

Homosexuality, the Christian Perspective

by Lehman Strauss, Litt.D., F.R.G.S.

Q. What is homosexuality?

Homosexuality is the manifestation of sexual desire toward a member of one's own sex or the erotic activity with a member of the same sex. (The Greek word *homos* means *the same*). A lesbian is a female homosexual. More recently the term "gay" has come into popular use to refer to both sexes who are homosexuals.

Q. How does one determine if the practice of homosexuality is right or wrong?

That depends upon who is answering the question. The Christian point of view is based solely upon the Bible, the divinely inspired Word of God. A truly Christian standard of ethics is the conduct of divine revelation, not of statistical research nor of public opinion. For the Christian, the Bible is the final authority for both belief and behaviour.

Q. What explicitly does the Bible teach about homosexuality?

This question I consider to be basic because, if we accept God's Word on the subject of homosexuality, we benefit from His adequate answer to this problem. I am concerned only with the Christian or biblical view of homosexuality. The Bible has much to say about sex sins in general.

First, there is adultery. Adultery in the natural sense is sexual intercourse of a married person with someone other than his or her own spouse. It is condemned in both the Old and New Testaments (Exodus 20:14; I Cor. 6:9, 10). Christ forbids dwelling upon the thoughts, the free play of one's imagination that leads to adultery (Matthew 5:28).

Second, there is fornication, the illicit sex acts of unmarried persons which is likewise forbidden (I Corinthians 5:1; 6:13, 18; Ephesians 5:3).

Then there is homosexuality which likewise is condemned in Scripture. The Apostle Paul, writing by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, declares that homosexuality "shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (I

Corinthians 6:9; 10). Now Paul does not single out the homosexual as a special offender. He includes fornicators, idolators, adulterers, thieves, covetous persons, drunkards, revilers and extortioners. And then he adds the comment that some of the Christians at Corinth had been delivered from these very practices: "And such were some of you: But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God" (I Corinthians 6:11). All of the sins mentioned in this passage are condemned by God, but just as there was hope in Christ for the Corinthians, so is there hope for all of us.

Homosexuality is an illicit lust forbidden by God. He said to His people Israel, "Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination" (Leviticus 18:22). "If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them" (Leviticus 20:13). In these passages homosexuality is condemned as a prime example of sin, a sexual perversion. The Christian can neither alter God's viewpoint nor depart from it.

In the Bible sodomy is a synonym for homosexuality. God spoke plainly on the matter when He said, "There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel, nor a sodomite of the sons of Israel" (Deuteronomy 23:17). The whore and the sodomite are in the same category. A sodomite was not an inhabitant of Sodom nor a descendant of an inhabitant of Sodom, but a man who had given himself to homosexuality, the perverted and unnatural vice for which Sodom was known. Let us look at the passages in question:

But before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house around, both old and young, all the people from every quarter:

And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? Bring them out unto us, that we may know them.

And Lot went out at the door unto them, and shut the door after him, And said, I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly.

Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes: only unto these men do nothing; for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof. (Genesis 19:4-8)

The Hebrew word for “know” in verse 5 is *ya,da*, a sexual term. It is used frequently to denote sexual intercourse (Genesis 4:1, 17, 25; Matthew 1:24, 25). The message in the context of Genesis 19 is clear. Lot pled with the men to “do not so wickedly.” Homosexuality is wickedness and must be recognized as such else there is no hope for the homosexual who is asking for help to be extricated from his perverted way of life.

Q. You said that sexual intercourse outside of marriage is condemned in the Bible. How do you explain marriage ceremonies in which two persons of the same sex are united by an officiating clergyman or justice of the peace?

There are cases on record where a marriage license was issued to persons of the same sex. I recall one such incident in Phoenix, Arizona. A marriage license was issued in the Maricopa County clerk’s office to two men 39 and 21 years old respectively. The two men are reported to have “married” in a private ceremony.

However, to call a union of two persons of the same sex a “marriage” is a misnomer. In the Bible, marriage is a divinely ordered institution designed to form a permanent union between one man and one woman for one purpose (among others) of procreating or propagating the human race. That was God’s order in the first of such unions (Genesis 1:27, 28; 2:24; Matthew 19:5). If, in His original creation of humans, God had created two persons of the same sex, there would not be a human race in existence today. The whole idea of two persons of the same sex marrying is absurd, unsound, ridiculously unreasonable, stupid. A clergyman might bless a homosexual marriage but God won’t.

