

Rom. 14:19
So then let
us follow
after things
which make
for peace,
and things
whereby
we may
edify one
another.



John 8:32 And
ye shall know
the truth and
the truth shall
make you free.

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A BRIEF DEFENSE OF TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN SEXUAL ETHICS

by Shane Scott

A good friend of mine recently asked my thoughts regarding [this article](#), which offers a revisionist view of Christian sexual ethics (in this case, specifically with regard to same-sex issues). Over the years I have seen many articles like this which attempt to overthrow traditional orthodoxy on these highly personal and sensitive issues. I thought I would offer some brief thoughts in defense of the historical understanding of the biblical record on this topic. I want to begin with these crucial foundational principles of the Christian view of sexual ethics:

First, God is the creator of the universe (Genesis 1:1; Colossians 1:15-16). This means that the natural world is not a random assembly of bits of matter. Nature is the creation of God, and as such it is suffused with order, rationality, and purpose. Our rational nature allows us to discern the structures of the natural world and to live accordingly.

Second, Jesus Christ is King (Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:9-11). He is the ultimate sovereign, and calls his followers to absolute obedience. This means denying our own desires and wishes to live in keeping with his model of cross-bearing submission to God (Matthew 16:24). This is true regardless of our own feelings, inclinations, or desires.

Third, Jesus appointed representatives called apostles to defend and extend his authority over all nations (Matthew 28:19-20). To guide them in this mission, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles into the truth (John 16:13; 1 Corinthians 7:40). Anyone who dismisses the words of Paul or Peter or John merely because they are not in “red letters” (the words of Jesus) completely ignores what Jesus said in John 13:20 – *“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.”* I recognize that many people do not believe in God, or in the lordship of Jesus, or in the authority of the apostles. I think you should (duh!), and that there are

many good reasons for doing so. If you do not share these convictions, most likely we will not agree on highly controversial issues like same-sex conduct. But for those who do accept these truths, here is a survey of what Scripture says.

God’s Work of Creation

The crowning act of God’s creation in the account in Genesis is the creation of humanity. *So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27)* Just as there is order and structure to creation in general, there is special order and structure to the creation of humanity. Men and women share equal status and dignity as image-bearers of God, but are also different from and complementary to each other. Adam needs a partner who can be what the old translations called a *“help meet”* for him, what modern versions better capture as *“a companion who corresponded to him”* (New English Translation). This divinely ordered male-female complementarity is the foundation of everything else Scripture says about sex: Then the man said, *“This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (Gen. 2:23-24)*

God’s Covenant with Israel

As the biblical record unfolds, it is important to understand that the Bible is a very big story, with a huge narrative arc. So you always have to ask yourself, “Where are we in the story?” In some parts of the story, God is calling out the nation of Israel to be distinct from other nations. This is why there are certain laws that emphasize Israel’s distinct identity (through things like circumcision, dietary laws, holy days). That’s even why there are obscure laws about keeping things separate (like different kinds of seed, or clothing material). They served as visual reminders of Israel’s distinct identity. This is where the Book of Leviticus fits in with its (to our

ears) unusual and strange laws.

But in the larger story arc, it was not God's intent for Israel to remain separate forever. Through Israel, God brought the Messiah into the world, and for the whole world. So then at THAT point in the story line, those laws that kept Israel distinct were no longer needed (you can read a nice summary of this big picture in **Galatians 3:16-4:7**).

The Teaching of Jesus

But there are some principles that permeate all phases of the story arc. And from a traditional Christian point of view, this includes male-female complementarity in marriage. Jesus rooted this understanding in the fabric of the created order itself. Notice this passage from Matthew: *And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?" He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."* (**Matthew 19:3-9**)

The specific matter the Pharisees are questioning Jesus about is the divorce legislation found in another Old Testament legal document, the Book of Deuteronomy. But notice that Jesus draws their attention back to the creation narrative itself, to the male-female complementarity described in Genesis. And on the basis of that teaching, especially in light of the "one-flesh" union of marriage, Jesus says that divorce is wrong. He even explicitly argues that the later provisions of the Law of Moses were provisional and temporary in light of God's ultimate purposes reflected in creation – *from the beginning it was not so*. **Genesis 2** did not explicitly mention divorce, but Jesus draws out the obvious implication of its teaching regarding the subject. Anything that departs from this vision of the unity of a man and woman in marriage is a departure from the structure God infused into the created order. This includes:

- Divorce, which ruptures the *union* of male-female complementarity in marriage.
- Premarital sex, which ignores the union of male-female complementarity *in marriage*.
- Adultery, which *betrays* the union of male-female complementarity in marriage.
- And obviously, homosexual conduct, which subverts the union of *male-female* complementarity in marriage.

The Instructions of the Apostles

When the apostle Paul addressed the issue of same-sex conduct specifically, his arguments were also rooted in the natural order of God. For instance, in **Romans 1**, Paul argues that since the Gentiles suppressed the truth about God revealed in the natural order, God gave them over to – among other things – *"degrading passions."*

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

(Romans 1:26-27)

Right in line with the creation account, Paul says that the natural sexual counterpart for a woman is a man, and that same-sex acts are "contrary to nature." Notice carefully – what Paul condemns here are actions that are contrary to the natural order. Consequently, when the article my friend asked me to read claims that Paul "is simply not talking about loving partnerships between people with same sex orientation," it badly misses the point. Paul does not address the modern psychological construct of sexual orientation for good reason – that is simply irrelevant to the issue. It would make no difference to Paul whether the person engaging in same-sex acts identified as straight, gay, or bi. The issue is *the act itself*, regardless of the underlying orientation, and it is the act that is contrary to nature. There is one other statement from the article I would like to briefly comment on. The writer asserts:

In other words, monitoring and proscribing human (homo)sexual activity is not a particular concern of the Bible when compared to the overarching demand for justice, economic equality, and the fair treatment of foreigners and strangers. For certain Christian groups to make this the decisive Christian issue is simply a misreading of biblical values.

