



## **Biblical Position Paper on Same-Sex Behavior**

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Scholars from Biola University wrote and edited this paper, drawing from their expertise and training in the New Testament, the Old Testament and Theology. It is intended to provide a thoughtful, expository survey on the topic of same-sex behavior from a biblical perspective. It is not intended to be either a comprehensive or an exhaustive survey of the topic of homosexuality or sexual identity.

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### **I. Introduction**

At present questions of human sexuality, sexual identity, and the parameters of marriage are a central focus in our culture. Discussion of these issues both in the context of cultural commentary and legal discourse has moved ahead without reference to biblical teaching or Christian tradition. Thus the need for a clear voice from a biblical perspective on these matters is critical, both for the health of the Biola community and for our faithful witness to the world.

This paper, reflecting directly on Scripture as our ultimate authority, sets forth a biblical perspective on human sexuality, specifically with reference to same-sex activity. Though the issues of same-sex attraction and the question of whether individuals are born homosexual are of crucial importance and need to be addressed in the Biola community, the scope of this paper will be limited to what the Bible teaches regarding same-sex behavior (leaving aside sexual identity or orientation). Furthermore, any commentary on this topic is incomplete without considering the broader Christian vision of human sexuality as a good gift of God outlined in Scripture. God's design for sexual expression within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman is fundamental to the well-ordering of human society and is integral to human flourishing. Though a complete discussion of human sexuality in light of Scripture's teaching is the ideal, the particular goal of this paper is to articulate briefly what we, as the Biola community, understand Scripture to teach regarding same-sex sexual activity.

As Christians, we have been called to holiness through obedience to God's Word in all matters. Scripture says, "But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Pet. 1:15-16).<sup>1</sup> Our goal is to glorify God by living according to His Word and His desires for humanity, and our views on sexuality must be seen according to this larger purpose. We also affirm that the pursuit of holiness must be done in the context of a loving and committed community of God's people as we wrestle with the implications of both our fallenness and our renewal in Christ.

All Biola University Community Standards are grounded in our long-standing identity as expressed in our Doctrinal Statement and Student Handbook. These documents are intended to communicate the teachings of the Bible and our institution's historic Protestant theology. As such, our university community "is born of other-centered practices, strengthened when members live with integrity, practice confession and forgiveness, attempt to live in reconciled relationships, accept responsibility for their actions and words, and submit to biblical instruction."<sup>2</sup> As a community of committed followers of Jesus Christ we have agreed to study and live together obeying the commands of Scripture while giving and receiving the grace of the gospel—a community of holiness and redemption.

Of particular relevance to our position on same-sex sexual activity are the following passages. From the Doctrinal Statement: "Man was created in the image of God, after His likeness, but the whole human race fell in the fall of the first Adam."<sup>3</sup> And from our Community Standards:

“Furthermore, students at Biola commit to refrain from practices that Scripture forbids, such as, sexual relations outside of marriage, homosexual behavior, theft and dishonesty.”<sup>4</sup> The Student Handbook expands upon the Community Standards and further outlines the ways in which same-sex behavior is to be addressed:

When a student approaches [Student Development] and communicates that he or she is struggling with same-sex behavior, same-sex attraction and/or sexual orientation issues we aim to offer safety that promotes openness. We pledge to extend compassion and care communicating personal acceptance, while providing accountability and assistance supporting students in their desire to live consistently with Christian teaching.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, the handbook emphasizes the redemptive and restorative context within which the community goal of living in step with the teaching of Scripture must take place.

Due to the complexity of issues related to same-sex behavior, same-sex attraction and sexual orientation, we are committed to engaging this conversation with courage, humility, prayerfulness and care. We believe, in accordance with Scripture, that we are all broken. Therefore, a primary goal of Student Development at Biola is to help each student find God in the midst of their unique history and struggles and discern how to walk with Him and others along the way.<sup>6</sup>

## **II. Framework for Study: A Redemptive-Historical Perspective**

Biola University’s foundation for understanding human personhood, gender, sexual identity, and same-sex sexual activity is rooted in the Scriptures as divine revelation. This is in accordance with Biola University’s doctrinal statement regarding the Bible:

The Bible, consisting of all the books of the Old and New Testaments, is the Word of God, a supernaturally given revelation from God Himself... The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are without error or misstatement in their moral and spiritual teaching and record of historical facts. They are without error or defect of any kind.<sup>7</sup>

As Scripture is our ultimate authority, it is important to note first of all that the Bible is not primarily a book about human ethics. Though Scripture has much to say about how we live and act, it is not merely a manual for moral living. Rather, the emphasis of Scripture is on God’s will and activity in creation, redemption, and ultimately, the consummation of all things. When interpreting individual passages of Scripture, one must understand how that particular passage fits within the overarching narrative of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and finally, Re-creation or Consummation.

