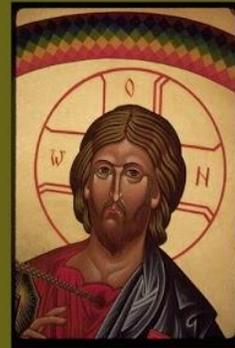


I'm Christian.
I'm Gay.
Let's Talk.



Homosexuality: Frequent Asked Questions

What is homosexuality?

This is a term coined in the late 19th century to describe the understanding that some people have an inborn physical and emotional attraction to members of their own gender instead of the opposite sex. Sexuality involves much more than whom one is attracted to; it is an integral part of one's personality and way of seeing and relating to life and other people. Gay is a term commonly used to refer to male homosexuals. Lesbian is a term that describes female homosexuals. Bisexual refers to people who may be attracted to either gender.

What do transgendered and intersex mean?

Transgendered people may have the body of a woman, but self-identify as being male, or they may have the body of a man, but self-identify as being female; they feel that they are "trapped in the wrong body." They find integrity and authenticity only when they are able to live as the gender which they feel themselves to be. Many go through a physical sex-change (transsexual) in order to integrate their physical characteristics with their self-identity.

Intersex refers to people who are born with ambiguous genitals or who have sex characteristics of both sexes. Including all types of intersexuality, this occurs about once in a hundred births. This condition is usually treated by assigning a sex at birth and is treated with surgery and hormones. However, many intersex people feel they have been assigned the wrong sex, or that they don't identify with either sex..

Is homosexuality a choice?

Have heterosexuals chosen to be attracted to the opposite sex? The majority of homosexuals give heartfelt testimony to the fact that (1) from their earliest memories they always knew they were somehow "different" and that (2) in puberty they came to realize that this difference included physical and emotional attraction to the same sex, with a corresponding lack of this attraction to the opposite sex. For most, the acceptance of this basic awareness is a slow, gradual and very painful process. The idea that they "chose" to be homosexual is completely unrealistic to them. They often reply with an incredulous, "Who would choose to be scorned and hated by their family, church and society?"

What causes homosexuality?

During much of the 20th century, study focused on environmental causes of homosexuality, but over the past few decades the focus has shifted to biological factors.

As yet, there is no absolutely conclusive proof of causation, and some researchers believe that homosexuality is the result of a complex interaction of both biological and psycho-social elements.

Some studies point to childhood non-gender-typical behavior as a strong indicator of adult homosexuality. Other studies show that fluctuations in the levels of pre-natal sex hormones between the 16th and 26th week of gestation can interfere with masculinizing the mating center of the brain. Too few androgen receptors in the brain may also result in incomplete masculinizing of the brain. Some research indicates that the more older brothers a boy has, the more likelihood that he will be homosexual, suggesting that some mothers build up a sensitivity to male hormones. Studies have found various physiological differences between homosexual and heterosexual males, primarily in the brain, inner ear, and olfactory system. Several genes have been identified that are related to homosexuality and passed on through the mother. Homosexuality often seems to "run in families." In a well-known twin study, when one twin is gay the likelihood that the other twin will also be gay jumps from 20% in fraternal twins to 50% in identical twins. Less research has been done for lesbians, but it is also believed that gestational hormone levels plays a role, and certain biological differences have been noted. Of related interest, homosexual behavior has been observed in over 450 species of mammals, birds, fish and insects. See Scientific Research

What percentage of the population is homosexual?

Anywhere between 1% and 10% has been estimated. It is not easy to discover the exact proportion, because many people are not willing to admit their homosexuality. Also there are differences in how people define and understand homosexuality. When the most recent US Census was taken close to 5% of the population identified as gay or lesbian.

Why do gays want to flaunt their sexuality?

To many heterosexuals, any mention of homosexuality whatever seems like flaunting it. They forget that much of their own conversation is laced with both indirect and explicit references to their own heterosexuality. They have pictures of their spouse or girlfriend/boyfriend in their office, and talk freely about their significant other, but when gays and lesbians do the same they take offense.

It is spiritually and emotionally dishonest and unhealthy for people to pretend to be something they are not. If they feel that they cannot admit they are homosexual, they must constantly be monitoring what they say to be sure their secret doesn't "slip out." Having to hide it makes it loom larger and more important in their lives until it becomes an obsession and makes it much harder to deal with. Being able to be "real" with others and share their need for spiritual support is an important aspect of Christianity for gays and lesbians just as much as for the rest of us.

Do homosexuals "recruit" children?

This question shows a confusion between pederasty (a desire to have sex with children) and homosexuality. Most pedophiles were themselves sexually abused as children. They need to be in a position of power sexually. While some pedophiles abuse children of the same sex, the large majority of child sexual abuse is perpetrated by the opposite sex. Gays and lesbians are sexually

attracted to adults of the same sex. They do not "recruit" children, although many of them, remembering the agony they went through as they were growing up, want to help youngsters who are coming to terms with their sexuality today.

What is a "gay lifestyle"?

Many heterosexuals use this term as a euphemism for "gay sex" of any kind. Homosexuals object to the term, because they point out that there are just as many homosexual "lifestyles" as there are heterosexual lifestyles. There is selfless, committed love, as well as promiscuity, uncommitted sex, adultery, rape, child abuse, sexual addiction and pornography, among both straights and gays.

What does the Bible say about homosexuality?

The Bible condemns same-sex behavior of various kinds (just as it does such kinds of heterosexual behavior), such as temple prostitution, rape, lust and pederasty, but it doesn't address the issue of homosexual orientation, as we understand it today. The recognition that some people are innately attracted to others of their own sex in the same way that most people are attracted to the opposite sex is a relatively recent understanding that was unknown when the Bible was written. The terms homosexual, homosexuality and homosexual orientation were coined in the late 19th century. Although some versions of the Bible use the word homosexual because the translators think this is what the Bible writers were referring to, there is no word in the original languages of the Bible for such a concept.

