

Same-Sex Marriage: A Current South African Christian Perspective

by

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Abstract

This article deals with same-sex marriage from a Biblical Christian perspective. It is not a treatise on homosexuality from either a Biblical or sociological point of view. The article deals with homosexuality, per se, only in as much as is necessary to examine the question of the Biblical Christian stance concerning same-sex marriage.

The article starts with a brief overview of the South African civil legal history of same-sex 'marriage' partnerships leading up to the current ruling by the Constitutional Court. The debate then starts with the Biblical definition of marriage before mining down to the two main arguments in favour of same-sex marriage and the homosexuality that underpins it – the appeal to the concepts of justice and love. Only then does the focus turn to the Biblical prohibitions concerning homosexual activity.

The second part of the article deals briefly with implications for church life, firstly from the perspective of how the church approaches same-sex marriage in general society, and then from the perspective of those within, or seeking to join, the church.

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1. Introduction

In December 2004, the South African Supreme Court of Appeal ruled that the definition of marriage be extended to include same-sex partners. The government took this on appeal to the Constitutional Court, which rejected the appeal in December 2005 and gave parliament one year to amend the Marriage Act. The issue of same-sex marriage is now a matter of both civic and religious importance.

In this article, I am addressing the issue of same-sex marriage, and not homosexuality *per se*. However, I cannot discuss the subject of same-sex marriage without some form of analysis of homosexuality. Moreover, I am focusing the discussion almost exclusively on the current South African situation. My perspective is that of a Christian minister and theologian and so I will not be focusing on purely psychological or sociological issues. Furthermore, my Christian perspective is that of one who is committed to the authority of the Bible and the effective lordship of Jesus Christ.

My objective in writing this paper is to explore the issue of same-sex marriage from a Biblical point of view and to present suggestions to Christians, and ministers in particular, as to a biblically sound position on this issue concerning both civil society and the church.

2. South African: Legal History and Current Situation

The current legal and parliamentary debate is the product of an evolutionary process dating back to 1999 when the Constitutional Court recognised the legitimacy of same-sex partnerships between immigrants. In 2002, the court granted same-sex couples the same financial status as that enjoyed by heterosexual partners. Also in 2002, the court allowed adoption by same-sex couples. In 2003, the court entitled same-sex couples to the same financial benefits as unmarried cohabiting heterosexual couples. In the same year, it granted legitimacy to children born to same-sex couples as a result of artificial insemination. In 2004, the Supreme Court of Appeal ordered that the government extend full civil marriage status to same-sex couples. They declared that under the Constitution, the common law concept of marriage

must be changed to include partners of the same gender. In his ruling, Judge Edwin Cameron stated that the definition of marriage should be altered to read, “Marriage is the union of two persons to the exclusion of all others for life” (www.365Gay.com, 2004-11-30). In 2005, the Constitutional Court rejected an appeal made by the Department of Home Affairs and gave Parliament until the end of November 2006 to amend the Marriage Act. If Parliament does not amend the Marriage Act appropriately by the end of November 2006 then the court ruling instructs that the Act be automatically amended by the addition of the words “or spouse” to the question that the marriage officer is required to put to each party to the marriage, as prescribed by section 30(1) of the Act.

The Marriage Alliance of South Africa, which claims to represent some twenty-four million South Africans, is currently making submissions to the Portfolio Committee of Home Affairs. It is also urging concerned Christians to lobby local and national members of Parliament (press release, 2005-12-02). However, my own understanding of the current situation is that representations to Parliament can merely influence the subtlety of the wording of any proposed changes to the Marriage Act. The Constitutional Court is the highest judicial authority in the land and it has ruled that Parliament must amend the Marriage Act to grant same-sex couples access to the status of full civil marriage. Parliament can only make changes to the wording that have the same import as the default addition of the words “or spouse.” Theoretically, Parliament could be persuaded to change the Constitution and by so doing render the Constitutional Court ruling of no effect. This is extremely unlikely to happen.

3. Legal, Civil and Religious Distinctions

The leaders of the Marriage Alliance of South Africa state that they “endorse and support the Courts referral of the matter to Parliament and thereby placing the final responsibility for the outcome on civil society and the people of South Africa” (press release, 2005-12-02). The Constitution of South Africa governs Parliament and the Constitutional Court is therefore the highest authority in the land in matters of civil liberties. As I have already observed, Parliament may well use different wording, but it must comply with the

intention of the court ruling that civil marriage be extended to same-sex couples. It seems to me to be just a matter of semantics. The Constitution enshrines the concept of 'secular state' and politicians and courts alike will inevitably give precedence to civil liberties over religious objections. A concern of the Constitutional Court is to ensure that all citizens be entitled to the rights afforded them under the Constitution. Marriage, from a purely secular perspective, confers a set of specific legal, economic and social rights. On this basis, the Constitutional Court holds that all qualifying citizens, irrespective of sexual orientation or gender, be entitled to the rights conferred by civil marriage.