In the beginning, God created all things by His own power and for His own express purposes. God reveals His holiness by His unwavering commitment to all that He created and saw as very good (Gen 1:31). But of course that is not the whole story. We learn from Genesis 3 that God’s good creation, humanity specifically, rebelled against God’s order and purpose. The rest of Scripture and human history must now be understood in light of God’s good and purposeful creation on one hand, and human rebellion and

rejection on the other. The only solution to the fracture and dislocation caused by human sin is God's redemption in Christ. Thus the overarching story of Scripture is the story of creation, fall, redemption, and ultimate restoration. From the Garden to Gethsemane and, ultimately, to the New Heavens and the New Earth, Creation, Fall, and Redemption become the major topographical landmarks that help us travel along Scripture's big idea.

Because the subject of the Bible is God and his redemption, we need to ask secondly, how does Scripture, then, apply to us? A Christian reading of Scripture should always have an eye toward obedient response. How shall we then live in response to what God has said? This is the receptive reading of a disciple. But again, because the story of Scripture is first and foremost about God, how might we understand our place in that story? Rather than thinking about how God's reality might fit into my own, it is best to think about how my life's narrative is taken up into that of God's. My story now must be reconfigured within God's story of redemption if my life or my actions are to make any sense at all. Seeing my life's story within God's transforms how I understand my past (the ultimate beginning is creation) and my future (the ultimate end is God's eschatological redemption of all things). And, re-inscribed within this new storyline, I come to understand my actions, attitudes, goals, and desires as reordered by a new and larger (and much more compelling) purpose now narrated by Scripture.

As indicated above, Biola University seeks to ground its viewpoint about all issues in the truth of Scripture . . . our goal being to think biblically in all areas of life. With Scripture as our ultimate authority, we believe that human sexuality is a good gift of God. The God Who created us, as with all His gifts to us, has also provided instruction and guidance for the proper use of the gift of sex within human relationships. In the following sections we explore this guidance in the Old and New Testament Scriptures, seeking to understand God's perspective and how to think biblically about our sexuality.

### **III. Homosexuality and Redemption in the Old Testament**

This section of the biblical statement focuses upon information in the instruction from the Old Testament. While there is much instruction about human relationships to be found here, the discussion will focus upon the topic of homosexuality.

#### The Genesis Model—Monogamous, Heterosexual Marriage

Biola's official statement on human sexuality<sup>8</sup> states the following:

Biola University affirms that sexual intimacy is designed by God to be expressed solely within a marriage between one man and one woman. This view of sexuality and marriage is rooted in the Genesis account of creation, reflected in the teachings of Jesus Christ himself, and is maintained consistently throughout Scripture. It is a view based on the biblical teaching of monogamy—that God designed sexual union for the purpose of uniting one man and one woman into a permanent, lifelong, one flesh union in the context of marriage. God created two complementary forms of humans, male and female, to bear His image together (Gen 1:27-28), and ordained that the first human pair were to become one flesh (Gen 2:23-24). These and other similar

passages show that God views sex, procreation and marriage as good, and that male and female are necessary counterparts—differentiated partners—in a sexual complementarity. Sexual intimacy and the sexual union of intercourse between a man and a woman are intended for a purpose—to join one husband and one wife together into one flesh in the context of marriage (I Cor 6:16).

Since the Scriptures begin with specific information about the first marriage in the Garden of Eden, we too are compelled to begin there in our views of man, woman, marriage, and sexuality. God’s creation of human beings as male and female (Gen 1:27) is the foundation of human sexuality. This complementarity in the human relationship reflects an essential part of our creation “in His image” (Gen 1:26-27; 5:1, 3). The creation mandate, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it . . .” (Gen 1:28) further reflects a major purpose of human sexuality, that those who carry God’s image will multiply in order to subdue the earth.

Therefore, the monogamous relationship between a man and a woman created by God (Gen 2:18-25) becomes our model of marriage. The import of this “one flesh” union is shown to be even more significant when it is later revealed this union was intended to be a visible illustration of Yahweh’s relationship with Israel and Christ’s relationship with the church today (Isaiah 54:5-6; Eph 5:22-33). The Genesis story of the first marriage is not just providing precedent, but mysteriously pictures our human relationship with God. As such, it serves as the basis for later warnings about behavior that violates the boundaries of this model, including heterosexual activity outside marriage and homosexual behavior.

#### The Effects of the Fall of the Human Race into Sin and God’s Offer of Redemption

The Old Testament celebrates human sexuality as a gift from God. Expressions of the beauty of love and romance are found in diverse contexts, like the poetry of Song of Songs, or in the beautiful narrative love story of Ruth and Boaz. In order to protect the beauty and sanctity of this relationship, the Old Testament Scriptures are also replete with warnings about violations of this covenant—e.g., adultery, premarital sex, rape, and prostitution.