Does the Bible say anything relevant to homosexuals today?

The Bible really has little to say about sexual relationships between two men or two women. It is not mentioned in the Ten Commandments or by Jesus or the prophets. There are only six biblical references to same-sex behavior, and there is much debate in the Christian world about what they actually mean. People who take these words at face value have no doubt that such behavior is unequivocally condemned for everyone.

Others who believe we must evaluate the context in which they are written, as well as take historical and cultural considerations into account, and then decide how they apply to us today, do not see them in such black and white terms. Although this second view is not that of all, or even most, church members and leaders, it is shared by a significant number of thoughtful, respected Adventists who have given serious study to this subject and want to understand it in as accurate and redemptive a way as possible, while remaining faithful to the fundamental principles of Scripture and Adventist belief. If you disagree with this view, I hope that you will still consider it carefully and prayerfully. Let's take a look at these references.

Genesis 19:4-9 "...all the men from every part of the city, both young and old, surrounded the house. They called to Lot, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.' Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him and said, 'No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing. Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don't

do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof.' 'Get out of our way,' they replied. And they said, 'This fellow came here as an alien and now he wants to play the judge! We'll treat you worse than them.'

The traditional interpretation: Sodom was destroyed because of homosexuality.

The contextual interpretation: First, we must remember that God had already decided to destroy Sodom before this incident took place. Second, it's not likely that the mob which gathered at Lot's house - every single man in the city - were all homosexuals. We also have to ask ourselves why Lot would try to distract them with his virgin daughters (a reprehensible act, indeed) if they were. So we cannot simply assume that they were motivated by homosexual desire. What this story most likely suggests is that the men of the city regarded these two strangers with suspicion - perhaps they thought they were spies who had been taken in by Lot, himself an outsider. They were determined to humiliate these strangers in the way common to that time and area, by "treating them like women," by brutally raping them. In much the same manner today, new inmates are introduced to prison hierarchy. Sodom's sins are enumerated in Ezekiel 16:49, Luke 10:12 and Jude 7 as inhospitality, greed, pride, haughtiness, refusal to help the poor, and unspecified sexual immorality. It is ironic that this story which condemns a city for its mistreatment of the poor, the stranger, is used to condemn another vulnerable group - homosexuals.

Leviticus 18:22, 20:13 "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable...If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads."

The traditional interpretation: Sex between two men is a sin punishable by death.

The contextual interpretation: This command to the former Israelite slaves seems quite straightforward. Yet we must remember that it was a command made specifically to the Israelite nation. Many of the other Levitical commands, including those about sexual sins, seem to be in the context of ensuring and emphasizing that the Israelites were to be different from the pagan idolaters, both those they had known in Egypt and those they would be living among in Palestine. Leviticus 18:3 says, "You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices." Leviticus 19:19 forbids mating two different kinds of animals, planting a field with two different kinds of seeds and wearing clothing woven of two kinds of material. Leviticus 19:27 forbids men to cut the hair at the sides of their head or clip the edges of their beard. Leviticus 11-15 contains many laws and regulations concerning ceremonial uncleanness – laws which were broken by Jesus when he touched lepers, dead people, and the woman with a discharge of blood. The injunction against two men lying together immediately follows the command against sacrificing one's children to the heathen god, Molech. We can conclude that God did not want His people to practice the many perverted or detestable kinds of behavior common in the pagan nations around them which were often associated with lascivious temple fertility rites in which worshippers had sex with as many people as possible, regardless of their family relationship or sex. They believed this would bring blessings on their crops and livestock. No doubt these practices were what made

idolatry such a temptation to the Israelites. As for the death penalty required for men who lie together, the same penalty was required for anyone who cursed his father or mother, for those who committed adultery, for a man who married his sister, etc. There is no indication that those involved in homosexual sex as part of their idol worship did so because of the kind of orientation we recognize today.

Romans 1:25-27 "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. 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 also 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."

The traditional interpretation: Women having sex with women and men having sex with men is called shameful lust and will be punished.

The contextual interpretation: The point Paul is making in Romans 1-2 is that all people, whether pagan or Christian, Jew or Gentile, have sinned and stand in need of God's grace. His condemnation here is directed at pagan idolaters, people who have refused to acknowledge and glorify God and have turned to worshipping images of the things God has made. They have given up their natural desire for the opposite sex and turned to an unbridled search for lustful, sexual pleasure. Their lives are full of covetousness, malice, envy, strife, slander, disrespect for parents, pride, and hatred of God (see verses 1-31). Jews, on the other hand, had been given God's law but were guilty of breaking it and, even worse, of judging the pagans. Paul uses the example of sexual perversion, knowing his readers will immediately identify it as an act of pagan idol worship. He speaks of women exchanging natural relations for unnatural ones and men abandoning natural relations with women in an obvious reference to heterosexual behavior, since what is natural for heterosexuals is not natural for homosexuals. No doubt there are heterosexual people today who engage in gay sex simply because they are lusting for a new kind of pleasure, to whom this text may apply. But most gay, lesbian and bisexual people who have grown up as Christians have struggled for long years against their same-sex attractions and have tried their best to love and serve God. Paul's description simply does not apply to them.

1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." (KJV) "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." (NIV)

1 Timothy 1:9, 10 "Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves

with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; (KJV) "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 adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine (NIV)

The traditional interpretation: Homosexuals will not go to heaven.

