

# Scriptural Perspectives on Homosexuality and Sexual Identity

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Scripture makes a distinction between intense biological "orientations" people experience and the identity that is available to them "in Christ." Indeed, Christians have in the cross the ultimate paradigm of self-denial. A person's experience of a "homosexual orientation" is no exception to the distinction made between biologically-based besetting conditions and self-identity revealed and constructed by God in Christ. Scripture affirms male and female as complementary sexual counterparts. Exclusive same-sex attractions cannot be given greater weight than the commands of God and should not be integrated into a homosexual identity. This article ends with three additional scriptural principles for clinical practice.

The purpose of this article is to address specific themes from Scripture and theology that might be helpful for Christian psychologists who work with men and woman who experience same-sex attractions. I shall begin by first discussing the relationship of Christian identity to biologically based orientations: does the latter necessarily determine the shape of the former? Then I shall look at the implications of this exploration for whether there is justification, or indeed necessity, for Christians who experience same-sex attractions to construct an identity distinct from such attractions. Finally, I shall suggest three additional scriptural principles for Christian psychologists.

## Christian Identity *versus* Biological Orientation

Can sexual identity be severed from sexual orientation? Most activists for homosexual causes argue that it cannot. They contend that for an individual with a homosexual orientation to refuse the label "gay" (or "lesbian") is to deny one's true self and to live a virtual schizophrenic existence (e.g., Via in Gagnon & Via, 2003). The problem with such a rationale, though, is that it begs the question of whether a homosexual orientation is a good thing. It does so by assuming that deeply ingrained, biologically related impulses are necessarily moral.

From a Christian perspective, to answer properly the question of whether sexual identity can or should be severed from sexual orientation one needs to expand the field of vision. In

short, one must ask whether there is scriptural justification for distinguishing between Christian identity and whatever impulses exert a significant pull on a person's life.

## *The Antinomy between God and the Biological Self*

Scripture never teaches that our God-ordained identity is the sum total of our biological impulses. On the contrary, it teaches us that our true identity, the destiny that God has given us, is often significantly at odds with our most intense, innate urges. The basic antinomy is between God-orientation and self-orientation, variously expressed as an antinomy between the call to do the will of God and the desire to do one's own, or between the confession of God and Christ as Lord and the daily setting up of oneself as lord.

This antinomy between God and self spans the breadth of Scripture. We hear it in the first two commandments of the Decalogue, which prohibit having any gods besides Yahweh and the making of idols (Exod 20:3-6). We hear it in the *Shema*, the early distillation of the essence of the law of Moses, that declares that Yahweh alone is Israel's God and that the people of Israel shall love Yahweh their God with all their heart, soul/life, and strength (Deut 6:4-5). We hear it in Yahweh's frequent assertion in (Second) Isaiah that there is no one or no god "besides me" (Isa 44:6, 8; 45:5-6, 21; 47:8, 10), the one to whom "every knee shall bow and every tongue shall swear" (45:23). We hear it again in Jesus' lifting up of the two greatest commandments from the law of Moses: wholehearted love of God (Deut 6:5, the *Shema*) and love of neighbor "as oneself" (Lev 19:18; Mark 12:28-31). We hear it again in the hymn to Christ in Philippians 2:6-11 where all history is said to be converging toward the

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time when every knee bows before Jesus and every tongue confesses "Jesus Christ is Lord" to the glory of God the Father (2:10-11; echoing Isa 45:23). We hear it in the declaration of the risen Christ in Revelation 22:13: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." And we hear it in dozens of other passages throughout the pages of Scripture.

Always there is the human proclivity to seek gratification, purpose, or self-definition in something other than knowing and glorifying God. That is why the apostle Paul saw as his primary responsibility "tearing down arguments and every exalted thing that rises against the knowledge of God, and taking captive every thought for the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor 10:4-5). There are no passes, no exemptions, certainly not for appeals to strong innate drives.

### ***Jesus and the Metaphor of Death to Self***

For this reason the metaphor of death is often chosen to illustrate the antinomy between God-ordained destiny and compulsive human drives. Particularly important here are the words of Jesus found in Mark 8:34-37 (par. Matt 16:24-26; Luke 9:23-25; parallels in Matt 10:38-39 par. Luke 14:27 and 17:33; *Gospel of Thomas* 55.2; John 12:25; for authenticity see Crossan, 1991, p. 353; Luz, 2002, pp. 417-18; Meier, 2001, pp. 56-67). Mark places these words in one of the most important points of the narrative; namely, when Jesus rebuts Peter's failure to grasp both Jesus' role as suffering Messiah and Peter's own role as disciple:

If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself and let him take up his cross and let him follow me. For whoever wants to save his life/soul will lose it; and whoever will lose his life for the sake of me and of the gospel will save it. For what does it profit (or: benefit) a person to gain the whole world and to forfeit his life? For what shall/can a person give as an exchange for his life?