Much of the discussion among Christians about these topics, as well as subjects like homosexuality, has focused upon prohibitions. While the “Thou shalt not’s” in Scripture are important, they must be seen and discussed in light of the reason for their existence—the fall of the human race into sin. From the independent, rebellious act of Adam and Eve (Gen 3:1-7) came a radical change in every aspect of human life (Gen 3:8-24). All human beings, and every part of our humanness, including our sexuality, have been deeply damaged by sin (Rom 1:21-32). We are all sinners, broken in some measure by this fall, but we are not left in a hopeless state. God’s redemptive power offers to rescue us, to reconcile us to Him, and to empower us to live in obedience to God’s design. If everything in our lives has in some way been touched by the effects of the fall, we can expect that our sexual nature is included. Addictive behaviors, heterosexual desire and behavior outside of a marriage commitment, homosexual desire and activity—all of these

result from our fallenness. Temptation, including sexual attractions, is not sin. Sin is yielding to temptation in an area of behavior that is specifically identified as wrong.

Since the concept of a universal “fall” is rarely believed, taught, or even known outside of Christian teaching, the following assumption is commonly embraced by most people: “I am the way God intended me to be, therefore I am compelled to act on my felt desires.” Scripture, however, provides two important teachings that help us to view life in another way: (1) Some of my desires and behaviors may be motivated from a fallen nature and contrary to what God wants for me, and (2) God’s redemptive story of salvation through Jesus Christ offers forgiveness and freedom to thrive as a human through obedience to God’s plan. The church, and institutions like Biola University which represent the church, must be redemptive communities that embrace sinners with this message. Celibacy and singleness are to be celebrated and affirmed, and for those who have married, the standard of monogamous, heterosexual marriage upheld. If sexual sins of all types are known, the church must address God’s standards with a firm, yet redemptive attitude.

In light of this theological and biblical framework, the following are specific teachings in the Old Testament relating to homosexual behavior:

#### Prohibition of Male Homosexual Intercourse in the Old Testament Holiness Code

*You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. (Lev 18:22)*

*If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them. (Lev 20:13)*

Both of these Old Testament commands are part of a larger block of laws (Lev 17-26) that urge God’s people Israel to keep their land unpolluted through their obedience to God. The context of 18:22 includes other forbidden sexual activities—incest, adultery, bestiality—as well as child sacrifice. In the entire Holiness Code (Lev 17-26), however, God’s abhorrence of homosexual acts particularly is reflected in the Hebrew *to’eba*, translated “abomination” in most versions. The thrust of the word is something detestable, disgusting, and utterly repugnant.<sup>9</sup>

Some have argued that the Old Testament’s use of this word *to’eba* does not usually signify something intrinsically evil, like rape or theft, but rather something which is ritually unclean for Jews, like eating pork or engaging in sexual intercourse during menstruation.<sup>10</sup> A similar approach seeks to discredit the applicability of these commands by claiming the homosexuality referred to in Leviticus is cultic prostitution within a pagan shrine, thus making the concern more idolatry than homosexuality. To support this, it is claimed that *to’eba* (“abomination”) is a highly technical term that points toward a concern about cultic impurity and prostitution.

One must acknowledge that many types of violations are called “abominations” in the Law material (Leviticus, Deuteronomy), Wisdom Literature (Proverbs), and the Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Malachi). But to categorize all of them as designating only ritual or cultic violations unique to the Jews is seriously misrepresenting the meaning of these statements. The following factors lead one to conclude that an “abomination” in these statements is much more serious than merely a cultic violation: (1) The severity of the death penalty (Lev 20:13) in Jewish law goes well beyond penalties in other Ancient Near Eastern cultures;<sup>11</sup> (2) The list of practices in Leviticus 18 are called detestable, an “abomination” to God (v. 26), but only homosexuality is individually labeled as such in two places (Leviticus 18 and 20), suggesting a stronger warning; (3) Generally, an “abomination” in the Old Testament is something that “Yahweh hates” (Deut 12:31; Prov 6:16). It carried with it a sense of the violation of a boundary, the reversal or undermining of something that had been already established by God. The details of the prohibitions against homosexuality in Leviticus 18 and 20 take on greater significance in this light. Both forbid male intercourse with another man *as with a woman*. The words “as with a woman”<sup>12</sup> are a direct reminder of the God-ordained plan of the marriage relationship (Gen 2), and that this act is a violation of divinely sanctioned boundaries established since creation. The issue of “boundaries” is important in all the Levitical laws, for the Israelites were to abstain from the immoral practices of the Canaanites (Deut 12:29-32) or they would be expelled from the land of Israel (Lev 18:24-30). Within these national religious laws are personal, moral “boundaries” as well that were to be respected because of God’s established order. Listed among the “abominations” are prohibitions against child sacrifice, incest, bestiality, adultery, theft, oppression of the poor, lying in court and deceit, all of which are abiding moral issues. This broad application of such laws beyond Israel’s purity laws leads one to conclude they reflect more universal, moral principles.