The Constitution separates Church and State and the same Constitution that provides the basis for same-sex marriage also provides the basis for religious freedom. The church, through the able offices of groups such as the Marriage Alliance of South Africa, has attempted to influence the government and the courts to uphold the traditional definition of marriage, but have so far failed in this endeavour. The real issue now before us, as Christians, centres on how the church should view same-sex marriages within its own membership.

4. A Biblical Definition of Marriage

Those within the Christian church who are in favour of same-sex marriage usually start the debate by attempting to reinterpret the Biblical texts dealing with homosexuality. The approach seems to be that if homosexuality can be Scripturally justified, then same-sex marriage is a given. I do not think this constitutes sound reasoning. Marriage is more than just a means of legitimising sexual activity. I do not believe that the Scriptures provide grounds for practicing homosexuality, but even if they did, this would not mean that same-sex marriage would automatically be Biblically acceptable. Therefore, I will start the debate proper with the Biblical definition of marriage rather than with a discussion on the issue of homosexuality.

The Scriptural basis for marriage is rooted in the Genesis 2 creation account. God saw that it was not good for man to be alone and so He created a female companion for him. John Stott (1999:392) makes the point that men and women are complementary in many ways and that these complementary

differences constitute the basis for heterosexual marriage. Genesis 2:24 presents the concept that when a man and a woman are united in covenant relationship, it constitutes a bringing together of the two complementary parts. Adam's response to God's creation of Eve presents an even deeper level of meaning. He cried out, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh..." (Gen 2:23). The covenant union of a man and a woman is more than a uniting of complementary components; it is a reuniting. God created in such a way that the two genders need each other in order to be all that He intended humanity to be. Dr Peet Botha singles out reproductive physiology as a prime indicator of this complementary interdependence and comments that "this design feature indicates that heterosexual union is that which is intended" (Botha 2005:220). However, the complementary nature of the two genders extends beyond the physical to the emotional and even spiritual dimensions of the human makeup.

Genesis 2:24 contains the elements of marriage: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." A man will be united to his wife—one man and one woman. He will leave his parents home and will establish a new family unit. The husband and wife will become "one flesh," not only in terms of sexual union, but also with respect to the other complementary gender differences. The Lord Jesus confirmed this understanding of marriage by referring to the Genesis account when He said that "... at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female', and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:4-6). John Stott (1999:395) identifies three truths from this passage: (1) that heterosexual gender is the product of divine will; (2) that heterosexual marriage is a divinely ordained institution; and (3) that heterosexual fidelity is the divine intention. He then states that "a homosexual liaison is a break of all three of these divine purposes."

Conservative scholars often argue that a prime purpose of marriage is procreation and that marriage should never be divorced from its procreative potential (e.g., Wilson 2005). The Scriptures sanction sexual activity only within the bounds of marriage, natural reproduction results from sexual

intercourse, and so we can argue that because same-sex marriage cannot issue in natural reproduction, it is biblically illegitimate.

Pro same-sex marriage protagonists argue that the Biblical authors were addressing questions which were relevant then but not now. For instance, they might argue that the attempted male gang rape of Genesis 19 is not relevant to today's gay rights debate. This argument is something of a smokescreen. God, not culture, established heterosexual monogamy, and so it is both permanently and universally valid. The Marriage Alliance of South Africa argues forcibly that the historic understanding of exclusively heterosexual marriage is recognised from creation and time immemorial and that it is therefore prior to both Law and State (Marriage Alliance, 2005). They argue that because marriage is God-given, it cannot be legislated by either Law or Government. This is a tenuous argument. The commandment concerning adultery also precedes modern law and society, yet it is not legislated against. However, Christians should hold themselves accountable to a higher law. The Law of South Africa does not prohibit adultery, but we as Christians know that we "shall not commit adultery" (Deut 5:18). In the same way, the Law does not prohibit consenting sodomy, yet we, as Christians, ought to honour the higher law which states that a man must not "lie with a man as one lies with a woman" (Lev 18:22). Concerning same-sex marriages, state legislation may well allow the legal marriage of homosexual partners, but Christians ought to honour the God-given definition and purpose of marriage.

How we understand the authoritative role of the Bible and how we interpret the Scriptures lies at the root of the same-sex marriage debate. For those who believe that the Bible is, at best, a description of how the people who wrote it understood things, the argument for or against same-sex marriage is more one of social analysis than exegesis. Scholars who hold to what is customarily called a 'liberal' view of Scripture reason from two poles. Firstly, what are the norms of society as it has evolved? Secondly, what overriding Biblical values govern the issue at hand? These scholars have identified justice and love as the two major principles that they believe should inform the same-sex marriage debate.