Mark frames these words of Jesus in 8:34-37 as the essence of the call to discipleship, that is, the call to learn from Jesus (the Greek word for "disciple" is *mathētēs*, literally, "learner," from the verb *manthanō*, "I learn"). What is that essence? Discipleship is denying oneself, taking up one's cross (i.e., crucifying one's self-orientation), and losing one's life for Jesus' sake. This sounds like the antithesis of the notion that identity and

destiny are determined by a constellation of deeply ingrained desires. Christian discipleship means no longer doing what we want to do, when we want to do it, and with whom we want to do it. It means following the path that Jesus treads for us, with our whole being and irrespective of any counter-impulses we experience. Mild reform of one's life will not suffice; nothing less than death to self is required.

Only this death to self leads to kinship with Jesus: "Who are my mother and my brothers? ... Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Mark 3:33-34). Living a life organized around doing the will of God, rather than one's own, comes to expression in the opening petitions of the Lord's Prayer, where the speaker asks God to usher his kingdom on earth supernaturally, finally and fully, so that all will honor his name as sacred and do his will as it is already being done in heaven (Matt 6:9-10, par. Luke 11:2).

### ***St. Paul and the Metaphor of Death to Self***

St. Paul undoubtedly knew of sayings about denying oneself, taking up one's cross, and losing one's life, for so much of his own theology was built upon the notion of dying or being crucified with Christ. For example, in the midst of defending to the Galatian believers how a law-free gospel actually promotes righteous conduct, Paul stated:

I through the law died in relation to the law in order that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ. And I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. And what I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself over for me. (Gal 2:19-20)

For Paul, faith was not a mere intellectual assent to the truth. Rather, faith was a reorientation of one's whole life away from self to God, such that one can speak of living no longer and having Christ live through one instead. This faith is inspired and motivated by Christ's own self-giving for us. As we recognize the enormity of his love for us, as well as the import of God's not sparing his own Son for us (Rom 8:32), we are "controlled" or "constrained" by this love to a point where we "no longer live for [our]selves but for the one who died for [our] sake and was raised" (2 Cor 5:14-15). In so doing, we "become like him (Christ) in his death" (Phil 3:10). We who are "in Christ" are redefined as nothing less than a "new

	<u>Internal or External?</u>	<u>Good or Bad?</u>	<u>Strong or Weak?</u>
<u>The law of God</u> (i.e., the law of God given to Moses)	External	Good	Weak
<u>The "law" of one's mind,</u> the "inner person," the "I"	Internal	Good	Weak
<u>The "law" of sin</u> (and of death) operating in flesh	Internal	Bad	Strong
<u>The "law" of the Spirit</u> of life in Christ Jesus	Internal	Good	Stronger

**Figure 1.** The Psychology of the "Four Laws"

creation: old things have passed away; see, new things have come into being!" (2 Cor 5:17). Instead of being ruled and defined by our intense desires, we are ruled and defined by the Lord Jesus Christ and destined to be "conformed to the image of [God's] Son" (Rom 8:29). Thus, "those who are Christ Jesus' crucified the flesh with its (sinful) passions and desires" (Gal 5:24), even though "the desires of the flesh" remain to tempt them and an exhortation to "walk" or "line up" with the Spirit is needed (5:16-17, 25; for the theme of "cruciformity" in Paul's thought, see Gorman, 2001; Tannehill, 1967).

#### ***The Psychology of the Four "Laws."***

St. Paul's letter to the Romans, chs. 5-8, is perhaps the best single place in Scripture to go to for thinking theologically about the interrelationship of innate desire and identity. In Rom 7:7-25, the "I" (Greek *ego*) or "inner person" (*esō anthrōpos*) or rational "mind" (*nous*) is distinguished, even in pre-Christian existence, from "the flesh" or, more specifically, from sin or the sinful impulse operating in the members of the human body. With the mind, the "I" or "inner person" looks at the commands of God and recognizes their good. Yet, because these commands are external, they legislate without empowering the doing and so are weak. The human moral compass, though internal and often in agreement with God's commands, remains weaker than the internal, sinful drive for self-gratification and is thus thwarted. The only thing that can bring lasting liberation is the introduction of a third internal regulating force or "law," one that is both stronger than the "law" of indwelling sin because

it comes directly from God and is always in agreement with the essential "requirement" of the law of God: "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (8:2, 4). Like the references to the mind and the sinful impulse as "laws" (7:23, 25), the formulation here is *ad hoc*, compared and contrasted with the law of God given to Moses. Yet it is *ad hoc* with an intertextual echo, here to Jeremiah's prophecy of a new covenant when God "will put [his] law within them, and ... write it on their hearts" (31:33).

Where does the atoning death of Christ fit in? It is the cleansing, amends-making function of Jesus' death on the cross that continually renders the bodies of those who trust in Christ suitable temples or holy receptacles for the indwelling Spirit of Christ. The indwelling Spirit of Christ, in turn, makes possible a life lived in conformity to God's will, which has as its outcome eternal life. Without such a turn away from a life lived mainly in conformity to the sinful impulses of the flesh, the outcome would have been death, understood here as exclusion from eternal life (Rom 8:3-8; cf. 6:20-23).

