

# Relating Well

Same-Sex Attraction, Practice and Foster Tukwila Presbyterian Church

Foster Tukwila Presbyterian

ELDERS AND DEACONS

## What is this Document?

This is not a church policy paper on those who are LGBTQ. You can't enact a policy on people. Rather, hopefully, this is an invitation.

This is an invitation for those who are LGBTQ+ and not part of FTPC to hear where the church is coming from as we think through Same-Sex Attraction. This is not the end of the conversation, but rather the beginning, as we welcome the opportunity to hear from you.

This is also an invitation for those who are LGBTQ+ and part of FTPC to have some of our discussions put into greater context. We know that there have been times when we reference Same-Sex Attraction in passing, and in doing so, we have not always explained or explored why we believe what we believe. And this lack of extended attention does not serve the church well as we make statements about the lives of people, it is important that our attention is focused and considered.

In addition, this is an invitation for those who are Straight and part of FTPC to consider deeply where we are as a church, and where we are intended to be. In countless stories, the American church building is experienced as a place of deep hostility to those who identify as LGBTQ+, which is a tragic distortion of who God intends us to be.

So, we invite you to read along with us. To think deeply, about what the Bible says, about what God wants for us, and where his Word leads us.

Bless you,

Foster Tukwila Presbyterian Church

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## Where Does FTPC Stand On Matters concerning those who are LGBTQ?

“I was ashamed that I was such an abomination to the God that I adored.”<sup>1</sup>

That is the response of one trans person after hearing their church teach on being LGBTQ+ without grace, love, or concern for those sitting in the pews. And our hearts break to hear Jesus represented in a way that would lead anyone to think that they are an abomination, or especially hated by God. We vigorously oppose that characterization. You are not an abomination, but rather a precious, amazing, and beautiful work of art. And no matter how much you love God, God loves you infinitely more.

A primary consideration of what it means to be a Christian is confessing Jesus as Lord of your life and believing that God raised him from the dead (Romans 10:9). In belief, we acknowledge that Jesus of Nazareth was a real person, who lived, died, and was raised (1 Corinthians 15:3-14). A central tenet of Christianity is that it is not merely a matter of opinion, or hedging our bets, but that the story told in the Gospels actually happened, and in so doing, the world has been forever changed. We do not stop at mere intellectual assent to a list of doctrines, instead we speak the truth that Jesus is Lord of us. We accept and acknowledge Jesus as our Lord, Master, Boss, Chief, King and Emperor. What does it mean for us to have a Lord? It means that there is someone whom we must listen to, whose orders hold such weight that we do what they have ordered even when we would rather do something else. And this is part of our relationship with Jesus, that we do what he says (Luke 6:46-47). In order to do what Jesus says, we clearly must know what he has said. The way that we are instructed as to what God asks of us is through Scripture (2 Timothy 3:14-16).

At FTPC our doors are open to any and all who would like to learn more about Christ Jesus and what it means to be a Christian. Those in the LGBTQ+ community are encouraged to come and discover the true results of a relationship with Christ: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-Control (Galatians 5:22-23). If this has not been your Christian experience, then we, as part of the larger church, have not succeeded.

## Does FTPC Believe Lesbian, Gay and Bi People Are Sinners?

One way that churches often fail in loving the LGBTQ+ community well is by characterizing those who are LGBTQ+ as *them*, as a community separate and distinct from the church. We recognize that the church that is Christ's bride spans the spectrum of humanity. In God's kingdom, everyone is invited, without regard to who they are attracted to.

Every human being was made in the image of God, according to God's own likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). We are inherently creatures capable of extraordinary feats of creativity, love, and goodness that are intended to point to the glory of God.

Likewise, every human is an imperfect image of God, meaning our ability to represent God well is distorted by the effect of sin in our lives. We believe that all people have sinned other than Jesus Christ (Romans 3:23). In that respect, everyone can rightly be described as a sinner.

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<sup>1</sup> Sprinkle, Preston M.. People to Be Loved (p. 83). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

In Jeremiah 17:9-10 we read that the heart is deceitful above all things. As flawed beings we are often slaves to our own inclinations and desires, and we can be fooled into thinking “it’s just a little white lie” or “greed is good” or any number of rationalizations we use to justify behaviors that God asks us to put aside. But God’s message doesn’t stop at a call to do better. Rather, we are invited to die to ourselves and die to sin and be raised in Jesus (Romans 6:1-12). This means laying down our own desires, our own wants, and even who we think we are, and instead increasingly allowing Jesus to shape our desires, dreams, and identity.

## Is an Orientation Sinful?

However, if we reframe the question and ask “Is an orientation other than a heterosexual orientation inherently sinful?” we come closer to the heart of the question.

Justin Lee, the founder of the Gay Christian Network, talks about the need to be specific in the designation of sin<sup>2</sup>. If heterosexual couples were told that being married in all forms was sinful, we would want clarification on exactly what that means. Does it mean that a couple can’t live together, can’t share joint accounts, can’t see each other on particular circumstances, can’t have sex, or can’t have candlelit dinners? Are all of those covered, or some of those? And those same questions hold forth for those who are attracted to the same sex.

In order to do this work properly, we need to develop a more thorough understanding of Sexual Orientation and consider how that interacts with the Biblical Witness. The American Psychological Association holds that “Sexual orientation refers to an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic and/or sexual attractions to men, women or both sexes. Sexual orientation also refers to a person’s sense of identity based on those attractions, related behaviors and membership in a community of others who share those attractions.”<sup>3</sup> This pushes us to consider that orientation includes at least three attractions. Sexual Orientation may relate to:

1. Emotional Attraction
2. Romantic Attraction
3. Sexual Attraction

Our desire is to faithfully hold what God has established as true in His Word, but also to discard anything that God has not established. And so, it makes sense to consider what the Bible actually has to say about each of these.

