptance of our sins any more than we accept yours. We simply ask for the same support, love, guidance, and most of all hope that is given to the rest of your congregation. We are your brothers and sisters in Christ. We are not what we shall be, but thank God, we are not what we were. Let us work together to see that we all arrive safely home.

A Sister in Christ²⁰

A beautiful example of how we should respond recently surfaced in press when gay-activist and journalist Shane Windmeyer 'came-out' about his unexpected friendship with Chick-fil-A president Dan Cathy. After Mr. Cathy's public stand on traditional marriage, Mr. Windmeyer's national organization and advocate for LGBT rights, Campus Pride, advanced a national campaign against Chick-fil-A. Deeply distrustful of Dan Cathy, Shane was shocked to receive a phone call from him.

The first call lasted over an hour and initiated a chain of calls, texts, and in-person meetings. He consistently found Dan to be "genuine and kind," an intent listener, "seeking first to understand, not to be understood." Shane and Dan built trust through kindness and openness. Neither compromised their deeply held respective views, stating, "Dan expressed regret and genuine sadness when he heard of people being treated unkindly – but he offered no apologies for his genuine beliefs about marriage." Shane further states, "Dan, in his heart, is driven by his desire to minister to others...He had to face the issue of respecting my viewpoints and life even while not being able to reconcile them with his belief system."²¹

In the end, both Dan and Shane still hold to their views, but they found the way of mutual respect, of seeking to listen, to understand in "real, respectful, civil dialogue." Defensive walls eroded, were lost. Genuine respect and friendship was found. Truth was not compromised. Christ was honored through the interaction.

Genuine, heartfelt, compassionate dialogue is key. The unexpected visitors at the women's college where I spoke heard the hearts of the young Christian women there who no longer felt they had a voice to speak their view on campus. The environment which celebrated diversity and proved to be "a safe zone" for lesbianism and trans-gendered students, did not offer safety for those who differed, but only alienation if they expressed their views. Perhaps a moment of clarity and understanding was granted in both directions that evening.

²⁰ Justin Taylor Blog, March 03, 2013, posting An Open Letter to the Church from a Lesbian, http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2013/03/21/an-open-letter-to-the-church-from-a-lesbian/?fb_action_ids=631951503481&fb_action_types=og.recommends&fb_source=aggregation&fb_aggregation_id=288381481237582

²¹ Shane L. Windmeyer, Dan and Me: My Coming Out as a Friend of Dan Cathy and Chick-fil-A, posted 01/28/2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/shane-l-windmeyer/dan-cathy-chick-fil-a_b_2564379.html.

Let us become ambassadors of Christ as though Christ was making His appeal through us. In grace and truth. In gentleness and respect. In moral consistency within our own lives. Let us change the old broad perception of culture that we are hate-filled, hostile, intolerant, and homophobic to a new one – that Christians can show love to all people, regardless of their lifestyle, yet still not compromise on truth. Separation, retreat, and criticism do not solve problems or heal souls. It has been said that ‘we cannot hate those whom we are trying to reach.’ But rather, we extend, share a meal, show genuine compassion, intentionally invest with humility to find hurts and to bind wounds with the healing grace, hope, and salvation of Jesus.

The world judges from its present state, its own normal experience, the water in which it swims. It lacks the ability to rise up, to see from a transcendent perspective its own lostness, its own blindness to find a better way. Those of us who have, through the profound grace of God, have been given eyes to see a better way. We are vessels placed in the world to help lead the lost toward redemption, renewal, toward restoring the sight of the blind through Christ alone. His Spirit empowers and enables us, lavishes love and compassion toward His creation. Let us utterly depend on Him, the only One who grants sight to the blind.

Yes, the line has been drawn. Cross over it in love and grace, in truth, generosity, compassion, and in the peace of Christ. Create meaningful, engaging relationships. Listen. Ask questions. Seek first to understand. Treat those with same-sex attraction with gentleness and respect, as you would anyone else. Minister to those hurting and in need. Help them see and know Christ. As Alan Shleman says, “We’re not trying to make gays straight. We’re trying to lead them straight to Jesus, just as we would anyone else. Once they trust Him, He transforms their life from the inside out.”²²

So, “Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love.”²³

²² Alan Shleman, *Apologetics for a New Generation*, “Homosexuality: Know the Truth and Speak it with Compassion.” 205.

²³ I Corinthians 16:13-14.

Suggested Resources:

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- Kinnaman, David and Lyons, Gabe, *unchristian*. Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2007.
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- Mittleberg, Mark, *The Questions Christians Hope No One Will Ask*, "Why do you condemn homosexuality when it's clear that God made gays and that he loves all people the same?" Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2010, Chapter 7, 189-220.
- Orr-Ewing, Amy, *Is the Bible Intolerant?*, Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005.
- Paulk, Anne, *Restoring Sexual Identity*, Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2003.
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- Stott, John, *Our Social and Sexual Revolution*, "Same-Sex Partnerships?" Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999, chapter 8, 189-220.
- Stuart, Ben, Breakaway Ministries podcast August 2, 2012, "Homosexuality and Christianity."