The psychology of the "four laws" in Romans 7:22-8:2 is illustrated in Figure 1. As the chart indicates, the individual has more than one internal regulating power: two if unregenerate (the rational mind and the sinful impulse), three if regenerate (the addition of the Spirit of Christ). According to Paul, the mind of even the unregenerate individual in Rom 7:14-24, 25b can choose a self-identity congruent with the commands of God or with the sinful impulse that resists those commands. In terms of the doing of the good,

however, choice is hampered by the absence of direct divine intervention in the form and person of the Spirit. Individual behaviors may conform to God's will but in the main the person remains "in the flesh" (on Rom 7:7-25, see further Moo, 1996, pp. 423-67; Theissen, 1987, pp. 177-265).

For the believer the choice of an identity divorced from sinful impulses opens up more fully. For the promise of the Spirit's help enables not only sympathy with God's commands but a life actually lived out in a new identity: the identity of one who is "in Christ" (8:1-2) or "in the Spirit" (8:9), who has Christ in him (8:9-11). Already in 5:15-21, Paul had distinguished for his audience between the old 'Adamic' humanity and the new humanity that has come into being with Christ's resurrection.

### ***Why Not Continue in Sin?***

Having a new identity in Christ does not mean that sinful impulses no longer persist. In fact, Paul spends most of his energies in Romans 6:1-8:17 explaining why believers should not continue under sin's primary sway (for a discussion of Rom 6:1-7:6, see Gagnon, 1993). In 6:1-14, Paul deals with the question of whether believers should sin to do God a favor (6:1); that is, to cause God's grace to "super-abound" (5:20) and so to give God even more glory: "Should we continue in sin in order that grace might increase?" He emphatically rejects this reasoning ("May it not happen!") by demonstrating that continuance under sin's lordship (6:14) is inconsistent with a *past* event, a *present* reality, and a secure *future* hope—each stage linked to the believer's identity in Christ. The *past* event is having been "baptized into Christ," i.e., immersed or incorporated into Christ "through baptism" (6:3). Being joined to Christ's life (compare 1 Cor 6:15-17) implies an immersion "into his death," a death that Paul defines as a death "to (i.e., in relation to) sin" (Rom 6:4, 10; cf. 7:4-6 for death "to [i.e., in relation to] the law"). To have been joined to Christ's resurrection is to have a lifeline to the age above and to come, which is tantamount to an initial "crucifixion" of the "old humanity" (6:6; cf. 6:5a). The *present* reality is the ongoing attachment to Christ's resurrection life, that is, the power of the Spirit of Christ, that makes possible the comparable reality of walking "in newness of life" (6:4; cf. 7:6; 8:4-17). The *future* hope is the destiny of one day being raised from the dead with a body like

Christ's (6:5, 8), a body that is "once and for all" impervious to both sin and death (6:6-7, 9-10).

Accordingly, to continue to "let sin reign in [one's] mortal body" by "obeying its desires" (6:12-13) is incompatible with one's new identity in Christ. The idea that God could possibly benefit from the believer's continuance in sin becomes absurd in view of God's efforts to circumscribe the believer's life in the past, present, and future away from sin. Does God want the believer to distinguish his or her identity from deeply rooted biological urges for behaviors that God expressly forbids? God not only wants it but also insists on it.

Paul's discussion of the question "Why not sin?" shifts in 6:15 from sinning to do God a favor to sinning because there are, allegedly, no apocalyptic repercussions for doing so: "Should we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?" (6:15). Of the two questions in 6:1 and 6:15, the second is the more likely self-rationalization for engaging in unholy conduct. Not surprisingly, then, Paul devotes most of his attention to answering this latter question, treating it in 6:16-8:17 (with an excursus in 7:7-25 on why the law of God is not sin). Believers often engage in a pattern of sinful conduct because they think that they can get away with it as persons "under grace." God may not want them to sin but God at least will not pass sentence on them for leading a sinful life. Paul took pains to show that it is precisely because believers are no longer "under the law but under grace" that "sin shall not exercise lordship over" them (6:14). For grace entails God's freeing of believers from primary enslavement to sin operating in the flesh and God's "enslavement" of believers to a righteous, God-ward life. Those that confess Jesus as Lord but continue to live as if sin is lord shall be recompensed by sin with death, whereas those that both confess Jesus as Lord and bear the fruit of a sanctified/holy life will be given the gift of eternal life (6:16-23; 7:4). The life leading to death includes continuance in "sexual uncleanness/impurity" (*akatharsia*) (6:19), a rubric that Paul used earlier in the letter to refer to same-sex intercourse as a prime instance of sinful sexual practices (1:24, 26-27).