Emotional Attraction refers to a rapport built or existing between two people through emotional connection. This is tied to deep desires for intimacy, companionship, and validation. In the Greek Four Loves, we would designate emotional attraction primarily as philos, or friendship love. This is not to say that every, or even most, instances of friendship are truly rooted in sexuality, but rather to say that friendship should properly accompany Sexual and Romantic Attraction. In a functional marriage, emotional attraction and attachment are how the couple feels about one another as friends. Do they like one another? Do they get along? In the Bible, we do see individuals who are emotionally attracted to their spouses, Elkanah and Hannah are good examples of a couple in which there is emotional attraction. Meaning, that in their relationship, Elkanah worked to care for his wife Hannah in

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<sup>2</sup> [\(6\) Homosexuality "debate": Justin Lee & Preston Sprinkle dialogue - YouTube](#) Minute 38-42

<sup>3</sup> [Answers to your questions for a better understanding of sexual orientation and homosexuality \(apa.org\)](#)

the midst of her distress (1 Samuel 1:1-8). However, among the most profound descriptions of emotional attraction, or friendship love, to be found in the Bible is the description of David and Jonathan.<sup>4</sup> When David hears of Jonathan's death, he cries out "I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women". The love that David is speaking of is friendship.

In considering how emotional attraction applies or is connected to sexual orientation, we clearly see no form of prohibition against emotional attraction towards the same sex. In fact, there is nearly an expectation that we will see people of the same sex develop friendship love for one another as they are living in close proximity, as David loved Jonathan or as Simon Peter loved Jesus (John 21:15-16).

Romantic Attraction is speaking of the desire to be engaged romantically. This might include things like a candlelit dinner, or holding hands as you walk along a moonlit beach, or watching Netflix together late into the night. Each of these activities might be non-sexual in nature, but acting on romantic attraction is not platonic in the same way that emotional attraction may be. Put simply, emotional attraction could be ascribed to a number of people with limited cause for concern. An individual may be emotionally connected, or hold friendship love, for their best friend, their wife, and their childhood playmate. And each of those relationships can be nurtured without an expectation of complete exclusivity (meaning that it is possible to foster friendship love with a friend and with a spouse, or with two friends, without necessarily compromising the other). Romantic attraction, on the other hand, carries a strong implication of being exclusive (One does not, or is not expected to, go to candlelit dinners with multiple people in the context of a relationship).

In looking at what God has to say about exclusively romantic attraction, we find a limited discussion. While we might see the Love Poems in Song of Solomon as romantic, they had a clear end point. While the lover seeks after her loved one, it is not merely to behold him in his finery, but rather "I held him, and would not let him go until I brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me." (Song of Solomon 3:4) The natural end goal of the candlelit dinners, or the poems written to one another, is the consummation of the relationship, a sexual encounter.

In thinking through homoromanticism, or same-sex romantic relationships (particularly when both partners are celibate), there are questions that must be processed by the individual. If the consummation of the romantic relationship is intended to be a sexual encounter, then determining if something is sinful is dependent on if that sexual encounter is sinful. However, if there is no possibility of a sexual encounter, then the intimacy generated from romantic attraction is not substantially different from the intimacy generated from friendship love.

When we come to sexual attraction, we see that the People of God are called to a high standard of sexual purity. We are not only to abstain from sex outside of marriage between a man and woman, but also abstain from lustful thoughts (Gal 5:19-21, Matthew 5:28). We echo the call from Christopher Yuan "The truth is that God's standard for everyone is holy sexuality: chastity in singleness and faithfulness in marriage."<sup>5</sup> This means that pornography is sinful, pimping and prostitution is sinful, pre-marital sex is sinful, fantasizing about having a sexual encounter with someone who is not your spouse is sinful, and sleeping with someone who is the same sex as you is sinful(Matthew 5:28-30,

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<sup>4</sup> Lewis, C. S.. The Four Loves (p. 73). HarperOne. Kindle Edition.

<sup>5</sup> Yuan, Christopher. Holy Sexuality and the Gospel (p. 48). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition."

Galatians 5:19-21, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11)<sup>6</sup>. In the Christian tradition, all of these acts would be categorized as Sexual Immorality. Some might seem more difficult to avoid than others, some might seem more costly to give up than others, but holiness in God encourages us to put aside any hint of immorality (Ephesians 5:3).

Ultimately, our ability to not sin is heavily dependent on the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. We, when outside of God's saving grace, are slaves to sin and ruled by it (Romans 6:12-18). And in that state, the tragic expectation is that we are prone to be violent, dishonest, unkind, and proud (Romans 3:10-18). As Christians we are not called to judge those outside the church (1 Corinthians 7:12-13). Instead, we are invited to call those within the church to holiness. Even as fellow believers are called into holiness, it is possible for us to have cause to repent for when we fail to follow the will of God (Galatians 2:11-13). We might not know where God is convicting an individual, we might not be able to see where or how God is conforming an individual to become more like Christ. What we do know for sure is that those of us residing in the Holy Spirit can encourage one another to grow in Christ through love, understanding and support, and as a church, we seek to do that well.

We, as a church, actively reject a framework that establishes those who are same-sex attracted as a special category of sin that God did not die for. Our fundamental belief as Christians is that even when we were dead because of our sin, we were made alive together in Christ (Ephesians 2:5-6). Sexual immorality, in any form, is not an unforgivable sin. Christ's redeeming grace and forgiveness is offered to all who sin, if they confess their sin and believe in the Good News of Jesus Christ (Mark 1:15). God is willing and eager to forgive us of our wrath, our pride, our greed, and our sexual immorality.

### What is FTPC's Policy on Homophobia?

"Homophobia refers to the dislike of or prejudice against LGBTQ people"<sup>7</sup>. Many people who are LGBTQ experience hatred when people know their orientation, and that is wrong. When being LGBTQ is the punchline of a joke, which is homophobia in action. When LGBTQ people are physically or verbally attacked due to their orientation that is homophobia in action.

Homophobia has no place among the people of God. Hatred of others is considered equivalent with witchcraft and orgies (Galatians 5:19-21). Homophobia, idolatry, and sexual immorality are all indicators of sin at work in our lives and should be strenuously opposed.

Jesus was able to spend time with and love tax collectors, adulterers, and Roman centurions. As he was being put to death, he cried out "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34). This is what the love of Christ looks like. The harshest words that Jesus spoke was not towards those whose sins were societally unapproved, but rather towards those who believed they were righteous in the midst of their sin (Matthew 23:27-28).