The contextual interpretation: Paul uses two Greek words, *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*, that have been translated various ways, often reflecting contemporary understandings. Malakoi literally means "soft or woman-like" and most often referred to those who were rich, lazy decadent, self-indulgent or lacking in courage. The KJV translates this word as effeminate, and probably refers to male prostitutes who painted their faces and wore soft clothes to attract both male and female clients. If they served male clients, they were also considered effeminate because they played the "receptive" role of women. Arsenokoitai is made up of two Greek words - arseno, meaning "male" and koitai meaning "bedder." It is only found twice in the Bible and this is the first use of it found in literature generally. In subsequent Greek writings over the first six centuries arsenokoitai is usually found in a list of sins similar to Paul's. In these lists it is adjacent to words with an economic connection, such as robber, swindler, thief, etc. In the Corinthians verse quoted above it is followed by "thief" and in the Timothy verse it is followed by "slave-trader." If it is a sexual term, why is it in these lists? Could it be referring to a pimp, who profits from selling the services of male prostitutes? Or might it refer to a man who pays for the services of a prostitute? Although we cannot be absolutely sure what is meant here, these words obviously refer to a specific kind of homosexual behavior, so we cannot generalize from these verses that all homosexuals will not inherit the kingdom of God.

A word of explanation:

How can I – a faithful, committed, fourth-generation Adventist; a minister's wife and long-time church employee – even consider a different interpretation of these texts than the one endorsed by the church? I have never been liberal, much less radical, in my views. But a close acquaintance with hundreds of gay and lesbian people and their families, hearing of their confusion and painful struggles, has forced me to re-examine my understanding of this issue.

I have come to realize that many of our beliefs have changed over time. God does not change, but our understanding and interpretation of God's Word has developed and changed over time. For instance, Christians for many years fiercely resisted the scientific discovery that the earth revolves about the sun, not the sun around the earth, on the basis of Joshua 10:12-14. They believed the Bible clearly taught that the sun moved across the sky, and those who believed otherwise were persecuted.

The Old Testament is strongly patriarchal in its focus. The last of the Ten Commandments even recognizes women as chattel, belonging to their husbands. "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house; thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant nor his maidservant, nor his

ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is thy neighbor's." It doesn't say, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's husband." But Paul saw that Jesus brought a new paradigm. "In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female." In God's sight every person is equal. We are still learning to apply that understanding.

A century and a half ago southern Christians defended from the Bible their right to own slaves. Nowhere does the Bible forbid slavery and there are many more references condoning and regulating slavery than there are condemning same-sex behavior. Yet Christians gradually came to understand that for one man to own and force his will on another was not in keeping with God's principle of free will. Many slave-owning Christians believed that the Bible taught the Black race had been condemned to slavery and was inferior to the White race, because of Noah's curse. (Genesis 9:25) No one would dare say that today.

In an age when polygamy was practiced, God did not condemn this practice. He even gave Moses a law to protect the first wife if another wife was taken. (Exodus 21:10) God blessed people like Abraham, Jacob, Elkanah, David and Solomon, who had multiple wives, and the Bible records no reproach from God about this. Yet today we understand that monogamy is God's plan for our best happiness.

So I have come to believe that we have read those few verses that mention same-sex behavior through the lenses of prejudice and ignorance. I believe that someday in the future we will look back and be ashamed of the way we have treated homosexuals.

If I am homosexual in orientation, how does God expect me to live?

Although the Bible does not give specific instructions for every situation we meet in our modern world, we can look for principles that apply throughout time and across cultures.

Psalms 51:10 "Create in me a pure heart, O God." If your heart is pure you will resist temptation to treat God's gift of sexual intimacy in a way that cheapens it and hurts others, such as promiscuity, adultery, rape or incest.

Psalms 38:9 "All my longings lie open before you, O Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you." God understands and sympathizes with your longings, your loneliness and your pain.

Genesis 2:18 "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone.'" God Himself put within you the need and capacity for a close emotional, mental and physical relationship with another person.

Isaiah 49:13, 23 "For the Lord comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones. . . those who hope in me will not be disappointed." John 10:10 "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." God promises you comfort, compassion and an abundant life.

Psalm 37:4 "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart." This is a promise that God will not only give you the desires of your heart, but that if you find your joy in serving Him, He will see that your desires are for the right things.

Isaiah 30:21 "Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'" Philippians 2:12, 13 "Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." Psalm 25:4 "Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me." God wants you to study for yourself what His will is for your life and to listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit guiding you. If you ask, God will give you the desire to follow His plan for your life, whatever that may be.

From SDA Kinship webpage.

How do we understand biblical inspiration and interpretation?

I don't think very many Adventists believe that God dictated every word of the Bible. If we read the Bible with our eyes open and our minds engaged, we realize that, while it is written by many different people in various walks of life, who were inspired by God, it was also written from within the confines of their particular worldview, scientific understanding and cultural perceptions. Moses was raised among the Egyptian elite and given a royal education; Solomon also grew up in a palace. Samuel, Ezra and Jeremiah wrote as members of the priesthood. David was a shepherd and a man of war before becoming king. Amos was an uneducated herdsman. The Gospels were written by a despised tax collector invited to join Jesus' band of disciples, an insignificant young man who recorded what he had heard from Peter, a gentile physician, and a former fisherman who became Jesus' closest disciple. Paul, the author of many letters preserved in the Christian Testament, was raised in the extreme legalism of the Pharisees. We can find a number of minor discrepancies between different authors.

Realizing this does not detract from the inspiration and authority of the Bible. I believe God expects us to employ the reasoning powers He gave us in searching what was written by and for people living in a very different time, in order to find principles which can guide us in our lives today. The Bible's great power comes from the way God can speak to us today from an ancient text.

"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." Isaiah 55:10-11

"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Hebrews 4:12

"I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth." John 16 12, 13

We also need to remember that words and ideas are not simple, concrete and unchangeable. Two people can read the same passage and understand it differently. Words have different nuances of meaning, both to the one who writes and the one who reads, and their meanings can change over time. We tend to think that our own understanding is the only correct one, but our particular upbringing and experiences give shades of meaning to biblical stories and passages that may never have occurred to the author. Everyone "interprets" what they read.