Q. A Jesuit Priest, John J. McNeill, reportedly said in a conference (Christianity Today, June 3, 1977), “There is no clear condemnation of homosexual activity to be found anywhere in the Bible.” How does a church leader arrive at such a conclusion?

This particular Jesuit priest, like some other supposedly Christian theologians, have totally ignored

the Scriptures as the guidelines for Christian behaviour in regard to homosexuality. McNeill does not speak for the Roman Catholic Church, but for a small segment of priests who, having vowed themselves to celibacy, that is, to abstain from marriage and sexual intercourse, have found sexual gratification in homosexual acts.

However, religious sex perverts are plentiful among protestants. Protestant leaders on both sides of the Atlantic have gradually eased away from the Scriptures. In England men like Bishop John Robinson, in his book *Honest to God* made a play on the term “The New Morality,” which in reality was a plea to open the door to immorality making it respectable and thus acceptable. The Bishop went so far as to describe the unscriptural adulterous relationship as “a kind of holy communion.” This modern concept of Christian ethics rejects totally the precepts laid down by God in His Word. It is blasphemous and atheistic.

Recently in America ten homosexually oriented religious organizations, comprised of men and women from more than a dozen denominations, and from seventeen states and Canada, met at Kirkbridge, a retreat and study center near Bangor, Pennsylvania. The retreat was entitled, “Gay and Christian.” But the two terms, “gay” and “Christian” are mutually exclusive, incompatible, incongruous.

Representing the women at that retreat, Nancy Krody a lesbian, spoke on “The Lesbian Christian Experience.” Here again is a misnomer. A practicing Christian, from the biblical viewpoint, will not be a practicing homosexual. Of course, I make the distinction between a professing Christian and a practicing Christian. Calling one’s self a Christian does not make one a Christian.

Malcolm Boyd speaks about “The Gay Male Christian Experience.” Boyd, a protestant clergyman, says he has been a homosexual secretly for years. Only recently he made a public announcement of his homosexuality. He claims that his public announcement of his homosexuality has brought him back to the church. Boyd does not tell us what he means by the “church”!

Following is one point on which the speakers at Kirkbridge agreed: “A monogamous homosexual relationship characterized by fidelity, honesty and love is possible, desirable, and honoring to God.”

Any evil condemned in Scripture cannot be honoring to God. Homosexual religious leaders attempt to smooth over the breaks and rough places with

Christian terminology so that a euphoria predominates, but God is not in it. A truly born again person, who loves and understands the Bible as God's revelation to him, will not condone an evil that God condemns. "If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him" (I John 2:29). "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And, let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (II Timothy 2:19). Practicing homosexuals are engaged in a divinely forbidden evil.

Q. Why do homosexuals refer to themselves as "gay"?

The word "gay" means merry, exuberant, bright, lively. More recently it has been adopted by homosexuals. In its original use it did not have this double meaning. The clever adaptation of the word "gay" by homosexuals has robbed it of its pure meaning, thereby corrupting a once perfectly good word. I never use the word "gay" when referring to homosexuals. There are many bright, exuberant, merry people in this world who are not sexual perverts.

Q. You made reference to First Corinthians 6:9-11. What is the meaning of the word "effeminate" in verse 9?

There are certain words in every language that can be used in a good or bad sense. In the context of this verse the use of "effeminate" is obviously in a bad sense. It is listed among other evils which are condemned. It describes feminine qualities inappropriate to a man. It is normal and natural for a woman to be sexually attracted to a man; it is abnormal and unnatural for a man to be sexually attracted to another man. Many male homosexuals are effeminate, but not all. Nor are all lesbians unduly masculine.

Q. Are there other Scriptures in the New Testament which deal with homosexuality?

Yes. Romans 1:24-27; I Timothy 1:10 and Jude 7. If one takes these Scriptures seriously, homosexuality will be recognized as an evil. The Romans passage is unmistakably clear. Paul attributes the moral depravity of men and women to their rejection of "the truth of God" (1:25). They refused "to retain God in their knowledge" (1:28), thereby dethroning God and deifying themselves. The Old Testament had clearly condemned homosexuality but in Paul's day there were those persons who rejected its teaching. Because of their rejection of

God's commands He punished their sin by delivering them over to it.