Specifically as we consider our language, followers of Jesus have a particular obligation to take care with their words, to tame their tongue as the Apostle James says. And as a body of believers, we are

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<sup>6</sup> For a substantially more in-depth treatment on the Biblical texts that identifies same-sex sex as sinful, please read "People to Be Loved" by Preston Sprinkle and "Holy Sexuality" by Christopher Yuan.

<sup>7</sup> Sprinkle, Preston M.. People to Be Loved (p. 181). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

committed to that. We are committed to the truth that slurs, insults, and jokes at the expense of those who are LGBTQ are sinful in the eyes of God and not accepted in our midst.

## Questions We Take Seriously<sup>8</sup>

Sexual Attraction is Not a Choice: We take seriously the truth that most, though not all, stories from Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, or Transgender people identify their sexual orientation and/or gender expression as something unchosen and unsought<sup>9 10</sup>. In this space, we are considering orientation as an aspect primarily related to attraction. When Person A looks at Person B, Person B's attractiveness to Person A is not a function of a conscious and specific decision that Person A made<sup>11</sup>. This is an immediate recognition that occurs. That being said, clearly, people absolutely are able to choose if they have sex with any individual. Just as clearly, people do not choose if they are initially tempted with a temptation. An individual might be sexually attracted to their coworker and the initial temptation there is unchosen.

That being said, sexual attraction being an unchosen desire does not always make it a good desire. The things that bring us, as people to sin, is not merely outside actions, but the consequences of our own heart. In Mark 7:20-23, we read Jesus say ““It is what comes out of a person that defiles. <sup>21</sup> For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, <sup>22</sup> adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. <sup>23</sup> All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” It is not a surprise for us to find a desire for illegitimately puffing ourselves up (pride), trusting in material goods for security (greed), or an improperly directed sexual desire (fornication and adultery) in our own hearts. For someone to say that they engage in any sin struggle from a very young age, when they didn't choose to struggle in that way, isn't a theological surprise. For someone to say that they are gay but didn't choose it, also isn't a theological surprise.

Likelihood of Change: While there are absolutely believers who have turned away from a gay identity, many of those same believers still struggle with same sex attraction<sup>1213</sup>. God is able to change sexual orientation, but God often chooses not to. God has not made a promise that those who are gay will be made straight as they are converted. Continuing to struggle with attraction to one's same sex does not act as proof that one's conversion wasn't real, any more than continuing to struggle with attraction to a coworker doesn't make a married person's conversion not real. Absolutely, there are expectations that one does not act on these wrong desires, there are even expectations that one does not fantasize about having sex with that person, but the temptation itself does not negate the work of God in their life.

As we come to Jesus, we come to the one who is able to empathize with our weakness. He is able to feel compassion and love even as we share our desires that are not of him, both those that we view

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<sup>8</sup> [\(8\) Your Bible arguments won't change minds UNLESS... - YouTube](#)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2017/06/16/born-way-many-lgbt-community-its-way-more-complex/395035001/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/dawnstaceyennis/2019/08/30/the-gay-gene-is-a-myth-but-being-gay-is-natural-say-scientists/?sh=3789cb197fa7>

<sup>11</sup> Lee, Justin. Torn (p. 53). FaithWords. Kindle Edition.

<sup>12</sup> [\(8\) Jackie Hill Perry Admits That She Still Struggles With Same Sex Attraction! - YouTube](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Becket Cook Doesn't Miss Being Gay - Boundless](#)



with horror and the desires that we view with longing. And we are able to come to Jesus in his love because he has been “tempted in every way, just as we are”. This means that Jesus experienced sexual temptation. In the life of Jesus, he experienced a temptation to lust after a person and chose not to. Jesus, the Son of God almighty, who was there at the beginning of the world, was tempted to gain sexual gratification from someone he wasn’t married to. And he chose not to do so, for although he was tempted “yet he did not sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

Primarily Sexual Temptation: Almost certainly, there is someone reading this thinking that we have tragically made being Lesbian, Gay or Bi all about sex, and in so doing, we have completely missed the point. Justin Lee says “Being Gay isn’t about sex. Yeah, sex is a factor just like it is for straight people, but ultimately most gay people want the same thing most straight people want: human connection. Relationship. Intimacy, family, romance, not to be alone.”<sup>14</sup>

We affirm the need for all people, whether straight or not, to have relationship, intimacy, family and human connection. In fact, if Foster Tukwila Presbyterian is properly being the church, you should find those things here. You should find invitations to sit and talk, to become enmeshed in the lives of other believers. You should find intimacy as you are deeply known by the people that you walk alongside. We are called to be the family of one another, when looking around at the church, you should see your mother and your brothers (Matthew 12:46-50).

In fact, the Bible categorically resists the idea that human connection is found primarily in a romantic or sexual relationship. Notably, the Christian tradition was unusual not because it made much of straight married people, but rather because it made much of single celibate people who dedicated their lives to the Lord. When writing to the church in Corinth, Paul wrote “To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am.” (1 Corinthians 7:8) In order for Christ’s sacrifice to have any meaning, Christ must have been fully human (Hebrews 5:1-10)<sup>15</sup>. And Jesus was unmarried, meaning that the Christian perspective vigorously opposes any real or implied statement that to be fully human or live a full life, one must be married.

The primary reason we focus so heavily on sex, is because sex outside of the marriage covenant between a man and a woman is the thing on which we can most clearly point to God’s Word (Romans 1:26-27).

## What Does the Bible Say?

The discussion of the Biblical argument as related to homosexuality deserves sustained study. The best practice is certainly to sit with the Biblical Text and a number of resources and study deeply so that one is able to speak from a place of knowledge.<sup>16</sup> However, this article is specifically a time in which our church is making a statement about what the Bible says, as nearly as we can understand it. In this space, we present the following:

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<sup>14</sup> [\(8\) Your Bible arguments won't change minds UNLESS... - YouTube](#)

<sup>15</sup> In Hebrews 5:1, it speaks of how a High Priest must be selected from among the people in order to represent the people to God. In this way, Jesus, as humanity’s high priest must be selected from within humanity. Embedded here is an understanding that it is an essential Christian doctrine that Jesus was both fully human and fully God.

