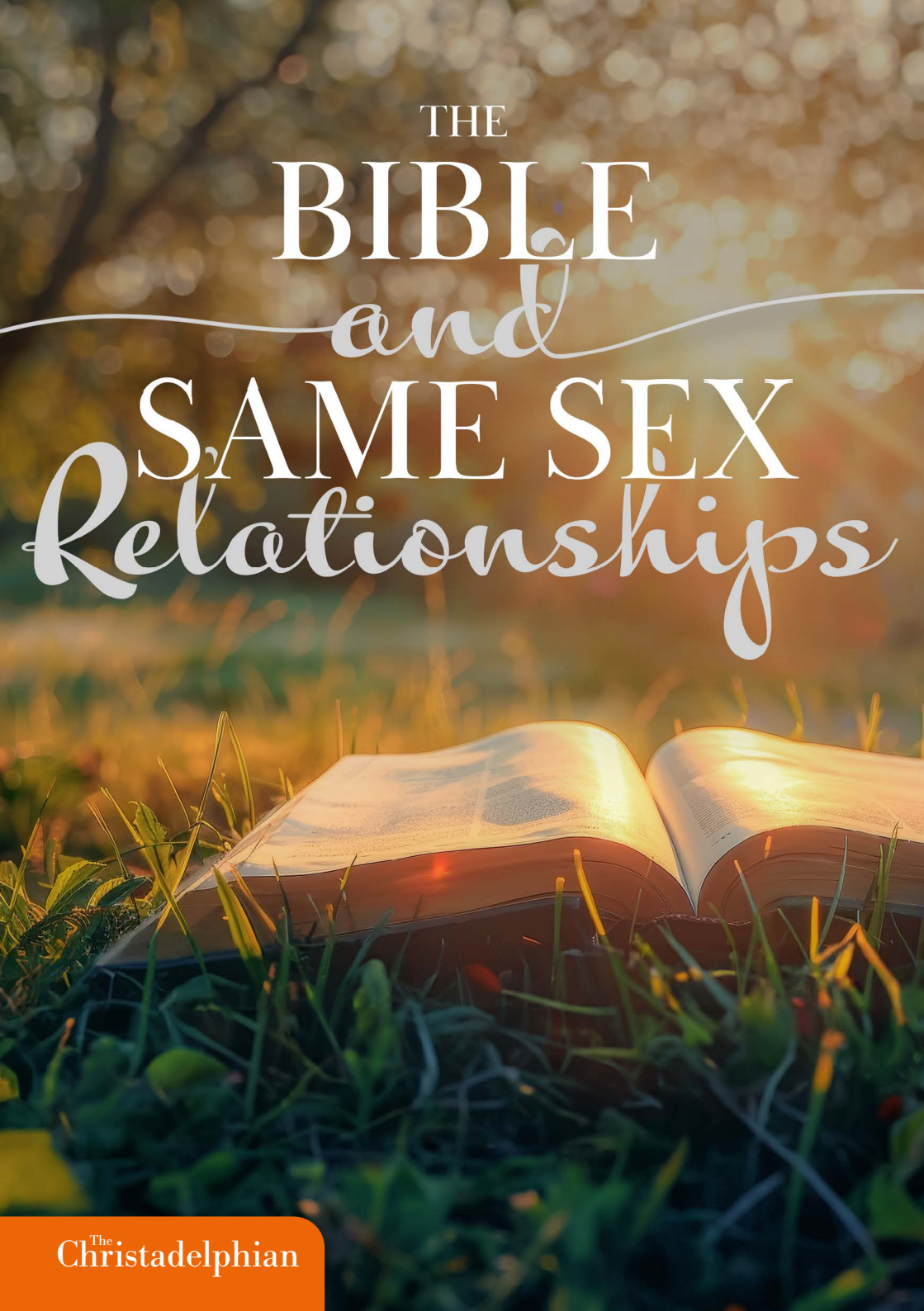
THE BIBLE and SAME SEX Relationships



The Christadelphian

THE BIBLE AND SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

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Preface

THIS booklet is intended for a Christadelphian audience; it may also be of interest to others who believe that the Bible is fully inspired, and presents an authoritative set of principles and a way of life that believers should seek to live by today. Our sincerely held view is that for followers of Christ it is not our personal opinions that matter on a subject like this, but rather what the Word of God says. Our goal, therefore, is to understand what the Bible teaches on same-sex relationships so that we may try to live by those principles within our Bible-based community. In doing so, we focus necessarily on one particular aspect of biblical morality; but the remarkable thing, when we open the Bible, is how its teaching on all aspects of sexual morality fits together in a wonderful and consistent whole with deep symbolic meaning.

In taking this approach, we are thus not seeking to address wider society in these pages, much less to discriminate or to dictate what others should do with the free will that God has granted them. We recognise the choices that others make in this and other aspects of life. We are grateful to the governments and authorities that allow us the freedom to express our sincerely held views based upon the Bible, and also the freedom to attempt to live by those views as best we can in our community of faith.

This material originally appeared as a series of three articles in *The Christadelphian* magazine between March and May 2024, in response to the need to discuss these issues and to examine what the Bible has to say on them; and also the need to think about how we uphold Bible teaching while at the same time seeking to support fellow-believers who may experience feelings of same-sex attraction.

1 | Introduction

HOW SHOULD WE UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE PASSAGES, AND HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND?

HISTORICALLY, the Bible has been thought to be very clear on the matter of same-sex relations, with no less than six or seven passages speaking specifically to it. Recently, however, some have begun to question that clarity. The churches around us have been locked in debate, some changing their long-held stances and others creating awkward workarounds. Two Church of England bishops, for example, recently claimed that loving, monogamous same-sex relationships should be permitted. [1] Even amongst those with a high view of Scripture, some have claimed that the passages are only speaking of promiscuity or pederasty (men with boys).

Some of these ideas are entering the Christadelphian community too, and there can be a danger of triggering emotions or offering suggestions without adequately presenting Bible teaching. It is timely, therefore, to review the Bible evidence – both in the face of strong cultural pressure, and because we want to be clear about what God is saying so that we can best help people, in both a present and an eternal sense.

The whole topic is a sensitive and highly politicised one, but Christadelphians believe that we must turn to the Bible to seek our Maker's view. It is not what ***we*** think, nor what seems 'obvious' to us, that is key (society's view of what is 'obvious' regarding relationships has changed rather a lot over the past seventy years). Rather, it is the moral standards by which God asks us to live that truly matter.

Biblical support

Let us say at the outset that Christadelphian ecclesias should give as much support as they possibly can to those who struggle with same-sex attraction and are trying their best to live biblically. To anyone who is struggling with this while standing up for the gospel, your commitment to Christ as you carry this burden is to be honoured. You should never have to feel alone. Regarding

1 anglican.ink/2023/01/14/bishop-of-worcester-explains-why-he-believes-same-sex-relationships-are-consonant-with-scripture/

those we meet in wider society, we should treat all with the love of Christ. We should welcome all to hear the gospel whatever their background, current lifestyle or temptations of any kind (with appropriate safeguards, of course). Jesus did no less as he interacted with tax collectors and sinners.