5. The Appeal to the Concept of Justice

The second main line of argument in favour of same-sex marriage, from a liberal Christian perspective, is the appeal to the pre-eminence of justice in the Scriptural revelation. In South Africa, the liberation struggle and the theology that underpinned it, has paved the way for homosexual theology based on the concept of justice. According to John Stott, Bishop Desmond Tutu holds the view that just as we may not discriminate on the basis of gender or colour, so we may not discriminate because of sexual orientation (Stott 1999:495). “Gay liberation” then becomes an issue of human rights. A counter argument to this is that we may not claim as a right that which God has not given us in the first place. Of course, those who do not believe that human rights derive from the inherent dignity of humanity’s creation in the image of God rather than from practical expediency or democratic opinion will not accept this refutation.

Marvin Ellison (2004) explores this line of thought in his “Same-Sex Marriage? A Christian Ethical Analysis,” and concludes that justice requires what he refers to as “de-centering” heterosexual marriage and extending social and theological legitimacy to same-sex relationships. He argues that the form and function of marriage is largely dependant on historical and cultural factors. He claims that the concept of marriage is “evolving” and that, as a result, the concept of justice is the only standard by which we may judge the moral appropriateness of sexual unions. He acknowledges that marriage and family serve as building blocks of society and should, for this reason, be regulated not by Scriptural prohibitions, but rather by the concept of justice. He holds that justice demands the empowerment of same-sex unions as legitimate family forms.

Justice, as I understand it, is a word that describes what is fair and reasonable in terms of established law. I would go further to assert that true justice reflects God’s character and is therefore eternal and not subject to cultural redefinition. Herein is the crux of the issue. South African civil constitutional law has certainly determined that it is unjust not to extend the definition of marriage to include same-sex couples. However, the Law of God determines that same-sex marriage is not acceptable. What takes precedence, the Law of God or the Law of man? As Christians we can, and should, attempt to influence civil law to conform to God’s law, precisely because we believe that

divine concepts of justice take precedence over civic formulations. If the courts of our land rule in opposition to the dictates of Scripture then we should choose to hold ourselves accountable to the higher law, the Law of the Kingdom of God.

A variation on the “justice” argument is expressed in the question, “How could God make a person homosexual and then deny him, or her, the right to sexual expression and marital fulfilment?” This argument assumes two things. Firstly, that God specifically and immediately creates every human soul at the moment of conception and, secondly, that this individual genetic creation determines cross-gender sexual orientation. Firstly, I believe that the doctrine of immediate human creation flounders in the face of the doctrine of universal sin. Secondly, the Scriptures present homosexuality as a sin. This emotional and behaviour trait is, like all other sinful patterns of behaviour, a product of humanity’s alienation from God. The Bible teaches that sin is a universal condition passed down through the generations of humankind since the days of Adam and Eve. Homosexual orientation is, in this sense, no different from any other condition resulting from alienation from the creator. Protagonists of the “God made me gay” theory claim that modern genetic researchers have discovered what has popularly been labelled “the gay gene.” However, scientists completed the Human Genome Project in 2003 and have not published evidence of any genetic disposition towards homosexuality. Dr Peet Botha, in his book *The Bible and Homosex*, cites from a secondary source, the genetic researcher Dr Hamer as stating that “we have not found the gene—which we don’t think exists—for sexual orientation.” He also cites, from another secondary source, Dr LeVay as stating that “I did not prove that homosexuality is genetic, or find a genetic cause for being gay” (Botha 2005:234).

In their book, *What God Has Joined Together*, Letha Scanzoni and David Myers take the argument concerning justice one step further and argue that marriage is a fundamental human good and that, as such, it must be available to both heterosexual and homosexual couples. Marriage is indeed good but it is prescribed, Scripturally, as pertaining to one man in covenant relationship with one woman.

The appeal to justice is one of the two major platforms from which many liberal theologians argue the case in favour of same-sex marriage. The other platform is the appeal to love.

6. The Appeal to the Concept of Love

The essence of this appeal is that God is love and because love is the highest good, all issues, including same-sex marriage, ought to be judged in terms of this concept.

Some conservative scholars attempt to refute this argument by asserting that research indicates the temporary and tenuous nature of the vast majority of same-sex unions. This form of reasoning is flawed in two ways. Firstly, it is true that research indicates that the majority of same-sex unions are far less stable than heterosexual unions. However, to compare same-sex unions with heterosexual unions in our day is like comparing apples and pears. Same-sex unions are subject to stress factors not experienced in most heterosexual unions—stresses imposed by such things as religious taboos, social sanctions, personal prejudice and feelings of unworthiness. Secondly, I believe that we should not argue from current culture back to the Bible (eisegesis), but from the Bible to current culture (exegesis).