The philosophy of substituting God's Word with one's own reasoning commenced with Satan. He introduced it at the outset of the human race by suggesting to Eve that she ignore God's orders, assuring her that in so doing she would become like God with the power to discern good and evil (Genesis 3:1-5). That was Satan's big lie. Paul said that when any person rejects God's truth, his mind becomes "reprobate," meaning perverted, void of sound judgment. The perverted mind, having rejected God's truth, is not capable of discerning good and evil.

In Romans 1:26-31 twenty-three punishable sins are listed with homosexuality leading the list. Paul wrote, "For this cause God gave them up into vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet" (Romans 1:26, 27). These verses are telling us that homosexuals suffer in their body and personality the inevitable consequences of their wrong doing. Notice that the behaviour of the homosexual is described as a "vile affection" (1:26). The Greek word translated "vile" (*atimia*) means filthy, dirty, evil, dishonourable. The word "affection" in Greek is *ispathos*, used by the Greeks of either a good or bad desire. Here in the context of Romans it is used in a bad sense. The "vile affection" is a degrading passion, a shameful lust. Both the desire (lusting after) and the act of homosexuality are condemned in the Bible as sin.

Q. There are those persons who say that homosexuality, even though a perverted form of the normal, God-ordained practice of sex, is a genetic problem, constitutionally inherited. Is there evidence to support this view?

I read in a periodical that in June, 1963 a panel of specialists in medicine, psychiatry, law, sociology and theology participated in a conference on homosexuality called by the Swiss Evangelical Church Union. That group reached the conclusion that homosexuality is not constitutionally inherited, it is not a part of one's genetic makeup. The ill-founded and unverifiable myth that homosexuality results from genetic causes is gradually fading away.

There are possibly a number of different ways in which homosexual practices could begin. When

boys and girls reach puberty and the genital organs develop, it is not uncommon for boys to experiment with boys, and girls with girls. In prisons where men and women are denied access to persons of the opposite sex for long periods of time, some are introduced to homosexuality for the first time.

A young Christian woman came to our office in Detroit for counseling. She became involved in lesbianism when her marriage began to fail. She was introduced to her first homosexual experience by a divorcee who was her neighbor. After six months of practicing lesbianism she was convicted of her sin and sought help. We were able to show her from the Bible that she was sinning and that God stood ready and willing to forgive and cleanse her. She confessed and forsook her sin, and continues to this day to live a happy, normal Christian life.

Homosexuality must be accepted for what God says it is—sin. Some homosexuals will attempt to circumvent the plain teaching of the Bible with the insipid reply that they are the way God made them. There is not the slightest bit of evidence in Scripture to support this false concept. God never created man with a so-called “homosexual need.” No baby is born a homosexual. Every baby is born male or female. In every place the Bible refers to homosexuality, the emphasis is upon the perversion of sexuality. The practicing homosexual is guilty of “leaving the natural use of the woman” (Romans 1:27), meaning that his behaviour is “against nature” as in the case of the lesbian (Romans 1:26). Inasmuch as homosexuality is opposed to the regular law and order of nature, the genetic concept must be ruled out completely. If homosexuality were a genetic problem, there would be little hope for the homosexual simply because there is no way that the genes in a person can be changed.

Q. Are there contributing factors to homosexuality for which a homosexual might not be responsible?

Yes, I believe there are. I have not done much research in this area, however, studies made by others showed varied deviations from the average or normal parent-child relationship. For example, clinical cases show that some homosexuals have not had a normal or natural relationship with the parent of the same sex. In some instances there has been a wide gap between father and son. There are those boys who have been neglected by their unaffectionate fathers. The boy who has not had a good and wholesome relationship with his father could have an unfulfilled need for a father relationship with a

man. Now that need will not start out as a sexual one, but there are cases on record in which the sexual relationship has developed. I know one case of a homosexual adult who seduced a 13 year old boy whose father had forsaken him. Before the boy’s contact with the older man he had no knowledge whatever of homosexuality. The older man seduced the boy.