But it is not loving, biblical, kind or 'safe' (in any eternal sense) to present only a message of 'love whatever the truth may be' when there is clear Bible teaching on a topic. It must be truthful love and support that we provide (Ephesians 4:15) – love that puts the Bible first in both its mercy and its truth. We can't support people standing for truth if we take their spiritual legs out from under them, so we must stick to the Scriptures. This booklet is not about scoring expository points, although we must do exposition; it is about seeking to support the body of Christ. God cares who people sleep with because He cares about people and He knows what is best for us.

So to the Bible passages. We will try to strike a balance between brevity and clarity on the one hand, while providing some evidence and considering alternative views on the other – parts 2 and 3 of this booklet (it could have been a book!). The definitive answer for disciples today comes in the New Testament passages (part 3), but it is critical to begin by laying the foundation in Genesis because that ties together the whole of the Bible's teaching on sex and relationships. Having done that, we shall also want to look at the testimony of the Law of Moses and the contested example of Sodom – all of which we will do in part 2.

In part 4 we will look at why it matters, whether it is 'fair', and why God doesn't just let us do as we wish. Is this Victorian prudery? Is it a matter of just believing 'because God says so'? Or is there a bigger underlying rationale, a set of divine principles underlying God's teaching about relationships that can lead us to a deeper understanding and love for God and for one another? Finally, we will turn in part 5 to the implications of all this and what we can do to support each other.

2 | The Old Testament passages

WHERE do we go to understand the big truths about who we are, where we came from, male and female, marriage, how and why we have value in God's sight, our nature, our moral challenges – and so many other topics essential to a proper biblical understanding of what it is to be human? We start with Genesis, of course, and it is no different for this subject. Early Genesis is critical for setting the framework and allowing us to develop an holistic understanding. It reveals eternal principles which are not limited to one culture.

The importance of Genesis

Genesis 1 and 2 describe the creation of male and female, so alike and yet crucially different, and both "in the image of God" (1:27). [1] The male was "alone" without the female, and this was "not good" (2:18); so God created a female 'corresponding to', 'complementing', 'over against' or 'opposite' him (the preposition used can have all of those senses, and there is truth in all of them). They were to be counterparts to one another, with the potential to be joined to one another as man and wife in a uniquely complementary way.

Although there is identity between what God is joining ("bone of my bones ... flesh of my flesh", verse 23), God is very clearly not joining together two things which are the same – they are different; they are counterparts, two contrasting parts of the same whole. The man and the woman belong together – there could hardly have been a more powerful way of saying this than for God to make the woman "out of" the man so that she clearly belongs with him (He does not make another man out of the man).

This is the only sort of marriage that is known in the Bible, and Genesis 2:24 defines the very scope of marriage, as can be seen by the number of times it is quoted in the New Testament. [2] Humans can choose to redefine marriage as something else or as including more if they wish (this is what free will permits), but they have ceased to talk biblically when they do so.

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1 Bible quotations are from the KJV except where otherwise stated.

2 It is cited in: Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7; 1 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 5:31. Compare: Psalm 45:10; Malachi 2:15; 1 Corinthians 7:10,11.

Powerful symbolism

The complementary nature of the male / female relationship works on many levels, including the fitting together of male and female bodies which enables fruitfulness. Whilst not all married couples have children, there is something symbolically powerful in that potential for creation when male and female are united. This is brought out in the famous passage, "And did not He make one? ... And wherefore one? That He might seek a godly seed" (Malachi 2:15). Needless to say, same-sex unions do not offer this potential. In passing, it is interesting to note that most if not all the Bible passages that deal with sex / gender as a topic talk about ***difference*** as a core element (whether it is a different symbolism or different responsibilities between male and female). Gender difference is its own topic, but it is relevant in that a same-sex relationship cannot be based on this core binary distinction that is intrinsic both to creation and to scriptural practice and symbolism. **[3]**

Genesis, then, provides the foundation for this topic, as for so many others; we should never let it be dismissed. Biblically understood, marriage relationships are about two sexes, different but intrinsically complementary, coming together to form a one-flesh union. Anything outside this will be forbidden in later scriptures, with Genesis providing the pattern that helps us to understand why.

The prohibitions of the Law

It can be tempting to sweep aside the passages from Leviticus that outlaw same-sex activity (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13) on the basis that we are no longer under the Law. However, this dismissive approach is too simplistic. Whilst the Law is no longer operative *per se*, it is still a witness to the righteousness of God, "holy, and just, and good" in its moral provisions as well as everything else (Romans 7:12). It is our responsibility to discern the eternal relevance and rationale for the individual provisions of the Law, even if we are no longer obligated to live under its letter.

In the case of the same-sex question, it appears that there is a symmetry between the Law and the New Testament passages, a powerful consistency and harmony between the Testaments. Given this potential continuity, we might ask ourselves what the basis for the sexual prohibitions of the Law

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3 Male / female is but one of a set of binaries distinguished in Genesis 1; they seem to be intrinsic to the way that God has chosen to create and to manifest Himself. Spiritual binaries are also a feature in (for example) Proverbs and John.

may be. It isn't difficult to answer – the ethos of it all arises out of Genesis. Leviticus 18 and 20 give a whole series of prohibited sexual relationships, and these can all be explained on the basis of early Genesis and the famous 'marriage' passage already considered (2:24):

- Why is it an abomination for a man to lie with a beast? Because they are different 'kinds', too far apart, not corresponding or complementary. The animals are not suitable counterparts for humans, either sexually or as life-partner helpers.
- Why is it an abomination for a man to lie with a close relative? Because they are too close – a man is to ***leave*** the family he has come from and forge a new family centred on his relationship with his wife ('leave and cleave', Genesis 2:24). So all other sexual relationships within a family or with a child are automatically excluded.
- Why should adultery be condemned? Because a man is to cleave to his wife and be one with her, the foundation of the new family.
- Why is it an abomination under the Law for a man to lie with a man (and, implicitly, a woman with a woman)? Because they are the same in terms of their sex as created by God, rather than 'corresponding to', complementary or 'opposite' in the sense of Genesis 2.

The principles of Genesis allow us to understand the provisions of the Law in example after example.

Consistent with Genesis

Continuing into the New Testament, we should not be surprised to find that in 1 Corinthians 5 Paul clearly objects in the strongest terms to incest – even though the letter of the Law is no longer in force, and even though Jesus does not specifically address the topic himself. He continues to object to it, just as the Law did, because the reasoning against it follows logically from Genesis. Similarly, we are not surprised to find that there are New Testament passages that prohibit same-sex activity (at some level yet to be explored), because this is consistent with Genesis and is enshrined in the morality of the Law – even though Jesus himself does not specifically address the topic. Likewise, we are not overly concerned that bestiality is not specifically addressed either by Jesus or elsewhere in the New Testament. This absence is not a licence to go after animals; rather, we appreciate that there is a core relationship morality in the Scriptures which arises out of what God establishes in Genesis and which winds its way throughout. There is a

logic and a flow to this – a consistency of divine teaching, as there is on so many issues in the Scriptures. It is a powerful thing. [4]

Abomination?