Those that locate their primary identity in sinful, biologically-based (fleshly) passions remain under the jurisdiction of the law of Moses and, as such, will incur the curse of the old covenant, death. Only those who are led by God's Spirit, who are under the Spirit's control, have left the

law's dominion over Adamic existence and are not "under the law" (7:1-6; cf. Gal 5:18). So long as one identifies with the old humanity in terms of one's desires and behavioral habits, one remains trapped in a cycle of sin, held down by the law's jurisdiction and judgment, and destined for death (i.e., exclusion from God's eternal presence). To many it might seem a paradox: Freedom from the law's demands and curse comes only for those who "serve [God] as a slave in newness of Spirit" (7:6) and who "fulfill the requirement of the law" by "walking not in conformity to the flesh but in conformity to the Spirit" (8:4). In the end Paul answers the question "Should we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?" (6:15) in this way:

So then, brethren, we are debtors not to the flesh such that we live in conformity to the flesh, for if you live in conformity to the flesh, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. (8:12-14)

In short, why not lead a life under the primary rule of sin? Because, whether believer or not, to do so puts one at risk of not inheriting eternal life (cf. 1 Cor 6:9-11; Gal 5:19-21). The days of locating one's identity in a constellation of deeply ingrained, biologically based desires are over. Only an identity in Christ and Christ's Spirit means anything. Sinful desires do not dissipate with the advent of faith. The threat of falling back into the old pattern of conformity to one's sinful desires is very real. But such desires can be challenged in the light of a new self-understanding based on one's linkage to the person and work of Jesus Christ. Sin transfer to Christ requires a self transfer, a death to the old humanity and a life lived in a new humanity for God.

This point is also made clearly in the letter to the Colossians and in the letter to the Ephesians, where the imagery of unclothing and clothing is used (see Eph 4:17-24; 5:3-12).

These texts also speak of a renewal of one's mind and a reorientation of one's thinking in accordance with one's new creation in the image of Christ. The same point is made in Romans 12:1-2, coupling this theme again with the sacrifice of self. Reorientation to a "new humanity" identity does not happen magically. It

requires a conscious mental realignment with the gospel.

### ***God's Grace as the Primary Incentive for Configuring Identity***

It is important to recognize that Paul surrounded the moral exhortation and judgment language in Romans 6:1-8:17 with an elaborate discussion of God's astounding grace in ch. 5 and in 8:18-39 (on Rom 5 see Gagnon, 2001b). The demand of God on our lives can be great because God's gift of grace is greater still. The person who wins something greater than a state lottery, something by divine design rather than human chance, can afford to give up a life oriented toward gratification of fleeting desires. Romans 5 and 8:18-39 form an *inclusio* or ring composition around the discussion of "why not sin?" in 6:1-8:17; book-ends of grace, so to speak. Chapter 5 contains an aggregate of themes that reappear next in 8:18-39: (1) the Christian's boast in the glory to come (5:2; 8:18, 21); (2) the inconsequential effect that sufferings have on that boast (5:3-5; 8:18-28, 35-36); and (3) the manifestation of God's love in Christ (5:5, 8; 8:35, 37, 39). What, specifically, is the boast of the believer, according to St. Paul?

In Ch. 5, Paul echoes Jeremiah 9:23-24 in exhorting his audience to boast or brag about God's saving righteousness through Christ. First, believers can brag in the secure hope that they have of sharing in God's glory (5:2b, 5-10). If Christ died for us while we were ungodly, weak, and enemies, how much more, now that we are justified and reconciled to God, shall God work to bring about our salvation at the end? Second, believers can boast that God uses even the pressures of life to affect the good (5:3-4). For instance, endurance in difficult times produces proof of our approval by God, which in turn gives us the assurance that we are among the elect of God. Third, believers can brag in God's amazing reversal, through Christ, of the effects of Adam's sin (5:11-21). Through Christ, God more than undid the damage done by Adam's sin, with the result that grace now reigns through Christ's righteousness.

In 8:18-39 Paul implicitly returns to the theme of boasting, focusing on how the sufferings of the present time—including the deprivation experienced from doing God's will rather than gratifying the desires of the flesh—do not diminish the believer's boast in God's triumph through Christ. First Paul contends that the magnitude of the coming glory is so great as to make any

hardship in the present time pale by comparison (8:18-25). Second, Paul shows that even in the present time the Spirit helps us in all our distresses by insuring that all of life's experiences, however bad, are transformed into Christ-conforming moments (8:26-30). The ultimate good, namely, of being conformed to the image of God's Son, is always within God's grasp (8:28-29). Third, the believer's future hope is made secure by the fact that both our Justifier (God) and our Intercessor (Christ) have shown themselves to be eminently for us, so that nothing save our own determination to reject God's help can separate us from the love of God and Christ.

The significance of Paul's framing the moral exhortation in 6:1-8:17 with joyous boasting in God's abundant grace in Ch. 5 and 8:18-39 lies in showing that Christian identity is formed not in the first instance by stern asceticism but by an overwhelming sense of joy and peace from the incomparable work of God on our behalf (cf. Rom 15:13). We are reminded again of Galatians 2:20, with which we started our discussion of Paul: The believer's motivation for letting Christ live in him or her is the realization in faith that Christ "loved me and gave himself for me."

#### **Implications for Homosexual Orientation and Identity**

##### ***The Necessity of Distinguishing Homosexual Orientation from Identity in Christ***

Where does this discussion of Christian identity and biological orientation leave us on the issue of sexual identity and sexual orientation? It communicates quite clearly that not only is it the case that Christians *need not* derive their identity from any particular sexual orientation that runs counter to God's revealed will but in fact Christians *must not* derive their identity from such. A Christian's identity is derived first and last from union with Jesus Christ, with the aim of being recreated to look like Jesus by living in conformity to God's commands. As St. Paul himself noted, in a context dealing with sexual issues: "circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing but the keeping of the commandments (is everything)" (1 Cor 7:19). This union with Jesus entails at its core self-denial, imaged as a death to all self-orientation at odds with God's purposes, consistent with Jesus' own death. But it is a death stimulated and even welcomed by the realization of God's superabundant grace; namely, that what God has in store for us is much greater than whatever self-preservation one might have in mind for oneself.