<sup>16</sup> There are a number of helpful authors in thinking this through well, both authors who are affirming and non-affirming. Authors who wrote on a popular level include Preston Sprinkle (NA), Greg Coles (NA), Wesley Hill (NA), and Justin Lee (A). Authors on an academic level include Karen Keen (A), Robert Gagnon (NA) and Christopher Yuan (NA).

In handling the Biblical arguments related to homosexuality, it is important to us not to argue against a position that no one holds. Furthermore, it is important to address concerns held by people who really are seeking to know what the Bible says to the best of their ability. For most of Christian history, there has been little dispute that the Bible does not affirm Same-Sex sexual behavior<sup>17</sup>. That being said, today there is disagreement among Biblical Scholars and commentators about this very topic. In order to not construct a straw man and disagree with that, this is written in dialogue with Q-Christian's section on "What Does the Bible Say About LGBTQ+ People?"<sup>18</sup>

In reading the Biblical argument related to a Same-Sex sexual relationship, some of it is very straightforward. However, much of the discussion is also complex, asking the reader to engage with questions of the meaning and intention of marriage, the purpose of the law in the Old Testament, and translation concerns.

For many years, the discussion of the Bible's stance on Same-Sex Sexual Behavior was considered to be an easy thing to determine. There are a number of verses that depict Same-Sex Sexual Behavior as impermissible. In the Biblical canon, there is no mention of a same-sex sexual relationship in which the author or text depicts the sexual act as positive or even morally neutral<sup>19</sup>. This is significant. However, some theologians have, both rightly and wrongly, insisted that those verses, and the whole of Scripture, deserve closer scrutiny. Quite frankly the model of "The Bible says It, I believe it, that settles it" may speak of maintaining sexual purity in the way that the church has long interpreted it, but it also allowed slave owners to tell their slaves "Obey your earthly masters with respect and fear" (Ephesians 6:5 (NIV)) as they beat them. There is always a need to be careful with our reading of Scripture, and seek to discern rightly if our way of interpreting Scripture is in line with God's whole revealed will in the Biblical canon. In this upcoming section, we seek to do that well, albeit briefly. One unfortunate consequence of that, is the upcoming section is dense. There is no way to exegete the passages related to Same-Sex Sexual behavior well without considering the ontology of marriage, purpose of the law, telos of dating, and doing word studies in Greek and Hebrew. This is necessarily complex and the section below reflects this truth. If this section is helpful for you, that is wonderful and that was the point of writing this down! However, if this is not useful, if it clouds more than it clears, and you need to skip through this section, do so. As C.S. Lewis says: "It is a very silly idea that in reading a book you must never 'skip'. All sensible people skip freely when they come to a chapter which they find is going to be no use to them. In this chapter I am going to talk about something which may be helpful to some readers, but which may seem to others merely an unnecessary complication. If you are one of the second sort of readers, then I advise you not to bother about this chapter at all but to turn on to the next."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Keen, Karen R.. Scripture, Ethics, and the Possibility of Same-Sex Relationships (p. 8). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.. Kindle Edition.

<sup>18</sup> [LGBTQ+ Theology 101 — Q Christian Fellowship](#)

<sup>19</sup> Karen Keen, an affirming Biblical scholar notes this repeatedly in her book, Scripture, Ethics, & the Possibility of Same-Sex Relationships, most particularly stating: "traditionalists and progressives largely agree on why the biblical authors condemned same-sex intercourse (at least for men)."

Keen, Karen R.. Scripture, Ethics, and the Possibility of Same-Sex Relationships (p. 31). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.. Kindle Edition.

<sup>20</sup> Lewis, C. S.. Mere Christianity (C.S. Lewis Signature Classics) (p. 166). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

**Genesis 1:27** - *“So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”*

The primary, overarching statement as related to this verse is the absolute assurance that every single individual is made in the image of God. This emphatically means that you, dear reader, are made in the image of the Holy One who put the stars in place. Every individual whose life is touched or affected by this paper reflects the Risen Lord and we take that seriously.

We also do see the statement made that God created humanity as male and female. A third gendered path is not discussed in this passage. The position that some Queer theologians hold is that Genesis 1:27 does not provide space for intersex conditions. Essentially, when we say that God created humanity as male and female, some argue that the Bible is engaging in intersex erasure. The core problem with this argument is that the argument being made posits a 3+ Sex system, where people are of the male sex, female sex, or intersex (and intersex can be broken down into a host of different conditions). One of several issues with that conception is that people who have intersex conditions have generally rejected it. Instead, prominent organizations hold that intersex, in and of itself, is not a third sex or gender.<sup>21 22</sup> It is also important in this discussion to recognize that Intersex, in and of itself, is not a singular condition or space, but rather is an “umbrella term for differences in sex traits or reproductive anatomy”.<sup>23</sup> Neither sexual orientation nor gender expression changes the fact that each person is physically male or female

Genesis 1 is replete with two conditions that are not strictly binary. It begins with the heaven and the Earth, light and darkness, day and night. Each of these factors, it is true, has a time in which one might be waxing and the other waning. Is the horizon part of the sky or the Earth? Is a dimly lit room part of light or darkness? Is Sunset part of the day or night? However, in each of those spaces, the binary is not disrupted by the awareness that there is a point of transition between the two. The existence of humanity as male sexed or female sexed also is not disrupted in persons who experience greater sexual variation in their reproductive development.

**Genesis 2:24** - *Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.*

And

**Ephesians 5:31-32** - *“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”*<sup>32</sup> *This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church.*

It is absolutely correct that initially, in Genesis 2, as the order of marriage is established, the author of Genesis does not choose to use that word. Instead, we see a one-flesh covenantal relationship established that is anticipating the Lord’s own relationship with his people (which is explicitly discussed in Ephesians 5:31-32).