The Law is strong in its prohibition of sexual misconduct, using the term 'abomination' to describe same-sex activity (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13). [5] However, some of the 'abominations' of the Law, like eating shellfish (11:10), we would no longer consider to be so *per se* today (Jesus "declared all foods clean", Mark 7:19, ESV). Nevertheless, the use of the term tells us that there is at the very least deep ***symbolic*** significance to the prohibition – something embedded in the teaching or obligation that is important to God. In the case of the same-sex topic it is not difficult to see what this is. It is because engaging in such acts transgresses the sexual and relationship boundaries set in Genesis, boundaries that (1) have a deep practical basis in physiology and purpose, and (2) enshrine a deep spiritual symbolism – the symbol of marriage and union in God's sight which begins in Genesis and ends in Revelation. Relationships are deeply ***symbolically*** important when we are trying to live in line with God's commands, and sexual union is an important and spiritually rich component of that. Relationships are purposeful acted parables of mutuality, salvation, identity and difference – a man and a woman; a husband and his wife. [6]

There are two final points to note from Leviticus. First, the prohibition has no qualifications; it is as broad as it could possibly be. It does not confine itself to situations of coercion or pederasty (men and boys); it does not say that only the 'dominant' partner is to blame (actually, both are put to death –

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4 It is true that God tolerated polygamy amongst His servants in Old Testament times, although it was not the design of Genesis 2. The better standard is clearly shown in the New Testament (1 Timothy 3:2 etc.). Whilst polygamy does not cross the gender lines of Genesis 2 and is not specifically prohibited in the Old Testament, the Biblical narrative implicitly critiques it time and again by showing us the many problems it causes. When we study polygamy, it is not difficult to see even from the Old Testament how the Genesis 2 model is the right one, the model which Jesus also taught.

5 Note also the four general uses in Leviticus 18:24-30 which summarise all the prohibitions of the chapter.

6 Notice that God makes both male and female in His image (Genesis 1:27) and brings the two together to make one – as He is one. It is through the union of both male and female that the fullness of His image can be revealed in one.

Leviticus 20:13, so this is not about rape or only a subset of same-sex acts); it does not confine itself to a context of cult prostitution or promiscuity. It is as broad a prohibition as there could be with respect to ***types*** of homosexual activity, and one which speaks against the breaking of gender distinctions (lying with a man 'as with a woman', in both passages). All of this is precisely as one would expect from the Genesis foundation.

Activity, not temptation

At the same time, Leviticus speaks about the ***activity***, not about temptation, inclination or, to use a modern term, orientation. A person may be ***tempted*** to desire many things, and we are not blamed for being tempted. It is what we ***do*** with temptation and whether or not we try to fight it that is important. Let us reiterate: Leviticus does not speak against temptation or desire in its sexual prohibitions; it speaks against the actions that we choose to carry out. The Lord Jesus, when speaking of adultery, escalates the standards by commanding us not to lust indulgently in our hearts (Matthew 5:27,28), but the temptation to sin in mind or body is not itself a sin. [7]

Sodom and Gomorrah

Finally in this section, what about Sodom and Gomorrah? For many, Genesis 19 may be the first passage we think of with regards to the same-sex topic (as reflected in the origin of the term 'sodomy'), but interestingly the incident is often sidelined nowadays. This is because it is often claimed that Sodom's sin is about pride, gang rape, coercion and the failure to show hospitality, rather than about homosexual activity. It is also pointed out that many of the later biblical passages that refer to Sodom do not explicitly reference same-sex activity. [8] What are we to make of this?

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7 Otherwise, we end up either condemning our Lord or denying the reality of his temptations.

8 Importantly, however, Ezekiel 16:49,50, a Sodom passage, does refer in the singular to a specific "abomination". If we are alert to Bible echoes, it will be hard to miss that this is the very term which is used to characterise same-sex activity in Leviticus, and that this is the only sin in the Leviticus list that is individually described by that term (other terms are used for other sins). Some quote Ezekiel to argue that Sodom's sin was pride (true – verse 49), but they miss the "abomination" term, which also connects us back to Genesis 19 and forwards to Jude verse 7. Ezekiel 16 is full of imagery of sexual sin, which is partly why the Sodom analogy is so effective.

Jude verse 7 is very helpful in interpreting Genesis 19. It talks about Sodom going after "strange flesh" (ironically, the Greek word for "strange" is *heteros* or 'other'). This refers to their desire for men, not, as some claim, for angels. It was ***men*** (as they thought) that they were desiring: 'Bring out the men … that we may know them,' they said (Genesis 19:5), not 'Bring out the angels' – and it would be odd to suggest that people from multiple surrounding cities (Jude verse 7) were also desiring angels. No, the 'other' flesh they desired refers to their same-sex intentions. It was *heteros* or 'other' from a scriptural perspective for the men of Sodom to contravene the distinctions of Genesis and seek relations with their own kind. The ESV's "[they] pursued unnatural desire" is a paraphrase but probably along the right lines – "unnatural" in the sense of contrary to God's design in Genesis.

What can we say in sum about Genesis 19? Even without this passage, the Bible is certainly clear that same-sex activities are wrong for the disciple, and this will become really clear from the New Testament in addition to our Genesis foundations. The biblical case does not rest on Genesis 19. However, if we look for the themes and connections between this passage and the rest of Scripture, we find that it fits the pattern. The Sodomites were sinners in many respects ("great sinners against the LORD", Genesis 13:13, ESV), but pursuit of same-sex relations was one of them. Coercion is wrong; gang rape is wrong; failure to show hospitality is wrong; covetousness is wrong; pride is wrong – but from God's point of view so is the Bible-defined 'abomination' of seeking sexual union with 'other flesh' outside the boundaries that God has set.

Hope in our struggles

Yet there is always hope. In the New Testament, Paul says: "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified" (1 Corinthians 6:11). So too, even to Israel, who were worse than Sodom (Ezekiel 16:48-52), God says that their fortunes could be restored (verses 53-55,60-62)

There is hope for us too, whatever our sin. This topic should never be about vilification; on the contrary, we are to love others and hold out the offer of salvation. But we should also be clear about God's truth and seek to live within its parameters if we wish to follow Him. This is difficult for all of us, each with our individual and different temptations in all their differing intensities. May God have mercy on us all, the sinners.

3 | The New Testament passages

HAVING set some context and considered the Old Testament, we turn now to the New. It is equally clear about rights and wrongs, but we must also lovingly support those facing temptation (see parts 1 and 5). The New Testament passages are not difficult in themselves, but we do need to address rival views about them, which makes our discussion a bit more involved than we might prefer.

There are two preliminaries. One concerns Jesus' silence on same-sex matters – how are we to interpret this? The other is the Greco-Roman cultural background, which some claim restricts the meaning of Paul's seemingly comprehensive statements.

