



Homosexuality: A compassionate yet firm response

The issue of homosexuality has been with the human family from its earliest days. At certain points in history same-sex relationships have been carried on very openly, but mostly they have been practiced behind closed doors and away from public scrutiny. Our North American culture has, largely, been prepared to allow homosexual relationships to exist as long as they are out of sight and out of the public arena.

In recent years, however, the issue of homosexuality has arrived on the front pages of Canadian and U.S. national life. In Canada, national, provincial and civic governments have enshrined “gay rights” in legislation and promote special sexual orientation days to increase awareness and to break down barriers concerning same-sex relationships. In some public schools, sex education classes include homosexuality as a viable alternative to heterosexual relationships.

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The issue of homosexuality has always been a source of contention. Its volatility has grown in direct proportion to the growing strength of the homosexual movement and lobby. The church, historically, has condemned homosexuality as sinful, deviant sexual behaviour and has argued strongly that only heterosexual relationships are legitimate.

The homosexual community has countered with two arguments. First, they argue that sexual orientation is genetically derived and is, therefore, legitimate. And secondly, if same-sex relationships are loving and monogamous, they should be accepted by the church as readily as heterosexual relationships.

These conflicting views are creating indecision in the church. Adding to the indecision is the strong societal emphasis on tolerance. We live in a society where any discrimination is thought to be wrong. For homosexuals, therefore, the issue is not only one of sexual orientation, but also of human rights.

Where does the church stand on the issue of homosexuality? Historically, it has proclaimed that the only legitimate intimate relationships are heterosexual, and these only within the bounds

of marriage. This is also the position of the Mennonite Brethren Church. In reviewing the subject material, the following five points are important.

1. **First, man and woman together are made in the image of God.** Genesis teaches clearly that it is man and woman together who carry the image of God. Something of the image of God is expressed in the maleness of man and the femaleness of woman (**Genesis 1:27–28; 5:2**). Though the image of God is carried equally in the femaleness of woman and maleness of man, it is the covenant relationship of marriage, which includes the sexual union of woman and man, that the richness and the complementary nature of the image of God is expressed most fully.

The biblical argument against same-sex relationships and sexual intercourse is that it is un-natural (**Romans 1:21–32**) and violates the complementary image of God as expressed in the maleness of man and the femaleness of woman. It is for this reason that it is expressly forbidden in the Old Testament Scriptures.

2. **Second, human sexuality is a gift from God.** Though it is natural that our sexuality should be expressed, it is clear that it should be expressed only within the covenant relationship of marriage. Sexual intercourse is a profound expression of love and commitment. All humans have a strong need for intimacy. But though sexual intercourse expresses a part of that need, it is not necessary for intimacy.

Therefore, sexual intercourse is not open to all – it is reserved for marriage. Because we are made in the image of God, it is possible to live full, rich lives without expressing our need for intimacy through sexual intercourse.

3. **Third, what about sexual orientation?** The question of whether the orientation towards homosexuality is

genetically derived or is a learned/conditioned response is the object of considerable scientific research. Although strong assertions have been made by proponents on both sides of the issue, presently no conclusive scientific evidence exists to support the argument for a genetically derived orientation towards homosexuality.

Obviously, the biblical material is not concerned with this matter and doesn't address it. It is, however, very concerned about lifestyle matters. The Scriptures forbid adultery, sexual relations outside of marriage; fornication, sexual relations as unmarried persons; bestiality, sexual relations with animals; and homosexuality, sexual relations with partners of the same sex.

Positively stated, the Scriptures affirm heterosexual intercourse within marriage and counsel marriage partners not to deny each other what is both natural and God's design for marriage (**1 Corinthians 7**). Negatively stated, the Scriptures deny persons the right to be sexually active outside of marriage, whether that be with members of the opposite sex, the same sex, or animals.

4. **Fourth, the homosexual lifestyle.** While it can be argued that some homosexuals maintain one intimate relationship with a person of the same sex, homosexuality has been largely very permissive and characterized by overt promiscuity. A study done by researchers Bell and Weinberg reported that only 9% of homosexual males had fewer than 25 sexual partners in their lifetime. Their studies concluded that only 1% of male homosexuals had had a monogamous relationship.

The question of whether the homosexual orientation can be changed to a heterosexual one is very difficult to answer. That homosexuals can change – both in orientation and lifestyle – is attested to by those who have successfully made the transition. But for most, it is very difficult.

Some research seems to indicate that there is a larger success rate with those who have developed their homosexual tastes through living in the “fast lane” as opposed to those who have struggled with the orientation question from childhood. In other words, the persons most likely to move back into the heterosexual community are the ones who are bisexual – that is, persons who once were heterosexuals and have, for whatever reasons, become homosexual.

We ought not, however, sell short the grace of God. God can free persons from oppressive addictions, and history is full of examples of such acts of liberation. However, for those who cannot overcome their orientation, the answer to their homosexuality is abstinence.

5. **Fifth, the church and declared homosexuals.** There are significant numbers of persons (perhaps between 1 and 10 percent, statistics vary greatly) who consider themselves to be homosexuals. Many of these are not only convinced of their orientation but also struggle, as many heterosexuals do, with temptation to illicit sexual activity. While it is not clear whether sexual orientation is only a learned response, or whether it also includes heredity, or is genetically determined, the church's response to declared homosexuals must be very clear.

It is this: it may be possible to have a homosexual orientation, but it is also possible to live a chaste and celibate life. To argue that a disposition towards homosexuality gives a person the right to homosexual practice and intercourse is as wrong as to argue that the heterosexual person has the right to be sexually active heterosexually outside of marriage.

The church must find a place for persons who lean towards homosexuality. But the church must love the person without condoning the practice. The church should not be silenced on its stance on homosexuality just because promiscuity in the heterosexuality community has increased dramatically in recent decades.

The church must remind itself that it is hypocritical when it tacitly accepts, approves, or turns a “blind eye” to sexual intercourse between heterosexuals outside of marriage, but condemns loudly and angrily same-sex intercourse or promiscuity.

Homosexuality has been with the human family throughout its history. For centuries it has hidden its face in the darkness of closed rooms and closed lives. Today it is very much with us, and may well gain momentum in numbers. While the Scriptures declare same-sex relationships to be deviant sexual behaviour, the church must enter the lives of these people with compassion. To speak with conviction against homosexuality is only one-half of the equation; the other half is to offer the redeeming grace of Christ and our care to them.

We encourage all homosexuals to give up their lifestyle and find healing in Christ. We call on all persons who struggle with questions of sexual impropriety to find release through forgiveness and transformed living.

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