

An Open Letter about Homosexual Issues

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I wrote this letter a dozen years ago in answer to questions from a parishioner concerning progressive revelation, and the relationship of this issue to other things that the Church had been “wrong” about, such as divorce, women in ministry and slavery and race. Hence, the personal nature of my remarks.

Progressive revelation can mean a lot of things, some of which are eminently true. For instance, there has certainly been a progressive revelation going on in my life since becoming a Christian: the initiating revelation digs its way deeper into my heart and mind as the Holy Spirit searches out my heart for sins and my mind for darkness (deceptive, worldly thinking). The instrument He uses is the unchanging Word of God in scripture. But that is the Biblical pattern of progressive revelation—Jesus says, “I have many things to say to you and you cannot bear them all now.”

There is also "on-going" revelation in the sense that each and every day I look to the Word and the Spirit of God to reveal to me my steps throughout the day. Jesus is always speaking. The key principle of Spirit led guidance is always that Jesus never says anything contrary to His Word. Such double-mindedness on the part of God would be a serious fault in His character or defect in His ability to give us a reliable revelation of His mind. The essence of Biblical faith is taking God at His Word.

There is also a progression of the revelation in scripture as we move from the old covenant to the new—for there the moral law is deepened and reaches into the recesses of the heart, not just the outward behavior. For instance, “the wicked” are no longer a group of people, but it is now shown to be the wickedness of the fallen nature in each one of us. This is a progression within the revelation itself. The Holy Spirit sealed the canon through the synagogue and the church on both revelations that we are accountable for: The Old and New Testaments. There is no such thing in Scripture as truth itself changing and being changed by God “progressively” through history. When God’s truth is spoken of in this sense, the idea of “progressive revelation” makes a sham of God’s Word as eternal truth and God as eternally wise.

The analogies to divorce, women in ministry, slavery and race (used to support changing our views on same gender sex) are nowhere near as sturdy as the analogy between same gender sexual sin and bestiality, prostitution and incest. This is easily demonstrated, if we are willing to reason from the text. In the first place it is no sin to be a woman, a slave, or of whatever race. The desires and attitudes of the heart, our words and our behaviors—these are the areas where sin can find expression and it is this that is under question.

Is it “fair” to put this burden on homosexuals? There is no reason in scripture to believe that there is a separate people group that is "homosexual." There are only men who have sexual desires and behaviors that are sinful—some with others of the same gender, some with others of the opposite gender (for simplicity sake I am sticking to men). Is this given from birth? It hardly matters from the biblical perspective, because it is written that the sins of the fathers are passed down to succeeding generation. Original sin and the fallen nature get into us all in one way or another even in the womb. We all



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have compulsions or desires that do not line up with what is right. Just consider the ongoing battle everyone faces with selfishness and self-will. We are all badly broken by the fall and come into life separated from our God—not even knowing as infants that something is terribly wrong, something that only faith in Christ can begin to mend. For many the sins of those around them contribute immensely to their brokenness and separation from God, from their true self and from others. How is this fair?

One of the only things that has made my pain and struggles fair at all is God's promise of healing—of bringing me out of my darkness into His light. So, it doesn't matter so much what we begin with or how, if God can actually turn it all for good. Can He turn this around for good? There is no question in the mind of Francis McNutt or Leann Payne that God can and does heal homosexuals of the sinful behaviors and of the orientation itself. Agnes Sanford said that God healed the orientation *every time* she prayed with them. Others don't see such consistency, but neither do we see it with alcoholism, anorexia, or mental illness—all of which have their roots deeply embedded in the heart and in the broken family systems (generational patterns) of those so afflicted.

Why would God use Agnes Sanford (for instance) to heal people of what He "gave" them? In fact, the scriptures are clear that such things come to us through the fall and that our God has set out to reverse the curse. Does Jesus love men caught in homosexual sin? Of course, He does—He died for their sin and He has come with His Word to bring them to His Healing.

Being changed on this issue due to listening to their stories. Of course, you can listen to the heartache and deep introspections of people caught in the bondage of this condition (and many others) and unless you are grounded in seeing it from the perspective of revealed truth, the way that they imagine it to be can seem very convincing. *Deception is very convincing.* Good people fall prey to it all of the time. I have listened to adulterers who are absolutely convinced that their beloved is God's "given" to them. I have a friend right now in just such a deception. We all know it and if he were in his right mind, he would know it. But the pain in his life has him crying out for something he thinks God has "given" him and he is very convincing—until you get away and shake yourself. That is just the way deception works. The one deceived is always the last one to know because the enemy is very good at covering his tracks and at making his promises of fulfillment seem right and true—the only possible way for a broken life to be mended.

Back to false analogies and slavery being something the church repented of. Maybe my history is way off, but I seem to recall that the institution of slavery fell along with the Roman Empire and that the Catholic Church never sanctioned it. Neither did the Eastern Church. What arose in medieval Europe was a system of feudal vassalage, of serfs tied to the land—not yet true liberty, but not abject slavery either.