Can we discern Jesus' view?

With respect to Jesus' silence, does this mean that he supports same-sex relations or is indifferent? This is unlikely given his emphasis on marriage and Genesis' 'joining' of male and female. In fact, when discussing marriage Jesus specifically quotes both Genesis 1:27 ("male and female created He them") as well as the more expected Genesis 2:24 ("a man … joined to his wife … one flesh" – see Matthew 19:4,5; Mark 10:6-8). This suggests that he views gender distinction both as important and, indeed, as the reason for marriage. [1] The two gendered 'halves' which God deliberately creates in chapter 1 are joined in chapter 2 to create one and to portray the fulness of God's image. The complementary difference between male and female (1:27) and their coming together to form one (2:24) are fundamental to Jesus' view – as they are to all New Testament discussions of marriage (Ephesians 5, Colossians 3, 1 Peter 3, etc.). The Christ / bride parable that underlies marriage works only if the two partners are different; Christ does not marry himself, and the ecclesia is not saved by another version of itself. Man and woman are two different and complementary sides of the

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1 Writer Sam Andreades makes an intriguing suggestion here. The Greek preposition "therefore" in Matthew, Mark and the Septuagint of Genesis 2:24 implies ***cause*** (a man is joined to his wife ***because*** male and female belong together and ***because*** she is part of him); but when Genesis 2:24 is quoted in Ephesians 5:31, Paul switches to a different preposition which implies ***purpose*** (a man joins his wife ***so that*** there will be oneness – that is the goal for which they are to strive).

same coin, two image-bearing parts of the unity that God creates through marriage.

It is not a good argument to claim that Jesus' silence on a matter (like his silence on bestiality or incest) should be taken as tacit affirmation – especially when Jesus explicitly holds up Genesis' teaching on relationships. Besides, we are "guided to all truth" (John 16:13) not only by Jesus' words but by those of the inspired apostles as well. It is by putting the whole of Scripture together that we come to a full understanding of what God requires. How likely is it that Jesus would implicitly affirm something that Paul explicitly condemns when all Scripture is pure, tried and true?

Jesus' silence on same-sex matters when he is so clear on marriage is because he takes for granted the ongoing validity of the Old Testament teaching established in Genesis and reinforced by the Law of Moses. Ancient Jewish writers who spoke about same-sex relations were universal in condemning them, and Jesus was quick to point out where he disagreed with Jewish tradition. Jesus did not argue that old moral standards did not matter any more; if anything, he made them tougher.

Cultural concerns?

With respect to Greco-Roman cultural background, it is true that many same-sex references from that time are to sex between men and boys (pederasty) or other displays of male libido and conquest (men and servants, or men raping male captives). [2] However, this is by no means the whole story, and seemingly every kind of relationship was known then as well as now, whether coercive or consensual, lustful or loving. There are some examples of consensual, loving same-sex relationships in the ancient world (both male-male and female-female), and even occasionally same-sex 'marriages' – but none of this finds support in the Bible.

Similarly, whilst the language of sexual 'orientation' is recent to our times, and whilst pederasty was often practised by those who also had heterosexual relations, there were ancient writers who thought that some are born with an innate attraction to their own sex. This means that the New Testament passages cannot be waved away by claiming that the ancient world had never thought about such things or knew only of certain types of relationship. That

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2 I apologise for the need to use some specific terminology in the paragraphs which follow. This is not done gratuitously; the aim is to be clear about what the Bible prohibits, and to push back on arguments that claim otherwise.

is simply not true, and the major academic studies of the topic reflect this. [3] The Greek language had a number of different words to refer to pederasty, and the New Testament specifically does not use them in the way one would expect if this were all that it wished to prohibit. Instead, it uses the most broad and general terms that it could. Let us now turn to those passages.

1 Timothy 1:10

Here Paul tells us that the Law is good if used appropriately ("lawfully", verse 8) [4] – to keep us within the right boundaries as image-bearers of God. He gives a list of behaviours forbidden by the Law and which remain wrong. We would of course agree; we should strive not to be ungodly sinners, murderers of parents, or slave-traders. The Law deals with all these, and their wrongness is reaffirmed by the Law of Christ and the New Testament more broadly.

Within this list are two terms relating to sexual activity. One is the prohibition of immorality: the Greek word *pornos*, which is about the broadest term available for a sexually immoral person. This means that proper sexual ethics remain important; the sexual 'liberation' of modern society (sex as you choose, hook-up culture) is not for Christians.

The other prohibition is the term *arsenokoitēs*. There is debate about this word, but the simplest and most biblically consistent explanation is likely the best – and here we find some very obvious clues.

The first is in the word itself. It comes from two words: *arsen*, which means 'male', and *koitē*, which means 'bed' (from whence 'coitus'). Thus it means 'men who go to bed with, or sleep with, males' – or, more paraphrastically, "men who practise homosexuality" (ESV). Other compound words are similarly made with *koitē* that mean 'men who sleep with their mother', 'men who sleep with servants' and so forth.

We notice here a resonance with Leviticus. It is not temptation, desire, identity or orientation that is being spoken of; it is the ***act*** or ***practising*** which is outlawed ('men ***who sleep with*** males'). Recall that the idea that some are born with same-sex attraction was an available one in the Greco-Roman world. The term that Paul uses does not rule out feelings of attraction or

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3 For a convenient summary of the cultural background and different types of relationships, see Preston Sprinkle's *People to Be Loved* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), pages 55-68.

4 Bible quotations from this point on are from the ESV unless otherwise stated.

temptation; rather, it precludes the ***activity*** of boundary-crossing for a male by going to bed with another male.

It is true, though, that not all words can be understood simply by looking at their roots. So, is there any other evidence? Paul is apparently the first to use this word in extant Greek literature, so why did he do so? A powerful clue emerges when we think about the Bible holistically and look for ***overall*** teaching from God. We recall that there are two Old Testament passages that explicitly forbid a man lying with another man: Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. How fascinating that in the Septuagint, the widely-used Greek translation of the Old Testament, not one but ***both*** passages use our two terms *arsen* (males) and *koitē* (bed) adjacently! Paul seems to be using the term 'men who sleep with males' in direct biblical allusion back to the two Leviticus passages, bringing out the deep scriptural consistency.

In addition to this there is further corroborating evidence in Greek usage by early Christian writers, and in early translations of the New Testament – the Latin, Coptic and Syriac translations all understood Paul's words in this sense. Remember: Greek has specific words for pederasty, a commonly attested type of same-sex activity at that time. Paul does not use one of those terms, but a broader term, one with crucially relevant links back into the Old Testament, and one which would be effective as a blanket condemnation of ***all*** types of male same-sex activity. It is a term which, like the Old Testament passages, focuses on the practice, not the temptation.