It would be difficult, if not impossible, to find two people whose beliefs and understandings agree on every single point. Absolute conformity should not be our goal; rather, we should find delight in the enrichment brought by others' viewpoints. God glories in diversity. No two snowflakes or flowers are exactly alike, and neither are any two persons God created.

Can we read the Bible in a way that justifies our own prejudices?

Many people do not want to recognize the parallel between the way we read Scripture relating to homosexuality today and the way Scripture used to be read regarding slavery and racial segregation. In the case of slavery Christians slowly came to recognize a different aspect of biblical teaching. Let's take a look at how the Bible was once used to justify slavery:

“Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father's nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, he said, ‘Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers.’” Genesis 9:20-25

Although the Bible never says that Ham was the progenitor of the black race, our western theological tradition has so designated him and used this curse as justification for slavery of Africans.

Jack Rogers, Professor of Theology Emeritus at San Francisco Theological Seminary, and Moderator of the 213th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), mentions several prominent leaders of his church who, prior to the Civil War, were “absolutely confident that Africans were cursed and deserved slavery both for their nature and their willful sin.” These men “were not evil people per se. They were among the best thinkers and church leaders of their day.”¹

Until the time of the Civil War, Presbyterian church leaders believed that, from its beginning, the Bible asserts God's judgment against Ham and Canaan, implies the black races are morally inferior to white Christians, and judges black people to be willfully sinful, often sexually promiscuous, and thus deserving of punishment for their sins. Similar charges are brought against homosexuals today.²

These same views were typical of most Christian denominations. Although I can't pinpoint just where I heard it, I was aware of the view about the “curse of Ham” and it must have come from my Adventist environment, since I grew up near church headquarters in Takoma Park, Maryland, and went to Adventist schools all my life.

Southern slaveholders' appeal to the Bible for their right to own slaves could not be denied.

“Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.” Colossians 3:22

“Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.” Titus 2:9-10

However, the Holy Spirit led thoughtful Christians to understand that it was not in God’s will for one person to own another.

Although Mrs. White spoke against slavery and encouraged work among former black slaves in the South, the Adventist Church has a less than perfect history in race relations. When my parents were workers at Washington Sanitarium (now Washington Adventist Hospital) back in the 1940s, a Black woman was brought to the emergency room, but they sent her to another hospital that accepted Black patients, and she died on the way there. In the 1950s, when the Seminary requested Washington Missionary College to allow pastors from the Caribbean islands to stay in their dormitories during the summer, college officials refused because their white students would be unwilling to live in rooms that had been occupied by blacks.

Although Christians today look back at these positions with abhorrence, they reflected the general opinions of the culture at the time. We are now seeing a change in how the Bible is read regarding the place and role of women, as cultural values in our society change. The Bible was written in a cultural and historical context that regarded women as inferior and treated them as property to be owned by men. This gave men a sense of superiority and power that was not easily relinquished.

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not cover your neighbor’s wife.” Exodus 20:17

“Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them.” Genesis 19:8

“I’ll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel.” Genesis 29:18

Paul had the first glimmer of understanding that Jesus’ followers were to regard women as having the same value as men. But it was not easy for him to accept this new paradigm and, even today, many still struggle with it.

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:28

“As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says.” 1 Corinthians 14:33-34

Today some Christians are beginning to see that there is a different way to understand the Bible’s principles as they relate to homosexuals. How can we discern what the Bible says that applies to people living today with a homosexual orientation? James B. Nelson, Professor of Christian Ethics at United Theological Seminary, Minneapolis, suggests that, first of all, we need to determine what

the biblical author was trying to say – what questions he was addressing and what the cultural and historical context was – and then we should consider what the text means for us today.³

He says, “We receive no guidance whatsoever about the issue of sexual orientation. The issue of “homosexuality” – a psychosexual orientation – simply was not a biblical issue. Indeed, the concept of sexual orientation did not arise until the mid-nineteenth century. Certainly, biblical writers knew of homosexual acts, but they apparently understood those acts as being done by heterosexual people (they assumed everyone was heterosexual. . .it is clear that our understanding of sexual orientation is vastly different from that of the biblical writers.⁴

There is difficulty in looking to the Bible for definitive sexual counsel. The Hebrew Scriptures accept polygamy as normative. Not only are there are no prohibitions against it; Moses gave laws for multiple wives (Exodus 21:10; Deuteronomy 21:15-17). Levirate marriage, concubinage and prostitution were other practices taking place among the Israelites that we would not condone today. On the other hand, remarriage to the same partner and intercourse during menstruation, which were specifically forbidden in the Old Testament, are not considered sinful today. Hebrew sexual ethics were framed in terms of purity and property systems that no longer prevail among us. Even “on such a major issue as sexual intercourse between unmarried consenting adults there is no explicit prohibition in either Hebrew Scripture or the New Testament (which John Calvin discovered to his consternation). Indeed the Song of Solomon celebrates one such relationship.”⁵

1Jack Rogers , *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality* (Louisville : Westminster John Knox Press) 2006, 19.

2Ibid., 33-34.

3James B. Nelson, “Sources for Body Theology: Homosexuality as a Test Case” in *Homosexuality in the Church: both sides of the debate*, Jeffrey S. Siker, ed. (Louisville : Westminster John Knox Press), 1994. 79.

4Ibid., 79-80.

5Ibid., 81.

Although the majority of us are over fifty, my Sabbath School class studies from the Collegiate Quarterly. As I paged through the latest edition I noticed this question, Is your church listening to you? It was part of an advertisement for www.letstalk.adventist.org, “a web site dedicated to promoting communication between church leaders and Adventist young people up to 25 years of age.”

I don't exactly qualify, age-wise, but I decided to take a look anyway. The web site offers four interactive departments: **Express Yourself**, where young people can post their picture and tell a little about themselves; **Have Your Say**, where they can post their opinion on the current topic of discussion; **Q&A**, where they can ask a question, which will be answered by church leaders and Direct Line, where they can send a question or comment to a team located in the office of the General Conference President.