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<sup>21</sup> [Does ISNA think children with intersex should be raised without a gender, or in a third gender? | Intersex Society of North America](#)

<sup>22</sup> [What is the I in LGBTQIA? Intersex, Gender, and LGBTQIA \(interactadvocates.org\)](#)

<sup>23</sup> [What is intersex? Frequently Asked Questions and Intersex Definitions \(interactadvocates.org\)](#)

The principle concern of much of this discussion is if sexual difference is important or significant in the ordinance of marriage. Or, said differently, is a covenant relationship between two people of the same sex to become one flesh with one another, a marriage?

And what we find is that in every circumstance, the establishment of marriage anticipates two distinct and separate entities who are in some profound way different from one another coming together to form one body in covenant relationship.<sup>24</sup>

In male and female, we see two sexual categories established that are intended to relate to one another. And the point of difference between the two categories is both relatively clear where defined according to reproductive organs, structures, or the presence of particular active genes and relatively hard to distinguish when defined according to other differences. It is outside the scope of this paper to expound on the variation in expressing the SRY Gene, Y Chromosome, or other factors that lead to sexual differentiation.

And what we find is that in every circumstance, the establishment of marriage anticipates two distinct and separate entities who are in some profound way different from one another coming together to form one body in covenant relationship. When we look at women in the Bible, we see the Lord say ““It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an ‘ezer as his partner.” (Genesis 2:18) This position or relation, ‘ezer, is a word most typically associated with God, or with a nation that one’s hopes are pinned on. For example, when Moses names his second son, he names him Eliezer (El referring to God, ezer referring to help) because Moses said “The God of my father was my help” (Exodus 18:4). When the Psalmist is distressed, he recognizes “But I am poor and needy; hasten to me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay!” God, in his relationship with Israel, takes on the role of an ‘ezer, which is a word introduced as the Lord considered how woman was to relate to man.

This has meaning for the marriage between God and Israel. As we turn to Exodus 19, we see the establishment of the Mosaic Covenant, which is “the actual marriage ceremony where the relationship will be consummated”<sup>25</sup>. Surrounding the establishment of a covenant is the Lord’s reminder that he has been the help of Israel. Indeed, he is the “the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt” (Exodus 19:2). In this space, Israel is reminded of how the Lord saved his people, acting as Moses said, as the “help” of the people in saving them from Pharaoh.

Furthermore, God himself sees his relationship with Israel playing out as a marriage. God, taking the role of the husband, says “You grew up and became tall and arrived at full womanhood; your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown; yet you were naked and bare. I passed by you again and looked on you; you were at the age for love. I spread the edge of my cloak over you, and covered your nakedness: I pledged myself to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord GOD, and you became mine.” (Ezekiel 16:7b-8) In this we see the role of a husband to care for, cover, and protect his wife from shame.

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<sup>24</sup> Not to cloud the issue, but in the marriage between God and the People of Israel, Christ and his church, and Woman and Man, we see the establishment of one figure as the ‘ezer, or savior of the other who enters into a marriage covenant with them.

<sup>25</sup> James K. Hoffmeier, “[Exodus](#),” in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, vol. 3, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 53.

The Bible establishes that part of the point of God identifying with the husband and wife in different situations is actually because they mean something different in the marriage itself. And the breadth of the Lord's relationship with his people is actually seen in the totality of a husband and a wife working together for the good of the family unit.

Later, in the New Testament, we see a recapitulation of the covenantal relationship between God and Israel in the form of an impending wedding between Christ and his bride, the church. In this situation, Christ is envisaged as one who loved his bride to such a great degree that he was willing to give up his own life for her (Ephesians 5:2, 25). Out of reverence for that gift, the wife is expected to respect her husband (Ephesians 5:32-33).

"In the New Testament we learn that in a mysterious way the loving union of a man and a woman in marriage can reflect something of our union with Christ. In both instances, the union is between two who are simultaneously the same and different, who are made to fit each other. This is reinforced in the second creation account, where the man and the woman are made separately and their relationship to each other is considered from a different vantage point."<sup>26</sup>

In answering the original question posed at the beginning of this section we find that marriage is particularly a union of two that is intended to point towards the relationship between God and his people. "To be clear, Christ's relationship with the church is not like human marriage; rather, human marriage foreshadows the ultimate reality that is Christ and the church. The first marriage between Adam and Eve in Genesis 2:24 typologically corresponds to Christ and the church in the consummation."<sup>27</sup> As defined in the biblical context, marriage is between a man and a woman; to describe a covenant relationship of two people without depicting a difference in sex is describing a relationship distinct from marriage. This speaks to more than just the physical aspect of sexual differences, which may be more or less prominent in a particular couple, but instead points toward the underlying reality of difference between men and women. Sex difference is an important part of the underlying meaning of marriage.

*Genesis 19:4-6: But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; <sup>5</sup> and they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them." <sup>6</sup> Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, <sup>7</sup> and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly.*

As we work through passages related to same-sex attraction and same-sex sex, it is clear that some verses have been pressed into service where they were not intended to do work. Quite frankly, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah's primary, or even secondary purpose is not to detail that same-sex sexual behavior is sinful. It is true that one aspect of the wickedness of Sodom is an attempted gang-rape of visitors. This is a horrific account of evil in a city, and one that violates all moral standards. That being said, the fact that rape is denounced does not necessarily mean that sexual behavior is denounced.

Leviticus 18:22 (20:13) & Deuteronomy 23:17-18

In reading these passages, the way in which we read the Law is called into question. Some people who are faithfully seeking to follow the Lord well, see the law as a system that does not represent

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<sup>26</sup> [Gender+in+Christ+Compiled+online.pdf \(squarespace.com\)](#) page 20

<sup>27</sup> Yuan, Christopher. Holy Sexuality and the Gospel (p. 93). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.



God's best will for his people. In this vein, the reasoning why Christians see no problem eating pork, for example, is because the law is illegitimate and Jesus has redeemed us from the law.

Others see the law as a temporary stop-gap made with illegitimate materials. If I have a leak in my roof, I need that fixed immediately. If I don't have the necessary tools on hand, it is possible that I put duct tape on my roof or ceiling, and plug the hole. I will certainly go get the proper materials to fix the hole from a hardware store, but duct tape will do for the moment. One conception of the law treats it like duct tape. The world was destructive, Israel was dying in her sin, and so the Lord gave them the law as a temporary stop-gap, waiting until Jesus would come to Earth with a more permanent solution.