No one that I know believes that same-sex marriage is "the decisive Christian issue." The decisive Christian issue is the lordship of Jesus Christ. And far too often, those who claim to follow Jesus have indeed ignored, exploited, and oppressed the poor and needy. If Jesus is truly Lord, we do not get to pick and choose which issues we intend to take seriously. But this also includes the principles of sexual morality, principles which are woven into the very fabric of the created order itself.

Following Christ Then and Now

The teaching of Christ regarding these matters was not any more popular in the first century than it is today. In the pagan world, adultery, prostitution, and same-sex conduct were widely practiced. The apostles of Jesus frequently taught about sexual purity since this was

such a counter-cultural aspect of following Jesus (as in **1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-9; 1 Peter 4:3-5**).

And the lordship of Jesus defies the popular idolatries of our age. Our culture is radically individualistic, prizing personal happiness above any sense of the common good. And our culture champions subjective feelings over objective truth, favoring personal identity over structural reality. The realm of sexual behavior is just one arena in which these idolatries are cherished.

But Christ calls his people to resist the tide of culture. To rejoice in God's love and to share it with others. Not the vague, insubstantial "love" of pop culture which twists "love" into a code word for self-gratification. But love in its true sense, that which seeks the good of others, good as defined by God.

I know many Christians who are committed to following Jesus even though it means doing his will rather than their own in these deeply personal matters. Married Christians who remain committed to their wedding vows even when the times get tough. Single Christians who remain pure in their conduct in spite of the lure of the world. Same-sex attracted Christians who embrace the self-denying cross of Jesus and follow him in obedience. In all these ways, these brothers and sisters of mine reflect the essence of love. Love *"does not insist on its own way"* (**1 Corinthians 13:5**). The challenge of Christ's lordship ultimately comes down to insisting on our way or his way. In other words, it comes down to love.

Taken from focusmagazine.org

Editor's note.

This article by bro. Scott does justice to the defense of the biblical position on this matter. I recommend it to all as those who are placed in the position of defending God's word in a world that devotes untold energy to perverting it in order to justify conduct designed to satisfy the lusts of the flesh.

The average age of a homosexual man dying with AIDS is 39. The average age of gays dying of all other causes is 41. (The average heterosexual married man lives 75 years.) Only one percent of men who practice homosexual sex lives to be 65 or older. Gay men are three times more likely to have alcohol or drug abuse problems. Homosexuals are 14 times more likely to have had syphilis, and 23 times more likely to contract venereal diseases.

[From a 1993 report by the Family Research Institute.](#)

HOW OFT WOULD I BUT YOU WOULD NOT

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How

often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'" (**Matthew 23:37-39**).

Matthew continues to bring the theme of judgment into his narrative. Now, until the time is nearly on Him, Jesus brings the inevitability of facing God's judgment upon all. Early in Matthew, we have the Sermon on the Mount—three chapters that say: If you want to be a kingdom citizen, this is what you do. Now, at the end of Matthew's gospel we have three chapters that say: If you refuse to come to Me and repent and live in My kingdom, judgment is coming. The crowds, the Pharisees, and particularly *Jerusalem* had heard and continued to hear Jesus' impassioned pleas to come to Him. The Pharisees, blind hypocrites, refused God's revelation. Their outward actions appeared to be OK; yet they were dirty on the inside. They refused to shoulder the heavy burdens they placed on others; their outward professions of piety were hypocritical; their desire for the praises of men illustrated their true motives. Their actions were hypocritical; the gap between their professions and their actions was wide.

Through it all, though, Jesus continued to love these people. And His love was not (is not) incompatible with judgment. As His cousin John had done, Jesus called the Pharisees a brood of vipers. Still, even this stinging indictment was a sign of Jesus' love; He longed for them to see themselves as they really were. They had long paved their own road to destruction—spiritually and politically. Judgment time was drawing near. They had rejected the prophets sent by the Lord; still, even at this 11th hour, they could repent. But they refused. Judgment was coming upon Jerusalem—upon the people of the city. Jesus' grief is palpable. As the mother hen safely gathers her chicks, Jesus longed to gather all to Him for safety. *"He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge"* (**Psalms 91:4**). The destruction of the temple looms large; "your house," will be destroyed. Those who heard Jesus speak would soon cry, *"Crucify, Crucify Him!"* As they cried for His blood Jesus said: *"Father, forgive them."*

Jesus' earthly ministry was at an end. He would never again travel to the city with an offer of hope and forgiveness. *"For I say to you, you shall see me no more till you say, blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!"* The temple of His body was raised after three days in the tomb; His church would be built; it is His temple. If we refuse, we continue to heap the woes of judgment on ourselves. Or, we can yield and find comfort and protection in the shadow of His wings.

Randy Harshbarger

Psa. 1:1 Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, Nor standeth in the way of sinners, Nor sitteth in the seat of scoffers: 2 But his delight is in the law of Jehovah; And on his law doth he meditate day and night. 3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water, That bringeth forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also doth not wither; And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. 4 The wicked are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. 5 Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For Jehovah knoweth the way of the righteous; But the way of the wicked shall perish.

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JIM STAUFFER



What Must I Do To Be Saved?

Hear the gospel - Romans 10:17

Believe in Jesus Christ - Hebrews 11:6

Repent of sins - Acts 17:30

Confess Christ as Lord - Romans 10:9,10

Be Baptized for remission of sins - Acts 2:38

Be Faithful unto death - Revelation 2:10