One of the topics discussed on Have Your Say was “Is war ever justified? Should Adventists go to war? Use weapons?” I was happy to note that the majority of responses indicated a greater commitment to pacifism than I think would have prevailed when I was a teenager.

Questions on 25 topics are answered on Q&A, but this is a format where the church seems to be talking, rather than listening. Interestingly, **one of these topics is homosexuality.** As I read through the questions and answers, it seemed clear to me that this is an area where the church has not listened carefully enough. It was the well-known **German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer who said, “Listening is the very first thing we owe the oppressed.”**

What is the church doing to minister to homosexuals?

This is the first question raised, and I appreciate the attempt, implicit in the following statement, to understand their plight: “It can be heartbreaking for an individual who longs for a partner to contemplate a lifetime without such a relationship--whether because of a disability, or because they are a Christian single who has simply not found a marriage partner, or because Scripture allows no place for sexual intimacy with a same-sex partner.”

But a lack of understanding is evident, simply from equating three situations that are not similar. A person with a disability may not be able to have a normal sexual relationship, but can still enjoy the many other blessings and intimacies of marriage. **A Christian single – usually female –** who has never found a marriage partner still has the hope of finding one someday. From time to time I hear of a friend or acquaintance marrying for the first time late in life. And singles have the option of living with a friend of the same sex and enjoying some of the feelings of “family.” **But with the current church position's requirement of lifetime celibacy from the earliest recognition of one's orientation, homosexuals are deprived of all hope.** And the church finds no place for same-sex partners to live together celibately,

The answer further states: “There are many areas in which people struggle where the church cannot have a specialized ministry.” Of course, Andrews University, a General Conference entity, hosts the Institute for the Prevention of Addictions. And in another controversial area dozens of

papers have been written and a book produced on the ordination of women, involving a lot of time and money. Yet, even if only 2-3% of the population is homosexual (some do not accept the figure of 10%), when parents and families are included this is a significant minority which the church has so far made no effort to help.

The answer continues: “However individuals facing the challenge of homosexual desire, and the deep sense of loss that often accompanies their commitment to live celibately, need to feel the care and support of the church as they struggle to live their lives in keeping with Scriptural principles regarding sexuality.”

Indeed the need of support from church family is great! Yet **how can it be realized when the Church, while speaking words of compassion, signals its lack of interest in the issue?** When church leaders have no desire to be educated, when pastors receive no training in how to handle situations in a redemptive way, is it any wonder that thousands are driven from the church by unkind, tactless, hurtful and judgmental remarks and actions?

This section began by saying, “There are no simple answers for those who are dealing with questions about their sexuality.” But it concludes with this assurance: “The church also works to link individuals with available professional resources which can provide the level of expertise necessary to help. In many parts of the world there are professionals who can provide counseling and support and your pastor or local conference should be able to access referral information for those who want to seek assistance.”

Perhaps I am wrong, **but this appears to be a veiled reference to the belief that orientation change is possible.** If that is true, the church does indeed need to listen more carefully—first to its own history with Quest and Colin Cook, and second to the hundreds of gay and lesbian Adventists who have spent years of their lives and thousands of dollars seeking change through every means available.

I feel God wants me to become a pastor, but I am gay. What should I do?

The second question is answered thus: “You should follow God’s leading. Following His leading, though, not only refers to preparing for and entering His ministry, but adopting His personal plan for your life. The Bible in several places (Leviticus 20:7-21; Romans 1:26, 27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11) speaks strongly against gay or lesbian sexual relationships--living an active homosexual lifestyle. This means that the biblical expectation is for those who believe they have a homosexual orientation to live a celibate life or to limit sexual activity to within a husband-and-wife marriage situation. This is true whether the homosexual person is a pastor or not, but as a pastor and leader of God’s people, obedience to His will is paramount.”

Since very few single pastors find employment, this is basically counseling homosexuals who feel called to the ministry to marry a heterosexual spouse. The number of pastors who follow this counsel is not inconsequential, judging from all the gay former Adventist pastors I know. And in every case, the marriage eventually foundered, spouses became bitter, children were traumatized,

and churches were devastated. Church leaders need to listen to their stories, as well as those of 80,000 straight spouses at straghtspousenetwork.org

What should be the attitude of the church toward homosexuals and homosexuality?

Included in the answer to this question are the following statements: “The Bible does not permit homosexual activity or relationships” and “The Bible is strong in its condemnation of homosexuality.”

Since the church has not authorized or attempted a careful examination of theological claims to a different understanding of the biblical texts, it does not seem that it has done all it could do to show its gay and lesbian members that it really cares about their plight.

The Adventist Church came into being because our pioneers believed they had found new light—present truth, they called it. Nineteenth-century Christians defended slavery from the Bible, but other Christians were able to see beyond the Bible’s apparent condoning of slavery. Twentieth-century Christians, including Adventists, were slow to recognize the biblical principle of equality of race and sex. Should we not at least investigate the possibility that God’s Spirit has new understanding for us on this issue?

Although the majority of gay and lesbian people grew up in Christian homes, why is it that only two percent attend church? I think many of them must echo Job’s cry, “Oh, that I had someone to hear me!” (Job 31:35)

We’ve all seen that commercial for a popular cell phone company that goes to great lengths to make sure its customers get good service. Gay Adventists are asking their church today, “Can you hear me now?”

Paul told the Galatian Christians to “bear one another’s burdens.” (Galatians 6:2) What does this mean for our gay and lesbian sons and daughters? Does it not mean, at the very least, that the church will stop telling them what they should do long enough to listen to their stories? To hear their heartaches? To share their frustrations? In a different context, Jesus said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” (Matthew 11:15)

Isaiah described God’s servant, Jesus, this way: “A bruised reed he will not break and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice.” As we see our sons and daughters, bruised and broken, leaving the church they love, we long for our church leaders, our pastors, our fellow church members to do something more than mouth words of love and compassion at best, and at worst make demeaning and cruel remarks that wound and hurt.