#### The Christian and the Old Testament Law

The previous discussion about Levitical laws raises one of the most important interpretive questions when reading the Old Testament: Does the Old Testament Law have contemporary authority? Most Christians are comfortable with a qualified “yes.” We would certainly support the 10 Commandments as legitimate moral, spiritual laws that are to be followed by an obedient Christian today. All of these commandments are repeated as commands (verbatim or in concept) in the New Testament, with the possible exception of the 3<sup>rd</sup> commandment.<sup>13</sup> In concept, these commandments have become the moral foundation for the laws of many societies. But how should we as Christians view the practice of offering animal sacrifices as a sin offering to God? What about the dietary laws? Recognition of the Holy days like Yom Kippur? Participation in Jerusalem temple worship? It quickly becomes apparent that most Christians do not obey many details in the Hebrew laws. So, how do we know what to obey and what not? Specifically, where does the practice of homosexuality fall in this discussion?

One way to approach the subject is to recognize the Mosaic Law was given by God for more than one purpose. Two prominent purposes of the Law were as follows: (1) It was given to reveal God’s character as a basis for spiritual and moral principles that govern the life of His people. “You shall be holy, for I, the LORD, your God, am holy” (Lev 19:2); (2) It was given as a covenant agreement between God and his covenant people,



Israel, guiding the laws of their theocracy. There are many details of the Law, therefore, that fall into the second category, and are conditional and historically temporary. While Orthodox Judaism still practices some of these laws, most people do not, nor do they feel obligated to follow them. But we must not ignore the moral values based upon God's character that proceed from many of these statements. We worship the same God, Who has not changed, and one must therefore submit to the eternal nature of commands that reflect this.

#### The Test of New Testament Witness

An important criterion that can be used to determine whether an Old Testament command is relevant today asks the question, "Is this command repeated, verbatim or in principle, in the New Testament?" If so, one is led to the conclusion that there is some sort of eternal, moral principle which spans both Old and New Covenant periods. The warning against homosexual intercourse in the Levitical laws (18:22; 20:13) is repeated in the New Testament (Rom 1:26-28; 1 Cor 6:9). Paul's term *arsenokoites* (trans. "men who practice homosexuality") in 1 Cor 6:9 is a compound term formed from the Greek translation of Lev 18:22; 20:13 for "male" and "lying." Even objectors who accuse Paul of antiquated views on morality fully acknowledge that the New Covenant commands seem to be firmly based on the Leviticus 18 and 20 commands.<sup>14</sup>

#### Examples of Homosexuality in Old Testament Narrative Material

Further examples of the Old Testament view of homosexual practice may be found in the Old Testament narrative material, specifically the stories of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:1-29) and Gibeah (Judges 19). There is an eerie similarity to these stories, likely because the Judges story was intentionally designed to remind the hearer of the sins of Sodom. Further discussion of these and other stories is included in the endnotes, including various interpretive views of the sin highlighted in these stories.<sup>15</sup> Jude 7 and 2 Peter 2:6 refer to Sodom's sin as "unnatural lusts" and "the sensual conduct of unprincipled men," fully supporting the majority view that Sodom represents unbridled homosexual behavior, bringing about the judgment of God.

## **IV. Homosexuality and Redemption in the New Testament**

The Biola University Statement on Human Sexuality further states:

Our marriages on earth model the relationship between Christ and his bride, the church (Eph 5:31-33), a melding that the Apostle Paul calls "a profound mystery." This God-initiated oneness, as detailed in Genesis, is clearly recognized and affirmed by Jesus in terms of the marital union of husband and wife (Matt 19:4-6). Any sexual intimacy outside of marriage violates God's design for marriage, and is thus to be understood as one of the disruptive consequences of the fall (Rom 1:18-32).

The New Testament supports the creation order described in Genesis and expresses the hope we have in Christ to overcome the effects of the corruption through the power of the Holy Spirit. In addition, it highlights the importance of the New Covenant community to

provide loving support to and exhort one another in pursuit of our mutual goal to become more like Christ. This section will examine how the New Testament supported the Old Testament prohibition against homosexual activity. It will also set the prohibition within the context of the New Testament commands to love one another as it relates to the intended holiness and obedience of the community.

#### Context: The Holiness of God's People

The foundational command for God's people is expressed in reference to Israel in Lev 19:2, "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (also Lev 11:44-45; 20:26). This command is then restated in 1 Pet 1:13-16, which presents the expectation that the church will also seek to be obedient to God's moral commands:

Therefore . . . set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

Holiness necessitates obedience to God's Word, and so as Christians our calling is to be obedient. Although we still suffer from the effects of the fall, live in a fallen world, and continually battle against the Enemy, God has given us a new hope in Christ. In Rom 5:11-14 Paul describes this call on the believer:

Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

The New Testament reaffirms that sexual relations only in the context of a monogamous, heterosexual marriage relationship are part of this call to obedience and holiness.

#### The Witness of Jesus

Since the gospel writers do not record any explicit condemnations of homosexuality by Jesus, some have argued that this reflected his acceptance of it. However, there are numerous indications that Jesus did not approve of same-sex activity.