Lesbianism has been known to follow this same pattern. Some mother-daughter relationships are not conducive to a normal social and sexual development. One young woman came to her pastor seeking help. She had gotten involved with a lesbian in the community where she lived, a woman twenty-one years her senior. The girl’s parents had a defective marriage which ended in divorce when the daughter was ten years old. Her mother became bitter and resentful against all men. She convinced her daughter that men were not to be trusted, and that man’s one goal was to exploit women sexually. The daughter grew up with a fear of men, a fear totally unwarranted. She was an easy victim of the seductive older lesbian. The good and wise pastor showed the counselee from the Bible that homosexuality was sinful and that God condemned it. She confessed her sin to God and received Jesus Christ as her Savior and Lord. Today she is happily married to a fine Christian man.

Q. Do you believe that the homosexual controversy is causing problems for the churches of America?

Evil in any form is a problem in the church. It always has been. The greater problem, however, is the church’s failure to discipline evil when it arises. Karl Menninger’s book, *Whatever Became of Sin?*, deals directly with that point. There are ministers, priests, and rabbis who never talk about sin. There was a time when the minister of God’s Word preached the whole counsel of God. Today many pulpits are silent on the sin question. Sin has become fashionable and therefore acceptable. When sin gets its victim into serious difficulty, the psychiatrist and psychologist tell him he is sick. The church must face the fact of sin squarely.

Q. Does the Bible tell us how the church should deal with sexual sins?

In Old Testament times in Israel God dealt severely with homosexuals. He warned His people through Moses, “If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them” (Leviticus 20:13).

Every Jew knew that homosexuality was an abomination, a disgusting practice to be loathed, hated. This was God's attitude toward that evil practice. He hated it to the extent that He considered it worthy of punishment by death. Now God loved His people Israel dearly, and it was from His great heart of love that He chastened them. The Epistle to the Hebrews says, "For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth" (Hebrews 12:7). When God issued His law forbidding homosexuality, and the punishment for those persons who violated that law, He did so in order to prevent them from sinning. However, when anyone broke the law, the offender paid the penalty due him. God is a holy God who hates and judges sin. Parents who love their children will not refrain from warning them of prevailing evils, nor will they fail to chasten them when they disobey. The church today not only tolerates sin but in some instances condones it. God does neither.

In the New Testament the principle of discipline was applied with apostolic authority. In the church at Corinth the young man who was committing fornication with his step-mother was excommunicated. Paul instructed the church to take that action "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . and with the power (i.e. the authority) of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 5:1-8). In Romans 1:21-32 where Paul shows the Gentile world in its downward plunge into sin, including the sin of homosexuality, verse 32 concludes with the words, "who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death . . ." Worthy of death, yes. But today we are not under law but under grace. People used to hear and heed the Gospel-truth, the message that God is holy, man is a sinner, and that through faith in the substitutionary death and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, sinful people can be born again and thereby delivered from the guilt and penalty and practice of their sins.

Q. Do you have any suggestions or recommendations for the church?

Nothing is more foundationally essential for the church and the world than a return to the truth. Recently I read where someone said we are suffering from a famine of the worst kind, "a truth-famine." Our modern culture is in a degenerating, deteriorating stage caused by a departure from the truth. And I must say unequivocally that truth does not exist independently of God, and His written Word the Bible, and His Son Jesus Christ. Truth is in no sense of man's imagination or contrivance. Man

in his fallen state does not know truth, and that is why he continues to go on sinning. A civilization without the truth is doomed to oblivion. Every ancient civilization that ignored God and His laws has crumbled. Our present civilization is well on the road to doom. We cannot survive independently of God and His Word.

The Church must return to the truth, the whole truth, the sum total of truth founded and grounded upon Him Who said, "I am the truth" (John 14:6). In our Lord's high priestly prayer for His own He prayed, "Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy Word is truth" (John 17:17). There must be in our churches the clear exposition of the Scriptures and a continuing exaltation of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ if our civilization is to be saved from the disasters that overcame past civilizations. Any civilization with a philosophy or a doctrine which denies the real truth cannot survive.

Q. Do you see any prophetic significance in the recent homosexual upsurge?

Yes, I do. However, I would suggest caution on this point. It is not uncommon for preachers to attach a prophetic meaning to every earthquake, riot, war, moral scandal or political disaster, labeling all such events as "signs of the times."