But this is a very different conception of what the law is than what the Bible teaches. The virtues of the law are extolled in the Biblical record (Psalm 1:2, 19:8, 119). The law is good, something to be delighted in, something that Jesus thought was so important that fulfillment of the law was more certain than the continuance of heaven (Matthew 5:18). If this is true, it is certainly more than a temporary stopgap measure, but rather a pointer towards the character of God, an aspect of God's own self-revelation to his people. And we later see that the purposes of the law is not merely to be a stopgap, but actually to point towards God's own righteousness and our own sinfulness, which makes us aware of the need for a savior (Romans 3:19) <sup>28</sup>.

In reading Leviticus 18:22 through a Queer theological lens, many theologians work through the passage so that it does not categorically renounce male same-sex sexual relations. The primary means of doing this is to see the law in general as enforcing distinctions<sup>29</sup>. This method of reading Leviticus 18 uses the temporary stop-gap view of the law. This particular theological lens would consider that God established some things as pure and other things as impure not due to the holiness of the things themselves, but rather in order to enforce and designate separation. However, this fails to account for the fact that most readers would still read the rest of the content in Leviticus 18 as rules that God still expects his people to abide by. We still agree that you should not sleep with a close relative (Leviticus 18:6). This is true whether it is your mom, sister, step-sister, grand-daughter, daughter-in-law, aunt, brother's wife (Leviticus 18:7-16). We still agree that someone should not sleep with both a mother and her daughter, or with two sisters (Leviticus 18:17-18). We agree that adultery, child sacrifice, and bestiality are all wrong (Leviticus 18:20, 21, 23). Almost every prohibition in this passage is one that most people would affirm, whether they identify as Christian or not.

There are only two prohibitions that are somewhat disputed today. The prohibition against sex while menstruating and the prohibition against same-sex sexual behavior (or more exactly, lying with a male as one would lie with women). At this point, the careful reader would search the rest of the Biblical canon and see if those prohibitions are regarded as extending through the New Covenant in Christ, or if they are not. And what we find is that the New Testament takes the prohibition against sleeping with a man as one would a woman very seriously and assumes it applies to people under the New Covenant in Christ.

*Romans 1:26-27 For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; <sup>27</sup> and the men likewise gave up*

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<sup>28</sup> [The Threefold Use of the Law \(ligonier.org\)](http://ligonier.org)

<sup>29</sup> [LGBTQ+ Theology 101 — Q Christian Fellowship](#)

*natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.*

Romans 1 is an incredibly important text for understanding the treatment of homosexual acts in the Bible. Most particularly, as we reviewed the Old Testament, it seemingly exclusively addressed relations between men, with little attention paid to same-sex sexual behavior between women. This passage engages with this separation.

As Paul turns to his primary argument in Romans 1, he opens with a proclamation: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. <sup>17</sup> For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.” (Romans 1:16-17) Here we see Paul’s intention to work through the Gospel message, recognizing that in that message is the message of salvation for the whole world. As he turns in that direction, for Paul, he is working and interacting with the power of God which is revealed as we place faith in God. In this passage, Paul quotes the book of Habakkuk, which leads us as readers to consider that ancient prophet. Habakkuk was a prophet astonished and disturbed at the wickedness of his world (Habakkuk 1:2-4). He was distraught not just at the evil being perpetrated within Israel, but within the surrounding nations (Habakkuk 1:12-16). And as the Lord responds to his cry, the Lord assures him that “the righteous live by their faith” (Habakkuk 2:4), which acts as a reminder that the Lord is present and interacting and will be victorious in the end, even if the world and society that one is watching seems to want nothing to do with the Lord.

From this point, Paul engages in a Habakkuk-like complaint about the state of the world, with an understanding of Christ coloring his cry. Paul makes an argument that humanity should, by rights, know the Lord and worship him. It is not that the Lord is especially hidden, but rather “what can be known about God is plain” to the wicked. God, in his power and divine nature, is able to be understood and seen, taking away any excuse humanity might have to not see God (Romans 1:18-21). Paul embeds the expectation that humanity would know the Lord in the Lord’s own creative work, we should have seen and understood God’s nature and power “through the things he has made”. As Paul invites the hearer to consider the Lord’s creative work, the natural connection point is when the Lord created humanity, male and female he created them. In this way, Paul primes his hearer to consider God’s created order for humanity, “male and female he created them”, as an outgrowth of God’s own expectation. Thus, when we see that humanity rebels against God, exchanging the glory of the Lord for idols, the natural and expected outgrowth of this is to expect rebellious humanity to rebel against the Lord’s created order. In this context, Richard Hays makes an observation that Paul treats same-sex sexual behavior as a “sacrament” (so to speak) of the anti-religion of human beings who refuse to honor God as creator: it is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual reality.”<sup>30</sup> It is within this framework that exchanging the natural for the unnatural is identified as sinful and representative of what all human beings do. All of humanity, in their core, knows what God wishes of them, and as a result of sin within themselves chooses to do something different. All of humanity fails to honor God as creator and the Holy Spirit guides Paul to use same-sex sexual behavior as an example of this tendency within humanity.

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<sup>30</sup> Hays, Richard B. 1986. “Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to J Boswell’s Exegesis of Rom 1.” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14 (1): 184–215. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a6h&AN=ATLA0000960731>.

Romans 1:26 is specifically intended to address female same-sex sexual relationships, which will be significant for later concerns. As Paul is describing the “degrading passions” that humanity engages in, he chooses to use same-sex sexual behavior as an example. He initially turns to the behavior as practiced between two women. As Paul writes “women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural”, which on the face of it might mean anything. As Q Christian argues, an ancient conception of sex would provide space for unnatural intercourse including actions like “any sexual acts that didn’t lead to procreation”<sup>31</sup>.