This argument only "makes sense" in the limited, myopic worldview of only looking at our history in the US, and distorted history at that. The church up until the colonial period did not champion slavery. There were serfs and indentured servants, etc. but slavery was the result of the sin of greed on the part of colonials, Europeans and warring tribes in Africa combined with a prejudiced view by Europeans that black Africans were less than human (nothing in scripture could have sanctioned this terrible view). These two errors combined at just the "right" time in history to provide a slave trade for the colonies in the New World. So, from about 1500 to 1865 you have what was essentially a huge



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“backsliding” on the part of one branch of Christendom where the issues of greed and slavery were concerned.

The church was not “corrected by the world.” Wesley knew it to be sin and he forbade his ministers to give communion to slave holders. It was his ministers’ sin that they gave in to the pressure of the plantation owners. Likewise, in England William Wilberforce believed himself commissioned by Christ Himself to end this terrible practice. In the states Christian abolitionists were clamoring for it to end. Since biblical texts were used by the abolitionists, Southern preachers scrambled to find texts of their own. This was clearly a manipulation of scripture on their part due to compromised belief. Nothing in the scriptures recommends slavery. The great story in both testaments is freedom from bondage. The overturning of slavery in this country was the result of the true church correcting a small erring branch (located in the southern states). Meanwhile the Eastern Churches remained unblemished and Europeans had already aligned with the influence of the Christian abolition of this practice in the worldwide British Empire.

Let me touch on divorce. I still teach the biblical stand on what is allowable where divorce is concerned (adultery and desertion). I call a lot of couples to repentance and I have seen marriages healed because someone was willing and able to believe the text was true. The country (since the 1960s) relaxed its laws that made divorce difficult and the churches went along with it. Since Jesus said that Mosaic law allowed divorce because of “the hardness of people’s hearts,” I am happy that the country gave a wider permission for divorce (especially for the sake of non-believers). There is a greater acceptance now for people who divorce which should have been there all along and wasn’t. So, to me this new climate of grace for couples who fail is a good outcome of the change in the divorce laws, even though the flood of divorces is a great evil that still needs mending. Jesus never said divorce was a good thing, only that it was permissible (i.e. not sinful) in two narrowly defined situations. Marriages are healed when people heed the warning in Jesus’ word (Matthew 18) and work on softening their hearts. I just don’t see any analogy here to the right or wrongness of homosexual behaviors, only to whether or not sinful behaviors (divorce for any reason, same gender sex, etc.) should be permitted in a free society.

The analogy to race only works if you believe that homosexuals are a people group separate from all other males. This begs the question—is it a sin or isn’t it? If it is a sin then they are no different than other groups in which sin is the identifying issue—greedy bankers, prostitutes, gluttons, Pharisees, gossips, people-pleasers, whatever.

What about “homo-phobia”? I see no weight to this kind of argument. I have ministered to people caught in this and they seemed grateful for my love and concern. I have a heart of compassion for them. So far as I am aware there is no insecurity about my maleness or secret fear of that kind of orientation going on inside of me. I came to Christian conversion as someone who embraced the idea that any kind of sexual activity was OK so long as no one was hurt—and that included what we called gay liberation back then. I cannot remember any time in which I hated or feared “gayness” in anyone I knew—or participated in thinking or speaking ugly words about them. But then with my conversion the Holy Spirit began to convict me of my own sexual sins by showing me the Word and by showing me His purity. What I now see is that the scriptures are clear, and that homosexual behavior is one of many sexual sins. Where does “homophobia” enter into it? Some people “on our side” may hate and fear homosexuals. I don’t doubt it. Some homosexuals seem to hate and fear conservative Christians. Do you doubt that?



Does that make them “Christo phobic? Slandering people on the other side when you cannot answer their arguments rationally is a true sign of weakness.

Biblical misinterpretation. Yes, I know that there is a great campaign mounted to show us that homosexual behavior has been misinterpreted all along, but if you want to see an excellent example of good exegesis on the subject, just read Robert Gagnon’s *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*. He absolutely demolishes all of the slender threads spun to twist the Word and rewrite history.

God’s Holiness. Reflect, if you will, on the holiness of God as it relates to the sexual expressions common to homosexuals. If these forms of anal and oral sex are not sinful, then they are holy, and it is from the Holy Spirit of God that the desire comes engage in sex that way and the Holy Spirit is the One who enters and upholds the sexual union rather than a spirit of lust. There are forms of sexual expression that are sinful even for heterosexuals who are married—and a spirit of lust is just as out of place there as elsewhere. Of course, where there is genuine love and affection between people that is to be commended. It is the sexualization of relationships (outside of covenanted marriage between a man and a woman) that is roundly condemned in Scripture.



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