God told the Children of Israel, “If you take your neighbor’s cloak as a pledge, return it to him by sunset, because his cloak is the only covering he has for his body. What else will he sleep in? When he cries out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.” (Exodus 22:26-27) If God hears the cry of a shivering poor man, I know he hears the cries of us and our children, too. In the Day of Judgment, He will say, “As you did unto the least of these, my brethren, so you did unto Me.”

Old testament “Clobber Texts”

There are six biblical passages Christians have traditionally used to condemn homosexuality. Gays and lesbians, who have been repeatedly bashed by them, have taken to calling them the “clobber texts.” In the light of today’s increasing knowledge, let’s take a closer look at these verses to see if they might be read differently than they have in the past.

The Story of Sodom

As far back as the 12th century, this story has been interpreted as evidence that God destroyed Sodom because of homosexuality.¹ Is this view warranted?

When did God decide to destroy Sodom ?

“Then the Lord said, ‘The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.’” Genesis 18:20-21

God was already planning to destroy Sodom before the incident with the angels, but in response to Abraham’s pleading He agreed not to destroy it if ten righteous people could be found in Sodom .

What was Lot’s response to the two strangers (angels) who came to Sodom?

“The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground.

“‘My Lords,’ he said, ‘please turn aside to your servant’s house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning.’

“‘No,’ they answered, ‘we will spend the night in the square.’

“But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate.” Genesis 19:1-3

Who then surrounded Lot ’s house?

“Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom – both young and old – surrounded the house. Genesis 19:4

This mob included every man in Sodom. It is unlikely that most of these men were homosexual in orientation. For there to have been a continuing population in the city, most of them must have been heterosexual men – husband and fathers.²

What was the mob's intention?

"And they called to Lot and said to him, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them carnally.'"

"So Lot went out to them through the doorway, shut the door behind him, and said, 'Please, my brethren, do not do so wickedly! See now, I have two daughters who have not known a man; please let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you wish; only do nothing to these men, since this is the reason they have come under the shadow of my roof.'"

"'Get out of our way,' they replied. And they said, 'This fellow came here as an alien, and now he wants to play the judge. We'll treat you worse than them.' They kept bringing pressure on Lot and moved forward to break down the door." Genesis 19:5-9

The Hebrew verb "to know" occurs 943 times in the Old Testament, but in only ten of those instances is it used in the sexual sense. This is one of them.³ By offering his daughters instead of his guests, Lot confirms that the mob's intention was sexual in nature.

However, the mood here seems to be one of violence rather than sexual desire. Lot seems to indicate that he had offered the strangers shelter in his house because he knew how the Sodomites might treat them. And it is likely that when Lot, himself an alien, brought the strangers to his home, the men of Sodom may have suspected them of being spies. Their threatening, "We'll treat you worse than them" also indicates violent intent. Their intention seems to have been homosexual gang rape.

There is a similar story in Judges 19, where a traveling Levite and his concubine are offered shelter in Gibeah and wicked men of the city demand that the host turn the Levite over to them. Instead the man's concubine is pushed out the door, and the evil men rape her all night long until she is dead.

What is the meaning of homosexual rape?

Rape is not motivated by sexual desire, but by a need to show power over someone disdained as weak and vulnerable. In ancient times women were looked down on and were considered as property owned by men. To rape a man was to humiliate him by treating him as a woman. Captives of a conquering army were often subjected to this act of contempt. This helps to explain Lot's act of trying to save his male guests, whom he saw as more important than his daughters, and it also explains why the men of Sodom wanted to show their power over the men, rather than Lot's daughters. We can understand this by looking at what takes place in prisons today, where the most powerful inmates sexually assault those who are weaker, asserting their dominance by subjugating others.³

How do other biblical passages describe the sin for which Sodom was destroyed?

“In the first chapter of Isaiah, the nation of Judah is rebuked through a comparison with Sodom and Gomorrah. The specific sins mentioned are greed, rebellion against God, empty religious ritual without true devotion to God, failure to plead the cause of orphans and widows, failure to pursue justice, and failure to champion the oppressed. There is no mention of homosexuality.”⁵

“In Jeremiah 23:9-15, Jeremiah expresses dismay over the behavior of the prophets of Jerusalem and says that God considers these leaders to have ‘become like Sodom’ and the inhabitants of Jerusalem ‘like Gomorrah’ (verse 14). Again, nothing is mentioned about homosexuality. Instead, the focus is on adultery, lying, and cooperating with evildoers rather than urging people to turn away from wickedness.”⁶

“Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty and committed abomination before me. Therefore I took them away as I saw fit.” Ezekiel 16:49, 50.

Some have speculated that abomination refers to homosexual acts, but the word for abomination has also been applied to many other actions, such as “haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that hurry to run to evil, a lying witness who testifies falsely, and one who sows discord in a family.” Proverbs 6:16-19

“But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near.’ I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.” Luke 10:10-12

Jesus referred to Sodom in the context of inhospitality. Ironically, Christians use this story that condemns uncharitable attitudes toward strangers to justify their inhospitable treatment of gays and lesbians.

“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.” Jude 7

In this reference, sexual immorality and perversion is mentioned, but not specified. Some have translated this as “fornication,” (heterosexual relations outside of marriage). Jeremiah mentions adultery as one of Sodom’s sins. There is no reason to assume that it refers to homosexuality.⁷

The Holiness Code

Leviticus contains a set of laws that has been called the Holiness Code, because they define how the Israelites were to keep themselves pure or holy before their holy God. Two verses, a law and its penalty, are of interest in our study of what the Bible says about homosexuality.