"Sexual orientation" should be seen as just one part of a larger matrix of human orientations that must be evaluated in light of the cross.

Simply because a Christian experiences intense sexual urges for more than one person is no license for identifying himself (or herself) as a "polyamorist" or "polysexual." Likewise, a Christian who experiences pedophilic impulses need not, and indeed should not, view his sexual identity as that of a "pedosexual" or pedophile. This is so in spite of the fact that nobody would ever choose to have pedophilic impulses; such impulses are deeply ingrained and highly resistant to change. Yet identity is something altogether different. We may not have a choice in experiencing certain impulses but we do have a choice in whether we will define ourselves by compliance with such impulses. It may not be a person's fault that he or she experiences sexual impulses and desires for things that God forbids. Yet such a person is responsible for what he or she does with such impulses. Moreover, impulse-oriented traits are not comparable to traits like race or ethnicity. A person's ethnic ancestry is immutable, benign, and non-behavioral. Impulse-oriented traits, however, are not absolutely immutable (at least intensity fluctuates through the course of life). Nor are they inherently benign (many impulses exist for immoral behavior). Nor are they non-behavioral (impulses are desires to engage in specific behaviors). We must not make the elementary mistake of assuming that, as regards such traits, either "God made people that way" and so wants them to satisfy such impulses or God "goofed." A biology-equals-morality rationale has no place in a worldview that talks of denying oneself, losing one's life, taking up one's cross, dying with Christ, new creation, and living for God.

##### ***Jesus on Creation***

Scripture—and here the views of Jesus are definitely to be included—presents a two-sex prerequisite for sexual behavior as the most sacred and inviolable structural dimension of God-ordained human sexual behavior (Gagnon, 2001a; Gagnon & Via, 2003). Here the creation texts in Genesis 1-2 take on particular importance, as Jesus' own teaching indicates. When Jesus spoke about matters of human sexual ethics in Mark 10:6-9, the texts that he lifted up as absolutely normative and prescriptive, above all other texts (including subsequent compromises in the law of Moses), were Genesis 1:27 ("male and female he made them") and 2:24

("for this reason a man ... shall become joined to his woman and they [or, with all non-Hebrew ancient translations, the two] shall become one flesh"). The one most essential common feature of these two texts is the recognition that legitimate sexual activity requires a male and female, man and woman. In fact, Jesus clearly based his indictment of male polygamy and serial monogamy on the "twoness" or binary/dimorphic character of human sexuality. A third party, whether at the same time or in chronological sequence is neither needed nor desirable because bringing together the only two sexes that exist already recreates an integrated sexual whole. Thus Jesus predicated his views on marital monogamy and indissolubility on the self-contained wholeness of the two sexes in complementary union.

The narrative in Genesis 2:21-24 explains why it is that an otherwise unrelated man and woman can become "one flesh" through a sexually intimate marital bond: woman was originally split off from the flesh of man. *The image of one flesh becoming two sexes grounds the principle of two sexes becoming one flesh.* The only way to restore the original sexual unity is to reunite the primordial constituent parts, man and woman (Gagnon, 2003b, pp. 111-26; Gagnon, in press -c). Irrespective of the extent to which this story is taken symbolically, it communicates that man and woman are each other's sexual counterparts, two halves of a single sexual whole. The Hebrew word often translated "rib" (*tsela'*), denoting what is extracted from the 'adam (earthling, human) to form woman, is better understood as "side," in accordance with its 40 other occurrences in the Old Testament. This also accords with some later ancient Jewish interpretation. Speaking allegorically about the creation of woman in Genesis 2:21-24, Philo of Alexandria (first century AD) states: "Love ... brings together and fits into one the divided halves, as it were, of a single living creature" (*On Creation*, p. 152). "And which side did he take? For we may assume that only two are indicated. ... Did he take the left or the right?" (*Allegorical Interpretation* 2.19-21; compare the rabbinic text *Genesis Rabbah* 8:1, where a division of the earth creature front and back, rather than left and right, is proposed). The sacred character of the two-dimensional sexual bond is further underscored by the fact that all but one of the other uses of *tsela'* in the Old Testament refer to the "side" of sacred architecture: the ark,

tabernacle, incense altar, temple rooms. (Compare Paul's usage of temple imagery for the human body in its sexual capacity, 1 Cor 6:19.) God's own self drew up the blueprints for male-female sexual compatibility. The design for other-sex coupling and against same-sex pairing is not a mere social construct that human beings have a right to alter.

#### **Paul on Creation**

Paul understood the implications of Jesus' teaching about human sexuality for homosexual practice. His chief indictment of idolatry and homosexual practice in Romans 1:23-27 contains a clear echo or allusion to Genesis 1:26-27 (Gagnon, 2001a, pp. 289-95; Gagnon, 2003a, pp. 206-13, 242-46).