In regards to the Mosaic Law, Jesus states clearly, "Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matt 5:17). By this statement, Jesus argues against any concerns that the arrival of the kingdom means that he is setting aside God's previous revelation. He also affirms the continued validity of the Law when he goes on to say, "Until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished" (Matt 5:18; also Luke 16:17).<sup>16</sup> In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus not only does not dispense with the Law, but expounds its original intent.<sup>17</sup> Thus, adultery now includes looking at a woman lustfully (Matt 5:27-28) and to be angry with someone violates the prohibition against murder (Matt 5:21-22).

In regards to matters of sexuality, Jesus reaffirmed the Genesis account as providing the basis for the only valid sexual union as between a man and a woman. When approached by the Pharisees on the legitimacy of divorce, he answers by citing Gen 1:27, “God made them male and female” and contextualizes the citation by saying that this was “from the beginning of creation” (Mark 10:6; also Matt 19:4). Jesus’ description of the event as “from the beginning of creation” indicates that he saw the account as being normative and prescriptive rather than simply descriptive.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, in Mark 7:21-23, Jesus lists sexual immorality, or *porneia*, as among the offenses which defile a person. As a first century Jew, Jesus would have understood sexual immorality in light of Leviticus 18 and 20, which included homosexual activity, along with incest and adultery.<sup>19</sup>

In conclusion, although Jesus does not explicitly prohibit homosexual behavior in the gospels, he does affirm the Law, which would have included such a prohibition. As the fulfillment of the Law, Jesus epitomized and upheld God’s standard, thus supporting it as God’s intent for humanity.

#### The Witness of Paul and the Rest of the New Testament

Paul also bases his view of marriage and human sexual relationships on the creation account. In his view, marriage is to be a monogamous relationship between a man and a woman and is the only acceptable context for sexual union.

#### *1 Cor 6:9-11 and 1 Tim 1:10*

These passages reflect how Paul and the early church agreed with the Old Testament view on sexual morality, including homosexuality. In 1 Cor 6 Paul describes how the Christian believers in Corinth are to lead different lives than they had before they were converted. He declares that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God and lists several types of persons as illustrations of who fits into that category.

Paul’s list of examples includes *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*. There was no technical term meaning “homosexual” in the Greek of Paul’s day. *Malakoi* is a pejorative Greek term which refers to the passive partners – often young boys - in a homosexual relationship. *Arsenokoitai* is most likely derived from two Greek words found in Lev 18:22 and 20:13, which prohibit a male (*arsen*) from lying (*koite*) with other men as with a woman.<sup>20</sup> Since Lev 18:22 addresses the active partner in the relationship,<sup>21</sup> it is likely that Paul used it in the same way so that the combination of the two terms then refers to both partners, the active and passive, engaged in homosexual activity.<sup>22</sup> 1 Tim 1:10 also lists *arsenokoitai*, along with “murderers . . . enslavers, liars, perjurers” (1 Tim 1:9-10), as those associated with the “ungodly and sinners” and what “is contrary to sound doctrine.”

The way Paul writes assumes that he believes his audience will agree with him, in other words, that they will share his Jewish viewpoint that homosexuality is a transgression of God’s standards and those who practice it should be included in the list of the “unrighteous” (1 Cor 6:9). Paul’s point is that these are examples are sinful behaviors that the Corinthians used to practice, but have left behind or should have left behind now

that they are living new lives under Christ's lordship. In other words, he ends this part of his exhortation by declaring that this is what they *were* previously and that they are to live differently now that they have been sanctified and justified in Christ.

### *Romans 1*

In this passage Paul both affirms the Old Testament prohibition and expands it to include sexual relations among females in addition to those among males (1:26-27). Paul indicates that homosexuality is a result of humanity's fundamental turning away from God to worshipping idols (Rom 1:26-28). Although God's "eternal power and divine nature" are seen in creation, humanity "did not honor him as God or give thanks" and as a result their hearts were "darkened" (Rom 1:21). As a result, humanity is given over to "impurity," "degrading passions," and "a depraved mind" (Rom 1:24-29). Thus homosexuality, along with other sins such as envy, murder, strife and gossip, is seen as a consequence of humanity's rebellion against God.

In particular, Paul says that same-sex activity is "contrary to nature" (Rom 1:26). Paul appears to use "nature" to reflect the creation order of male and female,<sup>23</sup> and so what is "contrary to nature" is what goes against that design, "the active negation of marriage in the form of same-sex relations."<sup>24</sup> Those who engage in activities that are "contrary to nature," such as homosexuality, exhibit humanity's fallenness and alienation from God.<sup>25</sup> As such, homosexuality is portrayed as a distortion of God's fundamental creative design.