However, Paul is doing what he often does, which is pairs actions or states in order that one might see the different distinct states as related under God. This is what Paul does in Galatians 3:28, when he says “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” He takes six states, three binary pairs, and makes an argument that in Christ, they are all one before the cross. This is what Paul does in 1 Corinthians 7:4 “For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does”. He makes an argument that in Christ, the husband and wife’s bodies are under the authority of the other.

When Paul is writing in Romans 1:26 and 27, he pairs together two behaviors or relationships. Women who exchange natural intercourse for unnatural intercourse and men who give up natural intercourse with women, and instead are consumed with passion for other men. Paul is clearly pairing Women’s natural intercourse (which is implicitly understood to be with men) and men’s natural intercourse (which is explicitly mentioned to be with women). And Paul presents that intercourse (implicitly within the context of marriage), as the “natural” state of affairs. Once more, as Paul depicts the concept of a “natural” state of affairs, he is specifically speaking of a state of affairs in which humanity is following God’s good created order as evidenced in Genesis 1-2 and in Revelation 21-22. All of the created order suffers from the effects of humanity choosing to sin rather than follow God, and so there are absolutely spaces in which an in-built desire is felt as natural, but is not in alignment with God’s good created order as discussed in this Romans passage.

If the natural state of affairs is paired for men and women in Romans 1:26-27, it follows that the unnatural state of affairs is also paired in these same passages. So, in this space, when Paul is writing of Men committing “shameless acts with men” and being “consumed with passion for one another”, he is pairing that with the unnatural intercourse that women enter into. Paul makes that comparison by using the Greek word “ὁμοίως (*homoios*)”, meaning “similarly”, “likewise”, or “in the same way”. So, in the same way that Women enter into unnatural intercourse, they are doing what men who are consumed with passion for one another are doing.

This is extremely important in that most of the Biblical passages addressing same-sex sexual behavior explicitly refers to male same-sex sexual acts. And thus, one common discussion is that the primary concern of the Biblical authors is not the act itself, but instead is rooted in the power dynamics understood in a gay sexual relationship in the ancient world.<sup>32</sup> However, these same power

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<sup>31</sup> [LGBTQ+ Theology 101 — Q Christian Fellowship](#)

<sup>32</sup> “Consensual relationships between adult men were considered offensive because a grown man who took the passive role lost his masculinity in the eyes of Greco-Roman culture.”



dynamics were simply not understood to be present in the same way in a lesbian sexual relationship of the same period.<sup>33</sup>

Said perhaps a little more accurately, in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Roman Culture, the primary relationship that we would understand today as “Gay” that was practiced in Rome would have been pederasty. In pederasty, a boy who could not yet grow a beard entered into a sexual relationship with a fully grown man. In this relationship, the man received sexual gratification while the boy was to be taught and mentored by the man. While in 1st century Rome, this relationship might not be considered effeminate in the face of the gross power differential between the two partners, it was certainly exploitative. And given that contemporaneous references to pederasty may be as much as five times more likely to be employed as references to a committed monogamous relationship, it is highly unlikely that Paul was not thinking of Pederasty in some way when he mentions men engaging in shameless acts with other men. However, while the evidence is certainly there that in Paul’s description of unnatural intercourse he included pederasty, it also seems clear that it was not limited to pederasty. This is demonstrated, in part, by his beginning this discussion with women, for whom there was no equivalent to pederasty. Instead, there are numerous examples of same-sex, peer to peer, monogamous relationships between women in Rome around the time of Paul, and Paul recognizes those relationships as products of the fall in the same way that he recognizes same-sex relationships between men as products of the fall.<sup>34</sup>

*1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (AMP) Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit or have any share in the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate [by perversion], nor those who participate in homosexuality, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers [whose words are used as weapons to abuse, insult, humiliate, intimidate, or slander], nor swindlers will inherit or have any share in the kingdom of God.*

**1 Timothy 1:8-11** *Now we know [without any doubt] that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully and appropriately, <sup>9</sup> understanding the fact that law is not enacted for the righteous person [the one in right standing with God], but for lawless and rebellious people, for the ungodly and sinful, for the irreverent and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, <sup>10</sup> for sexually immoral persons, for homosexuals, for <sup>11</sup>kidnappers and slave traders, for liars, for perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, <sup>11</sup> according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted.*

A real objection to the translation of these passages that occur in most modern translations is that prior to 1946, this passage did not read homosexual. For example, in the American Standard Version, published in 1901, 1 Corinthians 6:9 read “Or 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 men,”. In this understanding, there is an accusation that to translate the text as speaking toward homosexuals is an overreach which has to be addressed by a careful reader of Scripture.

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<sup>33</sup> Sprinkle, Preston M.. People to Be Loved (p. 64). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

<sup>34</sup> Sprinkle, Preston M.. People to Be Loved (p. 63). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

In both the passage in 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1, Paul is doing a similar thing. In both passages, he works to spur the church away from sin, causing them to recognize that these actions are not reflective of the Gospel that the church professes to believe.

As we come to 1 Corinthians 6, we are able to faithfully read the text as saying “Do not be deceived; neither the sexually immoral... nor μαλακός (malakoi), nor ἀρσενικοίτης (arsenokoitai)... will inherit or have any share in the kingdom of God.” Now, it must be stated that the rest of that list is really important. Our theology of what it looks like for thieves to enter the kingdom of God is important, especially since a thief enters paradise with Jesus.<sup>35</sup> It is important that we understand that this same injunction that is upon the sexually immoral, malakoi, arsenokoitai, and thieves is also upon those who use words as weapons. But, it is also important to determine what to do with the words malakoi and arsenokoitai.<sup>36</sup> Most scholars argue that in order to understand these two words, the reader needs a more thorough understanding of Rome’s understanding related to orientation in the ancient world. This is necessarily at least somewhat graphic, but these terms only make sense within that context.

In the United States in 2021, the prevailing theory of Sexual attraction roots the sexual desire on the object that is desired, and we define terms according to that. So, when speaking of sexual attraction, we say someone is hetero-sexual when they are sexually attracted to someone of a different sex, homo-sexual when they are attracted to someone of the same sex, bi-sexual when they are sexually attracted to both sexes, and so on. So, orientation is based primarily on the person one is attracted to. In Rome however, one would have defined sexual desire primarily based on the role that someone would take during intercourse, or based on what you wanted to do with that person. “Both Greek and Roman male sexuality was constructed on the division between active and passive. The active one ... was “male,” and was acting the role of a free man, whether he used as object a woman, a boy, or a man. The passive one ... was “female,” and servile, whether woman, boy, or man.<sup>37</sup>” In this way, contemporary same-sex sexual behavior invariably resulted in one partner taking on a role separate from their sex.