1 Corinthians 6:10

In this passage Paul lists a whole set of deeds which are practised by "the unrighteous" (verse 9) and which, if unforgiven, will bar entrance to the Kingdom of God (verses 9,10). He also warns us not to be deceived – so the point will be debated and it is important. [5] Here, two Greek terms are used to describe same-sex acts, although sometimes these are conflated by

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5 1 Timothy 1, 1 Corinthians 6 and Romans 1 each contain long lists of forbidden behaviours. People sometimes ask, "Why single out same-sex relations for such prominence compared to the others?" This misunderstands the point. All the behaviours that Paul lists are wrong and should not be persisted in. The point is that we should uphold them ***as indeed being wrong*** for believers and try not to do them – not make our own judgments, or restrict Paul's words to only a certain subset of behaviours when there is no warrant to do so. We should take seriously all the elements that Paul lists, but the others are not our subject in this booklet.

translators into one English expression (the ESV does this, opting for "men who practise homosexuality", while KJV goes for two terms, "effeminate" and "abusers of themselves with mankind"). The two terms are *malakos* and our familiar *arsenokoitēs*.

Malakos literally means 'soft' and has correspondingly sometimes been translated into English by terms like 'effeminate'. In its ancient context it probably means a man who deliberately seeks to be feminine (by appearance or behaviour) rather than a male who merely has fewer stereotypically masculine traits than others. While this 'male-seeking-femininity' might be seen to be the 'basic' meaning of the word when used of males, by extension it often implies or even denotes a male who is the passive partner in a same-sex relationship. [6]

Occurring as a pair with *arsenokoitēs*, it seems probable that one term refers to the active and the other to the passive participant. Both are prohibited, which suggests that this is not primarily about coercion or exploitative lust. [7] The prohibition is comprehensive: the Bible implies that neither will enter the Kingdom of God if they are unrepentant. There is a resonance here once again with the Leviticus passages in which both partners are at fault.

But the joy in Paul's words is that both can indeed be forgiven, washed and sanctified when they receive the gospel message: "such ***were*** some of you"! There are no barriers to fellowship with God, whatever our past and whatever our temptations and inclinations, provided we recognise and strive to maintain His standards. And forgiveness is available if we fail.

Romans 1:24-27

Our last passage in this section [8] is the most extensive, but we will be as brief as we can. In Romans 1, Paul is recounting the corruption in human society

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The issue is really whether we seek to uphold God's moral instructions or seek to subordinate or change them in deference to human feelings.

6 As A. C. Thistleton argues, it is 'overtranslation' to use a term which assumes prostitution or a younger male; whilst the word can be used in that context, this is not a required meaning. There are more precise terms for that, and the wider biblical context supports a broader understanding of the word.

7 With respect to male-female coercion under the Law, it is the one who forces who is punished, not both; the Bible knows how to distinguish these.

8 Jude verse 7, also highly relevant, was considered in the previous chapter.

and God's opposition to it as a 'suppression of the truth'. He does this in the strongest terms (verse 18). Humans have deliberately rejected the evidence of God's eternal power and divine attributes plainly visible in creation (verses 19-21). Instead, they have pursued their own wisdom ("Claiming to be wise, they became fools", verse 22). He then talks about three types of 'exchange' they have made:

1 people have exchanged God's glory for idolatry (verse 23)

2 they have exchanged the truth of God for a lie by worshipping and serving the creature rather than the Creator – this is manifested through "the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves" (verses 24,25)

3 they exchange 'natural' relations for ones "contrary to nature" (women with women, men with men), committing shameless acts (verses 26,27).

This framing of Paul's is very instructive. What humans are doing in these instances is taking God's plan and thinking (described in Genesis – where else?) only to 'exchange' them for human thinking and desires. The error is expressed through the medium of idolatry and sexual practices which displease God, including same-sex relations. Why these two things? Because idolatry is a denial of the Genesis doctrine of God as Creator (it worships creature instead of Creator), and because forbidden sexual practices are a denial of the Genesis doctrine of relationships for humans in the image of God. The 'problem' of same-sex relations for a believer according to Romans 1 is that they contravene God's created order and go against His right, as Creator, to specify the design and rules for our relationships. We ought not suppress His truth, either through idolatry or through this.

Quite what the sexual sins are in point 2 above is not clear (perhaps the language is deliberately general and therefore comprehensive). It would certainly be hard to think of better language to describe modern sexual permissiveness or the way that degrading sexual practices are referred to and even defended on the basis of 'consent' in mainstream media, never mind their normalisation in pornography. Notice that Paul's argument that these 'body-dishonouring' practices represent a particular root sin: a worshipping of the creature (what humans want or desire) rather than the Creator (the principles and commands that He has given us). The body is a loving gift from God, and we are bearers of His image. It is an "image and superscription" (Matthew 22:20, KJV) which should be rendered to Him again in obedience and worship, a temple for His dwelling (1 Corinthians 6:18-20). As temples for

His glory, our bodies are not ours to do with as we please. We must try not to dishonour, harm or denigrate them – irrespective of what our desires and inclinations in any particular direction might happen to be, sexual or otherwise.

The third exchange

When we turn to point 3 in Paul's list of 'exchanges', the nature of the sin is very clear – it is same-sex activity. The language is easy to understand unless we have an agenda to deliberately confuse it. There are no context-limiting clues to say that it relates only to coercion or prostitution, or that it excludes monogamous and loving same-sex relations. It is also interesting that Paul does not literally say, 'men with men' and 'women with women'. Rather, he uses specific gender terms: 'males with males' and 'females with females' (five gender terms in verses 26,27). Why would he do this? Probably for two reasons. First, it points right back to Genesis when God made them 'male and female' so that they might be joined to their corresponding 'other half' as one. It is God's gendered design and its contravention that is in focus. Secondly, because the male term (*arsen*) provides linkage with the other New Testament passages and the Greek translation of Leviticus 18 and 20 that we have been considering. It is just another tiny detail which demonstrates how 'joined up' the Scriptures are. It is the contravention of divinely created gender distinctions and complementarity (male / female) that is in view.

Paul decries the 'giving up' and 'exchanging' of one thing (God's relationship design according to Genesis) for another (human passion and desire). He describes as 'dishonourable' both the behaviour and the shameless way in which it is paraded (there are echoes here of both Genesis 3 and 19). He writes about 'natural relations' and those that are 'contrary to nature', and in doing so he seems to deliberately use phraseology that was well-known in the ancient world to condemn same-sex activity.[9] But for

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9 Contrary to some claims, the use of the phrase "against nature" (Greek, *para physin*) does ***not*** imply that Paul is talking about those who were not 'genuine' homosexuals. Paul is not engaging in a debate on sexual identity here; he is focusing on what people do with their bodies and whether creatures are following the order that their Creator built into creation / nature. The phrase was in common usage in ancient literature when same-sex relations were being critiqued (including by Jewish writers – Philo and Josephus, for example), and Paul uses it in a parallel way (see the technical commentaries by D. Moo and J. Fitzmyer, for example, for the details on this).

someone reading biblically he does more than this. The reference to nature chimes with the many Genesis allusions that congregate in this passage; Paul is talking about God's design in nature from the beginning (man + woman = one flesh), and the way in which humans have taken pride in exchanging or abandoning this. It feels remarkably contemporary.