And God said, "Let us make a *human* according to our *image* and according to our *likeness*; and let them rule over the ... *birds* ... and the *cattle* ... and the *reptiles*. ... And God made the human, according to the image of God he made them, *male* and *female* he made them. (Gen 1:26-27 LXX)

And they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for the *likeness* of the *image* of a mortal *human* and of *birds* and of *four-footed animals* and of *reptiles*. Therefore, God gave them over, in the desires of their hearts, to a sexual uncleanness consisting of their bodies being dishonored among themselves—the very ones who ... worshiped and served the creation rather than the Creator. ... Because of this God gave them over to dishonorable passions, for even their *females* exchanged the natural use for that which is contrary to nature; and likewise also the *males*, having left behind the natural use of the *female*, were inflamed with their yearning for one another, *males* committing indecency. ... (Rom 1:23-27)

There are here not only eight points of correspondence between Gen 1:26-27 and Rom 1:23, 26-27 but also a threefold sequential agreement: (1) God's *likeness* and *image* in *humans*; (2) dominion over the animal kingdom (*birds, animals,*

reptiles); and (3) *male-female* differentiation. The point of the echo is to show that idolatry and same-sex intercourse constitute a frontal assault on the work of the Creator in nature (note the mention of "Creator" and "creation" in Rom 1:25). Those who suppressed the truth about the Creator that was transparent in creation were more likely to suppress the truth about the complementary nature of the sexes transparent in nature, choosing instead to gratify contrary innate impulses.

Just as Gen 1:26-27 lies in the background of Paul's remarks in Rom 1:23-27, so too Paul cites Gen 2:24c ("... the two shall become one flesh") in close proximity to his indictment of "men who lie with males" (*arsenokoitai*) in 1 Corinthians 6:9 (see 6:16). Given the echo to Genesis 1:27 in Romans 1:23-27, Paul could not have missed the relevance of Genesis 2:24a-b ("a man shall ... become joined to his woman") for his rejection of male homosexual intercourse in 1 Cor 6:9. Indeed, his use of Gen 1:27 and Gen 2:21-24 later in the same letter, 1 Cor 11:7-12, clearly shows that Paul regarded these texts as integral for establishing the significance of male-female differentiation in the context of marriage (this point holds despite the thorny theological issues associated with 11:2-16).

Thus Paul took the same two creation texts that Jesus lifted up as decisive for defining sexual ethics, Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, and applied them to various sexual issues, including an absolute rejection of homosexual practice. That means that the standard used by Paul for assessing homosexual behavior was not just how well or badly it was done in his own cultural context but whether it conformed to God's will in creation for male-female pairing. Paul, then, obviously thought that the primary problem with homosexual practice was not what it happened to be in his particular cultural context but rather what it was not and could never be: a structurally congruous joining of the two sexes, male and female.

#### ***The core problem with same-sex attraction.***

From a theological perspective, the core problem with any attempted homosexual bond is not merely that it is structurally incongruous. It is also, *by definition*, sexually narcissistic or at least sexually self-deceptive. As one ancient text put it, in a critique of male homosexual practice: "One nature [rather than two] came together in one bed. But *seeing themselves in one another*, they were ashamed neither of what they were doing, nor of what they were having done to

them" (Pseudo-Lucian, *Affairs of the Heart*, 20; emphasis added). Or, as St. Paul put it: "males ... were inflamed with their yearning for one another, males with males..." (Rom 1:27). If one is conscious of being strongly aroused by the distinctive features of one's own sex, it is a case of sexual narcissism. If one is not conscious of this sameness but thinks instead of a same-sex partner as completing what is lacking in one's own sex (probably the more common scenario), then it is a case of sexual self-deception. A self-perception of gender deficit, expressed in a desire to merge with someone of the same sex, is consistent with scientific research regarding (1) high rates of childhood gender nonconformity among homosexual males and (2) preferences on the part of most adult homosexual males for very "masculine" men (Bailey, 2003; cf. Bem, 1996, 2000). The desire to supplement and complement one's sex with the same sex is really a form of self-delusion. Men, for instance, are masculine by virtue of their sex, not by virtue of possessing a social construct of masculinity that may or may not reflect true masculinity. What one lacks sexually is the sex that one is not, not the sex that one already is.

Some psychologists would doubtlessly dispute that homosexual orientation is narcissistic or self-deceptive. Yet they cannot deny that homosexual attraction ("homo-," from the Greek *homoiōs*, "like, same") is patently a desire for the essential sexual self that one shares in common with one's same-sex partner: males for essential maleness, females for essential femaleness. Notice here that I am not asserting that two or more persons in a homoerotic relationship can never exhibit genuine compassion toward one another. Such a claim would be absurd for virtually any proscribed form of human sexuality. Rather, *so far as the erotic dimension is concerned*, homoerotic desire is sexual narcissism or sexual self-deception. In a sexual bond between persons of the same sex, the extremes of one's sex are not moderated and true gaps are not filled. It is this reality that contributes markedly to the disproportionately high rate of problems associated with homosexual practice: high numbers of sex partners and high rates of sexually transmitted disease, especially among male homosexuals, as well as a dearth of long-term relationships and a high incidence of major depression and substance abuse, especially among female homosexuals (Gagnon, 2001a, pp. 452-60, 471-85; Gagnon, 2005).