Some have objected to this reading of Romans. One argument is that Paul seems to mean acting against one's own nature, in other words, that "contrary to nature" refers to homosexual acts committed by heterosexual people.<sup>26</sup> However, the apostle does not speak of a feeling and internal conflict, but a function. Connected with this is the idea that Paul is not speaking so much of individual transgressions, but rather the statement is an indictment of pagan society of his day. The text speaks of how Gentile culture went astray as the result of their idolatry, and homosexuality is presented as an indication of their turning from God.<sup>27</sup>

It is also highly unlikely that Paul is referring to pederasty, or homosexual relations between an adult male and young boy. One scholar argues that Paul was referring to pederasty as being "unnatural" because it involved "physical and emotional humiliation suffered by youths who were forced into slavery or who accepted the degradation of the prostitute."<sup>28</sup> However, as other scholars note, the Jewish worldview seen in authors such as Philo is that sexual morality is part of "natural law" and so is part of a divine mandate for all people. In line with the biblical and Hellenistic Jewish worldview, Paul connects heterosexual activity observed in nature to God's created order.<sup>29</sup> The inclusion of women also mitigates against the claim that Paul has pederasty in view.<sup>30</sup>

Humanity's initial sin is seen as their refusal to worship God as He is seen in nature, and homosexuality is presented as a representative sin of the result of this refusal. Paul does not consider it to be a "worse" sin than others. Rather, he uses it as an example of the consequences of turning away from God since it is a distortion of an original aspect of the

creation order in which man and woman created to cleave together in a complementary way and to be fruitful and multiply.<sup>31</sup>

### New Life in Christ

As a result of their new life in Christ, believers can now overcome sinful desires through the power of the Holy Spirit and so be obedient. Various exhortations in the New Testament speak of the struggle in this age in which the kingdom is partially, but not fully present. For example, Paul admonishes believers to put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit (Rom 8:12-13), and Christians are told to resist the devil (James 4:7).

Consequently, the New Testament also speaks of the importance of love, which is how believers come alongside and help each other to live in holiness. Christians are to do all things for the edification of others (e.g., 1 Cor 14:26), to care for one another (1 Cor 12:25), and to suffer and rejoice together (1 Cor 12:26). Our attitudes should reflect an absence of bitterness, wrath, anger, and slander. Instead, believers should be kind and forgiving towards one another (Eph 4:30).

However, love does not mean all things are acceptable. Within this context, the church should help one another in the quest for Christlikeness: “If anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness” (Gal 6:1). Believers are to “bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2). In this we are called to act with humility, remembering that without Christ, we are all under the power of sin and subject to the same judgment of God. No one is morally better than anyone else, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). Believers are not to think “more highly” of themselves than they should and should instead consider themselves with “sober judgment” (Rom 12:3).

Love does not preclude upholding a standard, but the one who “judges” needs to remember that they too are subject to the same standard (e.g., Matt 7:1; Luke 6:37-38; Rom 2:1). Therefore, humility, not arrogance or pride, must be present as we consider our own fallenness, and the motive must always be the good of the other. Paul exhorts believers to abstain from judgment on matters of indifference,<sup>32</sup> but he also does not think that all forms of behavior are now acceptable in the new creation order. For example, in regards to the man engaged in sexual immorality with his father’s wife, Paul says he has “pronounced judgment on the man” even though he is not present (1 Cor 5:3).

In particular, Paul considered matters of the body, especially as related to sexuality, as critical. The Corinthians had made a mistake in thinking that their salvation meant issues related to the body no longer mattered. Paul warns the Corinthians to “flee from sexual immorality” since “every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body” (1 Cor 6:18). Rather than the body being irrelevant, it is instead the “temple of the Holy Spirit.” Paul’s concern is to protect God’s holy temple, and so Christians are to glorify God in their bodies (1 Cor 6:19-20). Again, Paul’s perspective is restorative, since his intent for the man is “that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord” (1 Cor 5:5). Despite the man’s transgression and apparent lack of repentance, Paul’s ultimate goal is not his condemnation but his salvation.

Thus, the New Testament does not define love as acceptance of behavior which transgresses God's moral law. Love in the church is to support, exhort, and admonish each other with genuine care and concern in the corporate pursuit of Christlikeness.

## **V. Implications**

Our understanding of sexuality, gender, and marriage is grounded in our theological confession, which springs from the depths of God's self-revelation in Scripture. As we strive to be a community of obedience and redemption, we understand that our human sexuality must be shaped by God's purposes as revealed in Scripture. As all disciples of Jesus come up short of obedient living, it is by the mercy and grace of the gospel that we are forgiven and empowered to both confess God's good and holy design as well as to begin now, if even in faltering steps, to live out that design.

In light of this, we expect that each member of the Biola community will refrain from non-marital sexual acts, homosexual sex acts, and same-sex romantic relationships. We consider this expectation to be based upon God's creational intent for humanity. And, as a community, we commit ourselves to support each other as we all move more and more toward biblically defined relationships. At the same time such a stance should never communicate "homophobia" or otherwise support the misperception that Christians turn their backs on those who have embraced sexual identities and behaviors that are not consistent with Scripture's teaching.

Since we know that God's redeeming grace is our only true strength, all our efforts to love and to support Biola's community members will be oriented toward redemption and restoration. This implies that we must speak the truth in love. Failing to identify sin (both our own sin and the sin of others) is a failure to love. Therefore, this paper was written with the goal of faithfully articulating what the Bible says about same-sex activity. Our guiding aspiration has been to speak this truth in the context of Jesus' redeeming love.