The modern homosexual upswing is one phase of a declining trend in morals. When the disciples asked our Lord, "What shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the consummation of the age?" He told them that "iniquity shall abound" (Matthew 24:3, 12). There is today a permissiveness and a promiscuity in sexual behaviour unprecedented in the history of America. There is little restraint upon the widespread of material containing pictures and writing depicting erotic behaviour intended to cause sexual excitement. This would be included in our Lord's prophecy about abounding iniquity.

There is also a prophetic statement in Paul's Second Epistle to Timothy which has some bearing upon the subject we are discussing. Paul said, "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection . . ." (II Timothy 3:1-3). Homosexuality is an unnatural affection, practiced by persons "that defile themselves with mankind" (I Timothy 1:10), translated in the New American Standard Version "homosexuals," and in the New International Version, "perverts." I conclude, in

the light of these Scriptures, that the rise of homosexuality is very definitely a trend which indicates the approaching end of the age.

Q. Have you personally counseled with homosexuals?

Yes, in two pastorates over a period of twenty-five years. In each instance the homosexual was a man in his thirties who had seduced teen-aged boys. The seduction of younger persons is a pattern most homosexuals follow. They seem to prefer gratifying their lust with youth. This is a pattern typical of men who marry several wives. Men who do not respect their marriage vows pursue women younger than themselves. One man of wealth was reportedly married and divorced six times. Most of his wives were young enough to be his daughters. The two homosexual men who applied for a marriage license in the Maricopa County Clerk's Office in Arizona were 39 and 21 years old, quite a variation in ages.

Q. Do you attach any significance to the age factor you mentioned?

Yes, I do. I see a potential threat to young people who are exposed to homosexuals. Older practicing homosexuals are a threat to the youth.

Q. Do you care to make any comments on the Anita Bryant crusade in Dade County, Florida?

In my judgment Anita Bryant was justified in the action she pursued. She did not want her children exposed to the influence of a practicing homosexual in the public school classroom. Inasmuch as homosexuality is classified in the Bible as an evil, to insist that children be exposed to homosexual teachers in the public schools would be an infringement upon the rights of parents and their children. Under no condition would I permit my children to be subjected to the influence of a sex pervert. As an American citizen I consider that choice to be my right. Anita Bryant laid her career on the line in the bold and courageous stand she took. She should not have to fight the battle alone. Christians should support her.

Q. What should be the Christian's attitude toward the homosexual?

We must always keep before us the fact that homosexuals, like all of us sinners, are the objects

of God's love. The Bible says, "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Jesus Christ "is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (I John 2:2). The Christian who shares God's love for lost sinners will seek to reach the homosexual with the gospel of Christ, which "is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth" (Romans 1:16). As a Christian I should hate all sin but I can find no justification for hating the sinner. The homosexual is a precious soul for whom Christ died. We Christians can show him the best way of life by pointing him to Christ. Our Lord said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). We are obligated to take the gospel to all.

Q. How can we help Christians who get involved in the practice of homosexuality?

We can help them by seeking to draw their attention to what God says in His Word. In a kind and loving spirit we can show them that they are wrong. However, the homosexual must admit to the fact that he is living in sin and that he has the desire to be made free from it. Without a genuine conviction of God's displeasure and a strong desire to do God's will, there is no hope. A truly born again person cannot continue to practice sin without reaping the results of miserable unhappiness brought on by loss of fellowship with God, the fear of retribution and the anxiety produced by guilt. The homosexual must ask himself, "Is the temporary gratification of the flesh worth all the penalty and losses I must suffer?"

Dr. Strauss taught Old Testament history for eight years at Philadelphia Bible Institute, and served as pastor of the Calvary Baptist Church, Bristol, Pennsylvania, from 1939 to 1957. He was pastor of Highland Park Baptist Church (Highland Park, Michigan) until the end of 1963 when he resigned to devote full time to an itinerant Bible conference and evangelistic ministry both in the States and abroad. Dr. Strauss was writing his 19th book at age 86 when he went home to be with the Lord in June 1997. This pamphlet was originally made available through the Biola Hour radio ministry. His written materials are used by permission.

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