Malakoi, means soft, which when applied to a person, particularly a man, it meant a soft, or effeminate man. This was often seen as a position in Roman culture, where a man would choose to take on the passive role in intercourse with other men. This word is held in contrast with arsenokoitai, which when taken literally, means a man who beds other men.<sup>38</sup> So, when taken together, Paul is addressing men who are bedded by men, and men who take other men to bed. In consideration of this, when David Garland (a respected commentator on 1 Corinthians) translates 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, he translates it as “<sup>9</sup>Or do you not know that the unjust will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor those males who are penetrated sexually by males, nor males who sexually penetrate males, <sup>10</sup>nor thieves, nor the

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<sup>35</sup> Luke 23:43

<sup>36</sup> Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, “[1 Corinthians](#),” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 713.

<sup>37</sup> David E. Garland, [1 Corinthians](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 214.

<sup>38</sup> This is a topic that is the subject of general agreement, but numerous linguistic studies. Many of the sources cited in this paper have specific sections on the word arsenokoitai, including David Garland’s commentary on 1 Corinthians and Preston Sprinkle’s *People to be Loved*.

greedy—no drunkards, no revilers, no swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”<sup>39</sup> While it is only male same-sex sexual intercourse that is addressed here, our reading of Romans 1 serves as a reminder that in the Bible, female same-sex sexual intercourse was equally problematic. Here, Paul is making a sweeping statement about sexuality, where everyone engaging in sexual immorality, whether it is speaking of those who have sex when they are not married (fornicators), sex with someone other than their spouse when they are married (adulterers), or whether they are the passive participant in same-sex sex (malakoi), or the active participant in same-sex sex (arsenokoitai), are all implored to no longer engage in their sin. As Paul goes on to say, the church may have engaged in those actions “But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” (1 Corinthians 6:11b)

All of this is to say, that 1 Corinthians 6, and by extension 1 Timothy 1, certainly depicts same-sex sexual behavior as a sin. However, it just as clearly does not depict an attraction as sin. If, in reading the Amplified Bible, or the New International Version, your reading leads you to the conclusion that Paul is primarily concerned with attraction, then that is a misreading of the text stemming from a loss of nuance in translation. When Paul writes that no malakoi or arsenokoitai will inherit the Kingdom of God, he emphatically is not speaking toward those who have made a covenant with Jesus Christ that they might be pure; he is not speaking of those who strive to be sexually pure and chaste outside of a Biblical marriage. Please, do not hear condemnation when none is intended.

Instead, Paul is speaking of those who are not trying to be pure, but instead are sexually immoral as defined in the Biblical Canon. And if that is your current situation, the Biblical witness is that there is freedom and redemption in Jesus Christ. The primary point of the passage is not who does not inherit the Kingdom according to their sin, but rather the realization that everyone in the church is able to inherit the Kingdom due to the washing, saving, sanctifying, justifying work of Jesus Christ. The point is actually never what you have or have not done, but rather in coming to recognize that “... in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” (2 Corinthians 5:19-20)

## What Is FTPC’s Policy On Gay Marriage?

One of the most difficult realities for the church is knowing where God ultimately wants us to be, and representing that to the world. God’s representation of marriage is between a man and a woman. Yet, even in those instances where that aspect of marriage is lived out, it is marred by sin. When nearly half of all marriages end in divorce, and a further percentage of marriages are characterized by abuse, we see that not all heterosexual marriages function as God ordained the institution. By and large it is the church’s responsibility to help the world understand what God’s goal is for us. When Jesus asked us to “love our enemies” he confounded the world’s understanding of what it meant to be a child of God (Matthew 5:44). When Paul tells us in Corinthians that we give all our money to the poor, but without love it is meaningless, the world once again struggled to understand (1 Corinthians 13:3).

It is not unusual for God to stretch us. To challenge us with aspects that are difficult to understand. Is a Lesbian or Gay sexual relationship marred and inhibited by sin, yes. Is a straight relationship built

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<sup>39</sup> David E. Garland, [1 Corinthians](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 194.

on manipulation marred and inhibited by sin, yes. Neither represents perfection well. Our struggle as a church is to faithfully reflect God's ultimate goal for us. Perfection. And, as a church and individuals, sometimes, we poorly reflect who God is, sometimes there are distortions in our witness, but we still strive to faithfully say and live out what God has for us. No marriage is perfect but the foundation that God has put before us would start with a man and a woman. If we were to say God's ultimate goal for marriage starts with a man and a man or a woman and a woman, we would be misrepresenting scripture. Being honest about scripture is a difficult task at times but even more difficult is contradicting scripture and trying to justify it with human understanding.

Some things we know for sure. One is that ultimately, judgement does not belong to society, or ourselves, but God is the true judge because he alone knows all the complexity of our experience. Our job is to love and introduce people to Christ so they can develop a relationship with our creator. A relationship with a loving God that gives us the will and strength to surpass all worldly brokenness. This is what it means to be human. To know that we are not the sum of our imperfections, but the evolving creation of a God who continually moves us toward a Christ-like existence, where love rules the day and division is laid to waste.

If you are single, married, dating, straight, gay, bi, cisgender or transgender, you're invited with open arms to join us. Our first and always response will be love. And please know that, what concerns FTPC the most is that you know who Christ really is. Not only as the ruler of all and judge of the world, but also as a compassionate savior who deeply desires to know you and to be known. To be in a relationship.

And please know that your sexual or gender identity does not define you. Your job, your talent, your appearance is not what defines you. Our first identification is Christian. Everything else follows that. The principles of Christianity are timeless and unchanging. Love, grace and forgiveness never go out style, never fade with time, and always serve ourselves and our communities well. The time for division is over. God is waiting for you.