“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; It is an abomination.” Leviticus 18:22

“If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Leviticus 20:13

At first glance, these texts seem quite clear and straightforward. But let’s try to understand the context and the cultural norms of that day and see if they shed any light on the reason for this command. There are several possible explanations for why this particular type of male-male intercourse was condemned.

Chapter 18 begins with these words: “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Speak to the Israelites, and say to them: I am the Lord your God. You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices.’” (verses 1-3) There follows a long list of practices, mostly sexual in nature, which they are to avoid. They are commanded to keep themselves distinct and separate from the idolatrous nations around them.

It may have been considered part of the fertility rites of idolatrous nations.

The command directly preceding the one we are considering forbids sacrificing one’s children to Molech, which may indicate that both behaviors prohibited are idolatrous practices.

Although we have little evidence that same-sex behavior was part of pagan worship, “biblical scholar George Edwards provides a number of reasons for not ruling out entirely the possibility that homosexual acts may have been included among the functions performed by male cult prostitutes. He bases his arguments on the male-centered nature of worship under patriarchy and the fact that in the fertility religions ‘intercourse with the deity was supposed to effect, in a magical way, the divine cosmic mystery of fructification, even among crops and animals.’ It was the symbolic union with a deity that mattered, not the fact that actual reproductive capabilities were lacking in the physical act (which some have argued would make sexual contact between two males seem strangely out of place in fertility rites). ‘The cultic act transcended the biological union of the parties engaged in the ritual event,’ writes Edwards.”⁸ It has been suggested that in ancient fertility religions which understood that creation came out of chaos, sexual orgies without traditional boundaries were seen as a reenactment of the creation process and would result in fertility of land, livestock and people.

So we see that this prohibition against male-male sexual acts may have centered on its being part of idolatrous rites. God's people were strictly warned not to have anything to do with idolatry and commanded never to serve, nor to let their children serve, as temple prostitutes. (Deuteronomy 23:17, 18)

It may have been considered a mixing of gender roles that resulted in impurity or uncleanness.

"The "underlying theme [of the Holiness Code] was that they [Israelites] must be separate, different from the Egyptians from whom they had escaped and unmixed with the Canaanites into whose land they had now come.

"[T]hey could not mix with any other kind of people or adopt alien customs if they were to remain pure. Practically, this meant no intermarriage with non-Israelites. However the[y] generalized this aspect of the code to mean no mixing of any kind. Thus the Holiness Code forbids such things as sowing a field 'with two kinds of seed' and wearing a garment 'made of two different kinds of materials.' ...When a man took the passive role of a woman he was, in effect, mixing genders."9

In that patriarchal society where male superiority and authority was supreme, a man who played the role of a woman by being penetrated by another man, was demeaning the male role. This law is particularly concerned with sexual penetration. "The very Hebrew word for woman, naqeba, means "orifice bearer" – as if there were no orifices in the male body. The fundamental image of a woman was someone who was there to serve the man in sexual intercourse. So for a man to sexually penetrate another man in anal intercourse was to mix and confuse the standards of maleness and femaleness. It was to use a male in the function of a female. It was precisely this mixing of kinds, this confusion of accepted gender roles, that Leviticus 18:22 forbade – but not other kinds of male-male sex."10

Ancient understanding of reproduction.

The ancients believed the "seed" that produced life was contained in male semen, and females provided the "nest" where life was incubated. Therefore, "wasting" semen in male-male intercourse was seen as destroying the seed of life.

What is the meaning of abomination?

The Hebrew word *toevah*, translated as "abomination," can also be translated 'uncleanness' or 'impurity' or dirtiness.' 'Taboo,' what is culturally or ritually forbidden, would be another accurate translation. The significance of the term *toevah* becomes clear when you realize that another Hebrew term *zimah* could have been used – if that was what the authors intended. *Zimah* means not what is objectionable for religious or cultural reasons, but what is wrong in itself. It means an injustice, a sin."10 In the Greek Septuagint *toevah* in Leviticus 18:22 is translated as *bdelygma*, meaning a ritual offense, rather than other Greek words such as *anomia* (violation of law, a wrong or a sin), *poneria* (evil practice), and *asebia* (ungodliness), indicating that the command was against a purity violation, not a clear ethical or moral violation.11

In summary:

Anal penetration of a male may have been forbidden because it was part of idolatrous fertility rites, because it symbolized impurity through a mixing of genders, because it was thought of as destroying life, or because it violated the patriarchal notion of male superiority.

But whatever the reason, we have not been given the authority to choose some of the laws in the Holiness Code as binding today, while ignoring others, such as eating meat that still has blood in it (Lev. 17:13), having sexual relations during a woman's period (Lev. 18:19), mating different kinds of animals, planting a field with two kinds of seed, wearing clothes woven from two kinds of material (Lev. 19:19), cutting the hair at the side of your head or clipping off the edges of your beard (Lev. 19:27) or not rising in the presence of the aged (Lev. 19:32). The sexual ethic articulated in the first five books of the Bible relates to a purity system and property laws that do not apply to our society today.

1Daniel A Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality* (New Mexico: Alamo Square Press), 2000, 44.

2Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?* (San Francisco : Harper-Collins), 1994, 58.

3Helminiak, 45.

4Scanzoni and Mollenkott, 58, 59.

5Ibid., 61

6Ibid.

7Ibid., 61-62.

8Ibid., 63.

9Jack Rogers . *Jesus, the Bible and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church* (Louisville : Westminster John Knox Press) 2006, 72.

10Helminiak, 64. 11Ibid., 65.

New Testament “Clobber Texts”

There are three New Testament passages that specifically mention same-sex behavior.

Romans 1-3

“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 also 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.” Romans 1:26-27 (NIV)

“For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.” Romans 1:26-27 (RKJV)

What is the context of these two verses?