Sinners all

Now, Paul's wider point – if we step out from chapter 1 and into his whole argument in chapters 1-3 – is that ***all humanity*** finds itself condemned in one way or another for having replaced God with themselves; we are all idolaters worshipping the creature more than the Creator. There is sexual deviance from God's design, certainly, and it is wrong – but there is deviance of every kind amongst human beings, and none of us is exempt from this condemnation. Every mouth must be stopped and the whole world held guilty before God. It is into that breach and that silence that God graciously steps to offer His transforming forgiveness and to proclaim His righteousness to us all.

But it is also not for us to proclaim 'righteous' what He has proclaimed 'sinful' (or to say that it doesn't really matter, or that it's complicated and Bible-believers may therefore do what feels right to them, putting their feelings first and reinterpreting passages accordingly). Paul's examples of human unrighteousness in Romans 1 are human idolatry and human sexual dishonouring – specifically (in what is perhaps his climactic example) through same-sex passions. None of these therefore ought to be justified by Bible-believers; indeed, it is irresponsible and unloving to do so. Yet the fact remains that we are ***all*** sinners. It is for each one of us to fight personally against whatever unrighteousness there may be within ourselves, and to seek the forgiveness that God has offered.

We have seen, then, that God has not spoken indistinctly on this issue. He has spoken clearly and consistently in multiple passages in both Testaments. All of this is based upon common principles established initially in Genesis; it all derives from God's all-wise creative plan. We should welcome all to hear the gospel; we should proclaim it to all as we have opportunity; we should support those who are tempted, in whatever temptations they have, as much as we possibly can. But we should not change or hide God's commands. This still leaves many questions unanswered – why it matters, whether it is fair, and how we can support. We will turn to these in the next section, as we try to set this subject in a wider context.

4 | Why does it matter, and is it fair?

WE have seen that the Bible is clear and consistent in ruling out same-sex activity for believers. We have also seen that the focus is on practice, not on desire or temptation; we may be sorely tempted in many ways, but if God has said that something is wrong, then we should try our best not to do it.

Of course, many in the world are not seeking to live by God's commands. God gives them free will to choose, and so should we. We should treat all with respect, showing the love of Christ, sharing the gospel. Within the Christadelphian community we should support those who have such feelings, a topic we will turn to in section 5. First, though, some difficult questions which arise from what we have seen so far: why is the subject important, how does God's love apply, and is it fair?

Why does it matter?

Why does God want to legislate our sexual activity and relationships in the first place? It is essential here to see the bigger biblical picture about relationships established in Genesis (see section 2). God's reason is not based on prejudice, targeting just one type of feeling; there are many sexual practices forbidden in the Bible, and they all matter. Rather, there is one correct model (sexual union between one man and one woman as God's gracious gift within a marriage: Genesis 1:27; 2:24; Hebrews 13:4), and anything outside that is excluded by default. In terms of sheer numbers, far more heterosexually-attracted people are asked by God to deny their natural feelings as a result – because such attraction is far more common yet would often be contrary to God's will if practised. God's teachings on these matters impact all of us in one way or another.

Same-sex practice does break the principle of male-female complementarity and marriage established in Genesis, and is serious for that reason, [1] yet it was by no means the only sexual sin under the Law of

1 Of the sexual 'abominations' in Leviticus, it is the only one that is individually *called* an abomination, which provides emphasis; similarly, Romans 1:26 describes this sin as 'against nature' (God's design), which perhaps makes it the climactic example of the sinful 'exchange' of God's pattern in Paul's list.

Moses that brought the death penalty. [2] The same-sex prohibition is one part of God's ***overall*** model and rules for sexual expression.

Why, again, does God care about sexual matters? For several reasons:

1 ***Our bodies are special.*** The Bible teaches that our bodies are deeply and symbolically significant. They are not mere husks, pieces of flesh to do with as we please. They are ***His***, uniquely designed and specifically given to glorify Him: temples for His glory; sacred space (1 Corinthians 3:16,17; 6:18-20). Our bodies are not for ourselves; they are for the Lord (6:13) and, secondarily, for our complementary (male + female) partner. We must follow God's commandments because of the sanctity of our God-given bodies. While other sins may be 'outside' the body, sexual sin is ***against*** one's own body (verse 18). [3] Sexual sins are especially significant because of the symbolism of the body. Since our bodies are temples for God, it stands to reason that He cares about what we do with them.

2 ***Sex is special.*** While the modern world tends to see sex as a mere bodily function of little consequence, [4] in fact to be sexually joined to someone does (or should) create a deep connection and bond. To share one's body is to share one's whole self and become "one flesh" (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5,6; 1 Corinthians 6:16); deep emotions are unlocked in a way that is intimately personal. Sex ***means*** something because it involves the whole person, the inner as well as the outer. Some writers with no allegiance to biblical morality are increasingly recognising this: the world

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2 We mention this fact because it provides insight into God's view of the seriousness of these moral matters, not to suggest that we are directly under the Law today. See section 2.

3 Many think that the phrase 'Every sin that a man commits is outside the body' is a quotation of a Corinthian slogan to which Paul responds ('Be that as it may, sexual sin certainly isn't outside the body – it is ***against*** the body'; cf. verse 13). Alternatively, Paul may himself be drawing the contrast in saying that sexual sin is different from other sins because it is against the body. In what sense 'against' the body? Because (1) sex is a whole-person act, involving one's very self, one's whole being; (2) our body is not our own; it belongs to God, so to sin sexually is to offend against what is His; (3) our body has been incorporated into Christ's body; so we are being unfaithful to Christ by uniting wrongfully with another.

4 Ironically, it is simultaneously Western society's greatest obsession! There is a real contradiction here which is never resolved. Only when sex is considered from a divine perspective can we get a truly balanced 'doctrine' or theology of sex.

of Tinder and cheap hook-ups does not deliver on its promise because it does not provide the true satisfaction and settled one-ness that human beings crave and sex is meant to signify. When we start to appreciate the deep significance of sexual union – even at a non-spiritual level – we can start to understand God's wisdom in providing such clear guidelines and a particular context for it. It is for our own good and protection, not to spoil our fun, that God has provided us with boundaries. He knows us and what is good for us far better than we know ourselves.

3 ***Relationships have a spiritual meaning.*** For the believer, sexual relationships and marriage are even more special. Although they can bring joy in and of themselves, their primary purpose is not actually for our own personal gratification (the idea that this is the reason for everything is a curiously modern, Western notion). Their purpose is creative: to bring godly fruitfulness (yes, children for those so blessed, but also spiritual 'fruit' as the man and woman together serve their Maker). More, their purpose is to provide a spiritual ***pattern*** and ***parable*** of Christ and his Bride. This typology is enormous, transforming our relationships and giving them a significance beyond our own personal interests. But it is ***His*** pattern, not ours to morph as we please. Just as we would not deny the importance of the symbols of bread and wine or of baptism, neither should we deny the symbol of Christ and his Bride modelled in marriage; it requires a man and a woman to model this (Ephesians 5), and any 'union' outside this relationship (whether heterosexual or homosexual) breaks that parable.