As a community committed to following Jesus through the guidance and instruction of Holy Scripture, let us strive for sexual purity and fidelity in marriage as we seek to give witness to our Lord Jesus Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the ESV (English Standard Version), except when cited from another document, such as the Biola University Statement on Human Sexuality.

<sup>2</sup> Biola University Community Standards.

<sup>3</sup> Biola University Doctrinal Statement.

<sup>4</sup> Biola University Community Standards.

<sup>5</sup> Biola University Student Handbook.

<sup>6</sup> Biola University Student Handbook.

<sup>7</sup> Biola University Doctrinal Statement.

<sup>8</sup> Adopted by Biola University, May 2012.

<sup>9</sup> The concluding summary to this section (Lev 18:24-30) summarizes all the practices listed in this chapter as “abominations” (18:26-27, 29-30); in the list of specific commands, however, this word is mentioned only in reference to same-sex male intercourse (18:22). Leviticus 20 lists penalties for many of the forbidden acts of chapters 18-19, but the word “abomination” is applied as well only to sexual intercourse between males.

<sup>10</sup> John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: Univ of Chicago Press, 2005), 100-102.

<sup>11</sup> Robert A.J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 44-56. The most severe penalty in other Ancient Near Eastern cultures is found in the Middle Assyrian Laws where castration was carried out. In Assyrian laws the greatest concern was shaming a man by penetrating him as if he were a woman. In an honor-shame culture, a man who penetrated another lowered the man’s status. There were male cult prostitutes, whose services were offered for a fee. These prostitutes, however, were treated with disgust in that society.

Egyptian evidence is conflicting, and there is no extensive proof of homosexual cult prostitution. When same-sex intercourse appears in Egyptian literature, the receptive male is seen as inferior. In summary, one cannot prove uniform approval or disapproval in any of these cultures. The clearest statements, noted above in Assyrian laws, show that a man who was violated lost his manhood, and his attacker might be subject to castration.

<sup>12</sup> The Hebrew idiom literally rendered “lie in the bed of” appears in various forms in Gen 34:22; Psalm 149:5; Isaiah 57:2; Hosea 7:17; and Micah 2:1. The claim that its meaning in Leviticus 18 and 20 does not refer to sexual activity, based on a few of these other contexts, is unfounded. The full expression is used only in Gen 35:22 (Reuben lying with his father’s concubine) and Leviticus 18 and 20, which all contextually refer to forbidden sexual practices.

<sup>13</sup> Many Christians view the establishment of Sunday as a day of worship to be an extension of the concept of the Sabbath Day. This practice was not commanded in Scripture but came about as a result of Jesus’ resurrection “on the first day of the week.” (Matt 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1)

<sup>14</sup> Bernadette Brooten, *Love Between Women* (Chicago: Univ of Chicago Press, 1998), 281-294. Brooten agrees that Paul’s instruction about homosexuality has a close association upon the Holiness Code of Leviticus, and uses this point to disregard Paul’s advice as antiquated and not normative for our own time.

<sup>15</sup> Two Old Testament narrative passages, examples of male homosexuality, are found in the stories of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:1-29) and Gibeah (Judges 19). There is an eerie similarity to these stories, likely because the Judges story was designed to be a reminder of Sodom. In Genesis 19, the male citizens of a town demand to have sexual intercourse with male visitors who have come to the house of Lot. Their disgusting behavior is depicted in the story as an embarrassment to Lot, but a normal part of life there. Lot seeks to protect the angelic visitors in his home overnight, which is then surrounded by a mob. Before the homosexual rape can take place, the angels deliver Lot and his family out of danger. Scripture characterizes the men of Sodom as “wicked, and great sinners against the LORD” (Gen 13:13), and fire and brimstone destroyed the two cities.

It should be noted that a few interpreters have challenged the commonly held view that homosexual relations were threatened in the Sodom story. This view redefines the use of the verb “know” in Gen 19:5 as something other than sexual knowledge. The sin proposed in this view is lack of hospitality. John Boswell (*Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 93-94), following Derrick Bailey (*Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* [London: Longmans, Green, 1955], 3-4), argues that the men of the city wanted to “get acquainted with” the visitors, and this is not a reference to sexual relations. In the end, their view is that the town showed a lack of hospitality. The facts in the story and later Scripture strongly argue otherwise: (1) Why were Lot’s daughters offered to the men of Sodom to appease them? (2) Why the extreme, unprecedented judgment of God if only hospitality is the problem? (3) Why do Jude 7 and 2 Peter 2:6 refer to Sodom’s sin as “unnatural lusts” and “the sensual conduct of unprincipled men”?