An opposite-sex prerequisite for sexual relations is not an isolated or insignificant view in the canon of Scripture. Every narrative, law, proverb, exhortation, metaphor, and poetry that has anything to say about sexual relations at least implicitly presupposes a male-female requirement. Scripture holds this value pervasively, absolutely, strongly, and counter-culturally. In other words, it is a core value of biblical sexual ethics. Dissolving a two-sex prerequisite for valid sexual unions strikes at the heart of whether there should be any requirement of deep structural compatibility between prospective sexual partners, a requirement that takes its cue from the material structures of creation and transcends the issue of personal affections (Gagnon, in press -a). For at the heart of all sexual practice is the sex (gender) of the participants. If committed, loving multiple-partner unions and incestuous unions are unacceptable, then committed, loving homosexual unions should be even more problematic. For the twoness of human sexual relations, on which a prohibition of polygamy is based, is predicated on the deep structure of two sexes; and the structural requirement of complementary difference, on which a prohibition of incest is based, is more keenly disclosed in sexual differentiation than in blood unrelatedness.

All of this is to say that the existence of any biologically based, sexual attraction for members of the same sex provides insufficient warrant for transgressing the sacred male-female requirement for sexual bonds. This is clearly an instance where individual passions must yield to the confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and the call to take up one's cross.

### **Scriptural Principles for Clinical Practice**

Without attempting to be exhaustive, I will cite three scriptural principles for counseling persons who experience intense same-sex erotic attractions. These three principals are, of course, in addition to the principle of teaching a clear distinction between biological orientations and God-ordained identity, elaborated in the first section.

**1. Affirming the Integrity of the Sex of a Person with Same-sex Attraction.** One of the goals of counseling a person with homoerotic desire is to affirm the structural integrity of that person's sex, an integrity that may need affirmation by members of the same sex but not supplementation by such. God declared the creation of "male and female" and their sexual compati-

bility to be "good" (Gen 1:31). Males cannot become "more male" by merging with a male, nor can females become "more female" by merging with another female. God has already imprinted maleness on men and femaleness on females. Cultures may vary somewhat in how they define essential maleness and essential femaleness but that such a foundational sexual difference exists is beyond denial. Indeed, every claim to exclusive homoerotic attraction (6 on the Kinsey spectrum) or exclusive heterosexual attraction (0 on the Kinsey spectrum) is tacit recognition of the fact that there is something essentially male and something essentially female that causes a sexual fixation on a given sex. What is needed, then, is affirmation of one's God-given maleness, if male, or of one's God-given femaleness, if female, in order to reduce the felt need for structural supplementation with a member of the same sex. The intimate bond of Christian "fellowship" or "partnership," of which the New Testament often speaks (e.g., Acts 2:42-47) but which the church often falls short of providing, ought to be the primary conduit for such affirmation—particularly, intimate, nonsexual relationships with persons of the same sex.

I do not say that such affirmation will have a magical effect in eliminating same-sex attraction. The brain does not have unlimited plasticity. But such affirmation, reinforced long-term, may help in dealing with genuine needs and reduce or make manageable the intensity of such impulses. This is the point of the theme of renewing one's mind that one finds in Romans 12:2; Col 3:10; and Eph 4:23 (all cited above). As with other besetting conditions, the elimination of all unwanted impulses is not the goal but rather effective management of such impulses with some prospect for reduction in their intensity. The New Testament never assures believers that the entrance of the Holy Spirit into their lives will eradicate fully the sinful impulses of the flesh. It rather assures believers that the Spirit will always be cooperating with God for the ultimate good; namely, conforming believers more into the image of Jesus Christ (Rom 8:28-29), which leads to the next principle.

**2. Taking Care Not to Short-Circuit the Work of God.** Clinicians are prone to alleviate the distress of their clients as quickly as possible, often even if that means circumventing norms for behavior. In this instance, Christian psychologists should be careful not to short-circuit, by compromising God's standards, any work that

God might be doing in the lives of persons experiencing distress. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians is good for making this point. Paul earnestly pleaded with God to remove his "thorn in the flesh" (cataracts?), only to hear from God that "My grace is sufficient for you, for (my) power is perfected (or: brought to full measure) in weakness" (12:8-9). Often God uses the experience of deprivation as a means of shaping Christ in us. So, for example, Paul told the Corinthian believers that the afflictions he and his coworkers had experienced in Asia Minor (Turkey, probably Ephesus), which were so bad that they for a time even "despaired of life itself," had the divine purpose of teaching them to depend "not on ourselves but on the God who raises the dead" (1:8-10). Paul experienced incredible hardship in conducting his apostolic ministry: imprisonment, floggings, shipwreck, muggings, hunger, exposure to cold through poor shelter and poor clothing, constant anxiety for his churches, and attacks from fellow believers and from his Jewish compatriots (11:23-33; 6:4-10; cf. 1 Cor 4:9-13; 15:30-32; Phil 1:12-26). Yet he had learned to boast of his weaknesses "that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Cor 12:9) and to be content in all circumstances, knowing that he could do all things through the One who strengthened him (2 Cor 12:10; Phil 4:11-12).