It is the ***symbolism*** of the body, sexual union and marriage, therefore, that makes sexual morals an important matter. It is not Victorian prudishness, or some curiously inverted 'obsession with sex' that leads us to try to uphold Bible teaching. Rather, it is the belief that our bodies, our relationships and the marriage of a man and woman are precious, God-given gifts with deep meaning. As Bible believers we have a high view of sex and relationships.

The flip side is that other behaviours which do not fit that pattern are correspondingly forbidden in Scripture, as reflected in virtually every vice-list in the New Testament. If a person is deeply attracted to another outside these bounds (whether emotionally or lustfully, homosexually or heterosexually, 'naturally' or through perversion), it may well feel excruciatingly hard to resist; but if it is forbidden or contrary to the principles of Christ, then we are called to trust our Maker and do so. At the time this may feel completely unnatural. But God calls us from the natural to the spiritual.

But what about love?

Of course, the principle of love is essential; God ***is*** love. But we need to be careful. God is not ***only*** love; that isn't a full or sufficient description. He is also the Creator, the One who gets to say what is good (Genesis 1 and everywhere). If He says that something is not good, then it is not for us to say otherwise. The principle of love is not licence to ignore God's explicit commandments; we need to present the whole truth of Scripture on moral as well as doctrinal matters. Certainly, there is forgiveness for failure and compassion in temptation. But we dare not present a half-gospel. The New Testament contains passages about both forgiveness ***and*** discipline. Jesus certainly welcomed sinners, but he did so into a gospel of repentance, not a gospel of 'do as you see fit'.

Some have asked, "Can't we just agree to differ regarding these matters?" [5] But this involves disregarding or reinterpreting not just the immediate passages, but also key relationship principles embedded in creation. God has told us what marriage is and what it means. He has told us what the bounds for sexual activity are. Who are we to dispute this?

Jesus' dialogue with the rich young ruler is helpful. Jesus saw him and ***loved*** him (Mark 10:21,22) – and it was in that love that he demanded something that the young man judged himself unable to give, at that time at least. Jesus did not make a mistake here. Our ecclesias must indeed be places for sinners – we are all far from perfect, and struggle with different besetting sins – but that does not excuse us for condoning what God has not.

Is it fair?

We turn now to the question of whether it is fair for God to ask believers who experience same-sex attraction not to practise. Unfortunately, human

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5 Some claim that Christadelphians do this with respect to divorce and remarriage, so why not here? But the two cases are quite different. The community is not in doubt about whether divorce and remarriage is wrong or contrary to the divine ideal. We know that it is, and that it is only for our 'hardness of heart' that it happens; no one 'campaigns' for divorce and remarriage. There is recognition of biblical truth by all ecclesias, and the difference in approach is about what we do when a breach occurs (and whether there are biblical concessions for those situations). With same-sex relations we are dealing with something that does not pass definitions of what constitutes biblical marriage, and which some wrongly claim is not contrary to the Bible.

beings are not in a very good position to judge what is fair; we are too heavily invested in our own human perspectives. Is it fair that only some must struggle with chronic back pain or congenital heart disease? Is it fair that only some suffer with crippling anxiety or depression? Is it fair that some experience higher levels of sex-drive and sexual temptation – that some have appropriate outlets and others do not? Is it fair that only some find a life partner, or that some have happy marriages while others do not? We ought to be cautious about according some forms of spiritual challenge a status that is not given to others; we ***all*** need support and the mercy of God in our trials. Temptation and trial are not evenly distributed, and God does not 'owe' us any particular outcome. We cannot fathom this any more than Job could – but we can trust that God is in control; He will not burden us with trials greater than we can bear.

We cannot therefore construct a scale of human temptation and inclination and claim that somewhere on that scale there is a point where our feelings flip over into an 'identity' that cannot or must not be denied, and where disobedience of God's commands is now justified. The gospel message is about repenting and dying to ourselves and our natural inclinations, a struggle which takes on different forms and intensities for each of us. Only God knows the true scale of our feelings and how they compare with anyone else's. Resisting temptation is bound to feel unnatural, almost by definition. Every male-female couple madly in love but refusing to sleep together before marriage has probably felt it. Many an adulterer may have said, "But if feels so natural, so right!", but such feelings do not ***make*** it so. In fact, Bible teaching about human hearts and our sinful nature suggests that we should be cautious about placing too much emphasis on our feelings. To do otherwise reflects the spirit of our times more than the spirit of the Bible.

We do not know definitively what causes feelings of same-sex attraction (nor do we need to know, or God would have told us; what He has done is given us His commands). It appears not to be as simple as saying it is just biology, or just chemistry and hormones, or just to do with upbringing or childhood experience. In any particular case it is likely to be a combination of several factors. The explanation for how human sexuality develops is likewise not simple, but in simple terms it appears to be a complex blend of nature and nurture. But, while we may find it very difficult at times (perhaps most of the time!) to bring our feelings and preferences into subjection to God's will and His Word, we have much more control over whether and how we ***act*** on those feelings. We do have choice over our actions.

Fallenness and the will of God

Stepping out for a broader view, we can look at ourselves from a divine perspective: God has given us talents and capabilities, both physical and mental, yet our makeup in these domains may also be designed to challenge and develop us (sometimes our very blessings are also our challenges). One Christian writer who has struggled all his life with same-sex attraction but does not practise notes that it has been his greatest struggle, but paradoxically also his greatest blessing in developing Christlikeness. This will not be everyone's experience, and there was certainly much agony for him in coming to that outlook, but it is interesting that similar comments have been made by those experiencing very different sorts of trial.

We can also look at ourselves from a biological and environmental perspective (nature and nurture): we inherit so much from our parents (positive attributes, but also mental and physical challenges), and we grow up and live in an environment which may impact us positively or negatively (socio-economic deprivation, broken homes and worse). Both our biology and our environment are subject to a fallenness that is not our fault; we are a fallen and broken species living in a fallen and broken world; so not everything is as it should be with respect to both who and where we are. But it is still important how we respond.

We cannot disaggregate these two perspectives (divine yet inheriting; fearfully and wonderfully made yet corruptible and fallen), so we cannot fully explain and understand the way we are, nor say that some particular aspect of it must be inherently good or bad. Rather, it is what we ***do*** with it that counts. We can have confidence that God is in control, that nowhere is beyond His reach, and that His commands are for our good.