The point Paul is making in these first chapters of Romans is that everyone, whether pagan or Jew, is a sinner and in need of God’s grace. In chapter 1 Paul describes the pagan world, which knew of God through His creation but refused to show Him honor and thankfulness, making images of created things and worshiping them instead. In their self-sufficiency they turned from the truth to a lie, so God left them to the results of their darkened minds.

It is generally accepted that Paul wrote this letter while in Corinth,¹ where sexual orgies were a well-known part of the worship of Aphrodite, and he uses this as an example of where idolatry can lead. In Greek mythology, Aphrodite and Hermes were the parents of Hermaphrodites, a god/goddess that was both male and female; confusion of sexual roles was also part of these sexual orgies.² Paul goes on to list other forms of unrighteousness that those who trust in their own professed wisdom, but whose minds were debased, were filled with: sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, envy, murder, strife, deceit, disobedience to parents, gossip, slander, insolence, arrogance, boastfulness, faithlessness, heartlessness, and ruthlessness. Then, just as his Jewish readers are nodding their heads in agreement, Paul says, “You Jews, to whom God has given His law – when you condemn others, you are guilty of the same things!”

Paul’s reference to idolatrous sexual orgies, which include the “unnatural” mixing of gender roles, is not a condemnation of homosexuality, per se, but simply a well-known example of the behavior of pagans, who refused to recognize God as Creator.

What is the implication of “natural” and “nature” in this passage?

There are some who argue that because Paul mentions men and women who turn from what is natural to what is unnatural sexually, he is referring to heterosexual people engaging in homosexual behavior. However, there was no concept of sexual orientation until the mid-19th century, so people in Paul’s day assumed that all people were naturally attracted to the opposite

sex. This was considered the natural order of Creation and behavior that departed from that order was considered unnatural. There was also no awareness at that time that homosexual behavior occurs many times in the natural world among birds, animals, fish and insects.³

How do these verses apply to Christian homosexuals today?

This reference is to same-sex behavior in its relationship to idolatrous worship. It is about sexual acts in which lust is the defining characteristic, not about loving relationships. The people involved do not worship God, and they exhibit all sorts of evil behavior. There is no recognition that some people are born with a homosexual orientation. Paul's condemnation of immoral sexual behavior should not be applied "to faithful gay and lesbian Christians, who are not idolaters, who love God, and who seek to live in thankful obedience to God."⁴

Paul's "Vice Lists"

"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 (homosexuals – NKJV; effeminate – KJV) nor homosexual offenders (abusers of themselves with mankind – KJV) nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 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 our God." 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 (NIV)

"We also know that 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 adulterers and perverts (them that defile themselves with mankind – KJV; sodomites – NKJV), for slave traders and liars and perjurers – and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me." 1 Timothy 1:9-10 (NIV)

What is behind the different way these words have been translated?

The Greek word which has been translated variously as "male prostitutes," "homosexuals," or "effeminate" is *malakos*. Its basic meaning is "soft ones" and it has also been translated to mean "lazy," "wanton," or "undisciplined," so its meaning is not specifically linked with sexual matters. However, many biblical scholars suggest that in this instance it probably refers to young men who were prostitutes, wore soft, silken clothing, painted their faces and perfumed their bodies in order to solicit sex with both male and female clients.⁵

Another Greek word used in these two verses, *arsenokoites*, is a combination of the words for male and bed. This is the first known time it has appeared in literature. It may be that Paul invented the word. The second part of the word is commonly used for "lying with" and refers to the "active" or penetrating partner. It is not clear whether "male" is meant to indicate "a man who is the active partner in intercourse with anyone, male or female,"⁶ or whether it means a passive male who is penetrated by another male. Helminiak says "Language is not always logical," and

gives the illustration of the expression lady killer, which “means neither a lady who kills nor a person who kills ladies but a man who knows how to charm women.”⁷

In subsequent literature, this word almost always appears in vice lists similar to Paul’s, and is found adjacent to words having to do with economic exploitation, (for example, “thieves” in 1 Cor. and “slave traders” in 1 Tim.). Many biblical scholars believe that it likely refers to some form of prostitution. Malakos and arsenokoites are thought to be pair words, so arsenokoites probably means the man who makes use of the prostitute’s services.

Does Paul indicate that homosexuals can change their orientation?

Some have concluded that because Paul says, “And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified...,” this means that they had been homosexuals, but had become heterosexual, proving that orientation can be changed. But of course, Paul had no knowledge of orientation. Obviously, people who had been involved in prostitution, could change their behavior. But they may not even have been homosexual in orientation. In Paul’s world, a free, male Roman citizen had the privilege of finding sexual gratification with anyone, male or female, who was considered his inferior – women, and male or female slaves.

These few passages indicate that New Testament condemnation of homosexual behavior was made in a specific context, either idolatrous worship or exploitative sex.

1SDA Bible Commentary, Vol. 6, 407.

2This worship [of Aphrodite] was degraded by repulsive practices (e.g. religious prostitution, self-mutilation), which subsequently made their way to centres of Phoenician influence, such as Corinth and Mount Eryx in Sicily. In this connexion may be mentioned the idea of a divinity, half male, half female, uniting in itself the active and passive functions of creation, a symbol of luxuriant growth and productivity. Such was the bearded Aphrodite of Cyprus, called Aphroditos by Aristophanes according to Macrobius, who mentions a statue of the androgynous divinity in his Saturnalia. The moon, by its connexion with menstruation, and as the cause of the fertilizing dew, was regarded as exercising an influence over the entire animal and vegetable creation.

<http://www.1911encyclopedia.org/Aphrodite> (Classic Encyclopedia based on 1911 edition of Encyclopaedia Britannica).

3Bruce Bagemihl, *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity* (New York: St. Martins Press) 1999.

4Jack Rogers, *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press) 2006, 79.

5Daniel Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality* (New Mexico : Alamo Square Press) 2000, 108. 6*ibid.*, 109-110. 7*ibid.*, 109.