In Judges 19, the men of Gibeah threaten the homosexual rape of a male visitor. In this case, a concubine is offered and raped, and her ravaged dead body becomes a message to all the tribes of Israel. The tribe of Benjamin is nearly obliterated by the angry retribution of the other tribes. Many expositors agree that the similarities in the telling of the story in Judges make the following point: “How bad did

moral conditions get during the times of the Judges? At least in one town, it was like Sodom and Gomorrah.”

The inclusion of these narrative stories in the documentation of this paper is intended to provide a thorough listing of homosexual accounts in the Old Testament. It can be argued that both stories condemn the homosexual behavior of the men of each town, and judgment comes as a result. However, both stories also portray the homosexual act as intended gang rape, which everyone agrees is also a great evil. The New Testament commentary (Jude 7), however, specifically identifies Sodom’s homosexuality as the immoral behavior, and not just a lack of hospitality or rape.

One other story is worthy of mention in this Old Testament survey of narrative accounts, though scholars differ on the interpretation of its meaning. When Ham, father of the Canaanites, “saw the nakedness of his father” Noah (Gen 9:22), does it mean (1) literally viewing his father’s nakedness, an intentional act that culturally brought shame on him; or, (2) he committed incestuous homosexual rape of his father? The crux of the argument centers on the meaning of the expression “seeing the nakedness of his father.” Some interpreters (e.g., Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*) believe this expression is synonymous with sexual intercourse. The viewpoint equates “seeing the nakedness” with “uncovering the nakedness” in passages like Lev 18:6-18, where in most cases it clearly means intercourse. The shameful rape of his own father would help explain the severity of the curse on Canaan and later historical repercussions of their expulsion from the Land. It must be noted, however, that the majority of interpreters take another view, seeing this expression in Gen 9:22 as the intentional shaming of Noah by literally seeing his nakedness. This view better explains Shem and Japheth’s response, whose actions of walking in backwards to cover their father interprets the expression more literally. So, one cannot conclusively show that Ham’s sinful actions involved homosexual intercourse. Even if this is the case, the circumstances of incest and rape contribute to the severity of the violation as in the Sodom account.

<sup>16</sup> In this instance, “Law” most likely refers to the entire Hebrew Scriptures. Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 229.

<sup>17</sup> Wilkins, *Matthew*, 241-46

<sup>18</sup> Dan O. Via and Robert A.J. Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 72.

<sup>19</sup> Via and Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 72.

<sup>20</sup> Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 334-36.

<sup>21</sup> Via and Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 83.

<sup>22</sup> Some argue that the terms do not refer to general homosexual behavior. For example, Robin Scroggs says that the meaning of *malakos* should be narrowed to “effeminate call-boy” and the *arsenokoitai* are those who keep a *malakos* as a “mistress” or who hire him to satisfy their sexual desires. Therefore, Paul does not condemn homosexuality in general, but only homosexual prostitution (*The New Testament and Homosexuality* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983], 106-8). However, given the derivation of *arsenokoitai* from the terms in Lev. 18:22; 20:13 and the use of *malakoi* by other first century Jewish writers such as Philo in ways that go beyond “call-boys,” it seems most likely that Paul uses the terms simply to refer to the active and passive partners in a homosexual relationship. For a more detailed discussion, see Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 306-339.

<sup>23</sup> The phrase “contrary to nature” (*para physin* in the Greek) was used by both Jewish writers and Greco-Roman philosophers to refer to homosexual behavior. See Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 387.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas E. Schmidt, *Straight or Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 81

<sup>25</sup> Hays, *Moral Vision*, 387.

<sup>26</sup> Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 109.

<sup>27</sup> As Stanley J. Grenz states, “The apostle is assuming that heterosexual expression had once been the universal practice, but somewhere along the line homosexual acts had become prevalent.” *Welcoming but Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality* (Louisville: Westminster, 1998), 49-50.

<sup>28</sup> Scroggs, *New Testament and Homosexuality*, 117.

<sup>29</sup> E.g., Douglas Moo, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 114-15; Hays, *Moral Vision*, 387.

<sup>30</sup> Grenz, *Welcoming*, 49.

<sup>31</sup> Hays, *Moral Vision*, 388. It is also likely that, given the unequivocal rejection of homosexuality in early Judaism, Paul uses it as a representative example of the Gentile rejection of God in particular since the



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revelation of God which they reject is based upon nature rather than special revelation given in the Law. Romans 1 reflects Jewish apologetic arguments, such as in Wis 12-15, which condemn Gentile idolatry and trace immorality to that idolatry, thus justifying God's judgment of them (Moo, *Romans*, 97). Paul then turns the argument around on the self-righteous Jew in what Hays calls a "homiletical sting operation." He "whips the reader into a frenzy of indignation against others: those unbelievers, those idol-worshippers, those immoral enemies of God" and uses the same argument on the one who condemns. Those who condemn the unrighteous are themselves "without excuse," leaving all people, Jew and Gentile, equally condemned before God. Hays, *Moral Vision*, 389.

<sup>32</sup> E.g., issues related to food and special days in the dispute between the "weak" and the "strong" in Rom 14:1 – 15:13.