As Bible believers we ought to be careful, therefore, about embracing modern ideology about sexual identity and people being 'born this way' uncritically, as if our 'nature' and feelings are ***by definition*** and ***of necessity*** a good thing [6] – especially so if such claims are part of an argument whose conclusion is that we should disobey God. Given that we are fallen, mentally

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6 A similar point can be made with respect to our 'nurture' or upbringing. We cannot say that it is definitionally and inherently good. In all of this we cannot disaggregate or deconstruct ourselves; only God can truly search and know us (Psalm 139:23). The way of man is "not in himself"; it is not for us to look within to direct our steps (Jeremiah 10:23).

and physically, and that God confers blessings upon us but also challenges us, we have no firm basis to say, "I must be true to myself in this regard, because that is the way I am made." Being 'true to yourself' in that sense is scarcely a biblical principle. Instead, the only thing that we can do is to turn to the Scriptures and ask, "Lord, in this bodily temple that You have given me, but which I know to be compromised in various ways by fallenness and sin, what would You have me do?" Our route is not to turn inwards to determine for ourselves what feels right, but to turn to the Scriptures to see what God says. Because we ***feel*** something does not mean that it is good. Only God can tell us whether or not it actually ***is***. That is what His Word is for.

5 | Living with our feelings and offering support

ALL temptation is difficult, especially sexual temptation. Even though temptation and feelings are not in themselves sin, that does not make them go away; they still have to be borne and lived with. Some will find it helpful to talk ('a burden shared'); others will feel it far too private a matter; there is no 'one size fits all'. It may be helpful to know that, for many, the intensity can lessen with age, and also that others are also struggling with this and other kinds of sexual temptation; we are not ***in fact*** alone in our struggles, even though it may feel like that. Not finding the right person, or being attracted to someone we cannot be with (whether heterosexually or homosexually), or being in a relationship where love has gone cold and intimacy is long gone or is not physically possible – all of these are real-world experiences and extremely hard. Many experience trials and weakness which they probably did not look for, and we need the mercy and love of our Lord and our brothers and sisters to help us through.

Whilst it may not lessen the challenge of singleness and celibacy for those who pursue it, there may be comfort in knowing that this was the road walked by our Lord. To deny ourselves for him in this way would indeed be to take up our cross and follow closely, a burden borne because of love and respect for God's commandments. We would be joining many heterosexually attracted singles, who, by their choice or otherwise, are seeking to devote themselves to their Lord. It is good to know that, although our Lord was alone in one sense, in another sense Jesus was the most fulfilled and complete person who has ever lived. Sexual union does carry spiritual symbolism, as we have seen, but it is not actually a ***necessity*** of life (as our Lord shows), nor the 'Holy Grail' that our culture constantly claims. As the Apostle Paul argues, singleness can give us the potential of experiencing even more togetherness with our Lord to whom we are, in fact, already betrothed (1 Corinthians 7:32-35).

The challenge, of course, is not just – or even mainly – about sex. It is about loneliness and potential lack of companionship. One dimension of this is common to all singles, but there are also specific aspects for those who experience same-sex attraction. In a close community like ours, just to know that we experience different attractions from the majority can induce feelings of isolation and almost unbearable loneliness, perhaps

accompanied by a sense of guilt when feelings are experienced. We need the warmth and companionship of our brothers and sisters, not to mention their understanding, when we feel like this – and to know that, biblically speaking, we are not defined by our inclinations; our identity stands rather as children of God and part of Christ's Bride. It is he who loved us and gave himself to make us one with him.

Thus it is that being able to share our struggles, and to feel in some measure understood, can be extremely helpful. One brother who has lived with same-sex attraction for many years writes:

> "The first time that I was encouraged to talk about my inclinations brought relief which was a wonder to me, and my gratitude to the brother who spoke to me lives on in my mind. Ever since then it has always been a great source of comfort and security for me to know that the people I am able to talk to in this way, whether at work or in my spiritual life, are aware of and accept me. For those who are able to open their hearts and ears to listen and support, it can bring tremendous feelings of relief and gratitude for the talker, as a difficulty shared."

It is with the challenges of loneliness and companionship that our community has the potential to really come into its own in the support and fellowship that it is able to provide. How can we do otherwise than to reach out in love, considering needs and unintrusively making sure that all are included and cared for? We well remember Jesus' words about the support that he received in the struggles he faced: "You are those who have stood by me in my trials" (Luke 22:28, NIV). Imagine being able to be that for your brother or sister, as the disciples were for Jesus!

I have found Christian writer Ed Shaw's book *The Plausibility Problem* [1] helpful on these practical matters. He writes as a celibate, same-sex-attracted believer discussing what has and what has not been helpful for him, while giving a glimpse into the challenges of his life. What was not helpful for him was people telling him that his struggles were rather pointless: that he should just give in and adopt society's 'new perspective' on relationships, sweeping aside clear Bible teaching; or that he should accept society's new default thinking about identity ('your identity is who you are attracted to sexually') instead of the more fundamental and liberating identity in Christ which has

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1 This is the current UK title; it seems to be titled somewhat differently in other markets.

so much more to say about who a person is and can be. But he writes most eloquently of the loving support that fellow-believers can provide, which is able to make someone feel they are not alone but are indeed part of a very special, supportive family. Although we would not agree with him doctrinally, this is a useful book to provoke thought about how we can support our brothers and sisters.

And for our children and young people, if they have questions and feelings – so tough in a world which is inclined to jump on and even exploit those feelings ("How do you know unless you have tried?") – they need to know that we love them. They need our support and our understanding, as best we can, of the pressures that they are under. [2] But they also need, more than this, the knowledge that ***God*** loves them and cares for them, that He knows them and their struggles, and that in His Word He has given them guidance which is good and which makes sense. Not only so, He has given His Son for them such that, if they seek to follow Him and trust His commands, they may live. We need to talk and to share God's Word lovingly, and also to hug and to hold.

There is no place in our midst for unkindness, ostracisation, gossip, mockery or any such thing for anyone, whatever a person's feelings and temptations may be (and whatever stereotypical gender traits anyone does or does not have). We need to get better at thinking ***how*** we support those struggling with temptation, of whatever kind, and those who are lonely.

To be attracted to those we cannot be with if we have chosen to live a life of biblical morality will indeed be a hard road. But whatever our past, and whatever mistakes we make, there is forgiveness, and there is understanding from our Lord. We can be assured that we are loved in the fallenness that besets us all, and that he is with us in our struggles. It is a great reassurance and comfort to know that our Lord suffered trials as intense as any we face, that he was able to overcome, and that he did so for us. He is able to pity and to comfort us precisely because he shared our nature and our trials (Hebrews 12:18). In God's great mercy, there will come a time when those trials will finally be over and we shall be redeemed through Christ's great conquest. It is in our weakness that God's strength is made perfect.

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2 We have our work cut out. One academic survey showed that UK young people strongly prefer to turn to the Internet or to their friends, rather than to their parents, to discuss these issues. Our support needs to be demonstrably better than what the world provides, founded as it is on the life-giving principles of Scripture.

FURTHER READING
ON RELATED THEMES

The Commandments of Christ

The New Life (John Marshall)

Growing up into Christ (Phil Shaw & Greg Palmer)

Resisting the Devil (Robert Prins)

Steps to True Marriage (Harry Tennant)

For Better, For Worse – book and workbook (Mark Vincent)