God is ultimately pleased with forming Christ in us, often by making use of adverse circumstances. It is all too easy for us to lose sight of the "eternal weight of glory beyond all measure" that awaits us (2 Cor 4:17). Yes, we should do what we can to help those experiencing deprivation—but always short of violating God's commands. We should continue working toward meeting intimacy needs of persons with same-sex attractions or unhealthy opposite-sex attractions without abandoning the core sexual standards of Scripture.

**3. Coupling a Heightened Ethical Demand with a Loving Outreach to Violators.** Love and truth, or outreach and an intensified ethic, were not mutually exclusive in Jesus' ministry but interdependent (Gagnon, in press - b). We should neither dilute ethical standards in a bid to show compassion to violators nor callously consign violators to hell in an effort to preserve standards. Jesus combined a compassionate outreach to "tax collectors and sinners" (Mark 2:15-17; Matt. 11:19 par. Luke 7:34; Luke 7:37-39; 15:1-10; 18:13; 19:7), including sexual sinners

(Matt. 21:31-32; Luke 7:36-50; 15:30; John 4:16-18; 7:53-8:11), with an intensified ethic regarding money and sex (on sex see esp. Matt. 5:27-32; Mark 10). In Jesus' understanding loving outreach included reproof and correction. When he lifted up Leviticus 19:18, "love your neighbor as yourself," as the second greatest commandment (Mark 12:31; cf. Luke 10:27-28), he obviously had in mind the immediate context in Leviticus 19:17-18. Loving one's neighbor included *both* "firmly reproofing" one's neighbor so as not to "incur guilt because of him" (for failing to warn one's neighbor) *and* not hating, taking vengeance, or holding a grudge against one's neighbor. Jesus maintained *both* "if your brother sins, rebuke him" *and* "if he repents, forgive him," even "if he sins seven times a day" (Luke 17:3-4; cf. Matt. 18:15, 21-22).

This command to rebuke is not a contradiction of Jesus' words against judging others (Matt. 7:1-5 par. Luke 6:37, 41-42). Context and Jesus' own repeated judgments (e.g., Matt. 7:13-27 par. Luke 13:23-27; 6:43-49; Luke 10:13-15 par. Matt. 11:22-24; Mark 8:34-37 par.) indicate that his criticism was aimed at overly punctilious, hypocritical, and loveless criticisms of others, not self-introspective, gentle, and restorative rebuke of egregious sin. Similarly, Paul understood that admonishment had to be tailored to different kinds of respondents: "And we exhort you, brethren, admonish the undisciplined, cheer up the discouraged, give special attention to the weak, be patient with all" (1 Thess 5:14; cf., Gal 6:1: "restore with a spirit of gentleness, keeping an eye on yourself lest you too be tempted").

Consistent with his Jewish Scriptures, Jesus considered sexual ethics to be a life-and-death matter. The incentive behind Jesus' outreach was a loving sense of urgency about the possible exclusion of such sinners—persons who egregiously transgressed the will of God—from God's coming kingdom. It was better to enter heaven maimed, through cutting off offending limbs (metaphorically speaking) than to be thrown into hell full-bodied (Matt. 5:29-30; Mark 9:43-48 par. Matt. 18:8-9; cf. kingdom-of-God sayings in Paul that emphasize the dire risk posed by sexual offenses: 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:3-5; also 1 Thess 4:2-8). When Jesus protected the woman caught in adultery from the penalty of stoning (John 8:3-11), he was not communicating that adultery was a minor offense. Rather, by stimulating the woman's repentance through an act of kindness, Jesus was trying to prevent a worse fate from befalling the

woman on the Day of Judgment (cf. John 5:14). Simply put, dead people do not repent. The aim of a truly Christian psychology is not, in the first instance, elimination of all distress but rather conformity of the person's life to the will of God. Sometimes the doing of God's will is stressful—the cross is a key example of this. However, the outcome of such a life is well worth the momentary sensation of deprivation.

### Conclusion

Scripture is quite insistent about believers making a distinction between whatever intense biological "orientations" they experience and the identity that has been constructed for them "in Christ." The cross provides Christians with the ultimate paradigm of self-denial, not of self-gratification and self-preservation. Yet the stimulus for a rigorous life of discipleship is an overwhelming, joyous sense of the abundance of God's grace through Christ, not a desire for pain. Further, Scripture clearly teaches that same-sex intercourse is a great affront to God's deliberate creation of male and female as complementary sexual counterparts. From a theological standpoint, homosexual attraction is narcissistic and/or self-deceiving in its attempt to achieve structural supplementation of one's God-given sex by merging with persons of the same sex. As such, the experience of exclusive same-sex attractions cannot trump the commands of God and should not lead to a homosexual identity. Finally, three scriptural principles for clinical services from a Christian perspective were put forward that seek to integrate truth and compassion.

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