Scripturally, love is a cardinal value but it is not, in isolation, the highest value. John 14:15 records Jesus as saying, “If you love me you will keep my commandments.” Love and obedience to God’s injunctions are inseparably linked. 1 John 5:3 puts the matter this way: “this is love for God: to obey his commands.” The Bible also joins love with truth. 1 Corinthians 13:6 declares, “Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth,” and 1 Peter 1:22 states, “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.”

An important point to note in the Scriptures quoted is that both obedience to God’s commandments and truth partially define the concept of love. Those who hold that love has primacy must then adequately define what they mean by love. Any loose definition of love, uncoupled from the concepts of obedience and truth, opens the door to almost any “loving” relationship. Is it

acceptable to have a loving and perhaps sexual, simultaneous relationship with a number of partners? If so, and following the ‘primacy of love’ argument put forward, why shouldn’t polygamy be legalised? If a man has a loving relationship with his dog, should it then be acceptable for them to marry?

A secondary argument that flows from the primacy of love debate has to do with sexual expression. The point here is that it is neither just nor loving to prevent people from expressing their love sexually according to their orientation. Sex is seen as an integral component of marriage and so the argument extends from homosexual activity to same-sex marriage. Certainly, the Bible only gives legitimacy to sexual expression within the covenant of marriage but it does not indicate that sex is essential to human fulfilment. On the contrary, the Bible does not present singleness and abstinence as regrettable human conditions (see 1 Cor 7:8). If this were the case then the Scriptures would not teach against premarital sex.

Underlying the same-sex marriage debate is the attempt to legitimise homosexual activity, so I must now deal briefly with this issue.

7. Homosexual Activity

Those who argue in favour of same-sex marriage invariably start their argument with an attempt to show that the Scriptures do not prohibit homosexual activity. Other than the odd fatuous attempt to insinuate that David and Jonathan, Jesus and John, or Paul and Timothy were homosexual partners, the customary attempt to make their case by seeking to refute the texts that purport to prohibit homosexuality.

Genesis 19:1-3 records the story of how the men of Sodom wanted to have sex with Lot’s angelic visitors. Derrick Bailey (1955) was probably the first modern Christian theologian to attempt a reinterpretation of the Genesis 19 account. The main argument is that the Hebrew word *יָדָעַ* (*yada’*, v. 5), translated as “know” in the King James Version, does not mean “to have sex with.” The argument is that Lot had violated an important social custom by taking strangers into his home without the permission of the city elders and that the men of Sodom felt threatened and insisted on interrogating the

strangers to ascertain whether or not they constituted a threat. However, verse 8 records how Lot responded with, “Behold now, I have two daughters which have not *known* man...” (KJV). Here the Hebrew word is also *יָדָע*. In addition, Jude 7 states that, “Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion.” I believe the only way pro-homosexual theologians can argue against this kind of evidence is to hold that the Jude text is not inspired and should not be in the Bible. This takes the argument into the realm of the inspiration of Scripture debate. One of my underlying assumptions as I come to the task of evaluating the same-sex marriage debate is that the Bible as we have it is inspired and authoritative. Nevertheless, the context of the Genesis passage gives strong evidence of the meaning of verse 5 without appealing to the meaning of the word *yada* or to the Jude endorsement of the traditional interpretation. In a time of war or political unrest it could be that the men of Sodom were concerned by the appearance of strangers in their midst. Why though would Lot regard it as a ‘wicked thing’ for them to speak with the visitors? In addition, why would Lot even think of offering his virgin daughters in place of the visitors? The argument presented by pro-homosexual exegetes in this regard defies common sense and simple contextual analysis.

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 set out clear prohibitions against homosexual behaviour. The whole of Leviticus 18 deals with unlawful sexual relationships, yet the pro-homosexual theologians attempt to connect Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 with Deuteronomy 23:17 in an attempt to show that the Levitical prohibitions only apply to temple prostitution. Once again, the exegesis defies simple logic. Leviticus 18:22 simply says, “Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.”

In Romans 1:18-32, Paul portrays Roman society as decadent and promiscuous and within this context states that “even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way, the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion” (Rom 1:26-27). Pro-homosexual scholars make the claim that Paul did not have committed homosexual relations in mind when he wrote those words. I am sure he did not. Commitment or lack of commitment is clearly not the issue here. Paul, under the inspiration of the

Holy Spirit, is simply portraying homosexual acts as “unnatural” and “indecent.”

Pro-homosexual scholars also try to write off 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:8-11 as references to idolatrous pagan religious practices. It is hard to believe, however, that Paul had the specific issue of temple prostitution in mind when he included in his list of offences the very general sins of theft, greed and drunkenness. In addition, why then differentiate as he does between four types of sexual sin, namely, sexual immorality, adultery, male prostitution, and homosexuality? Yet again, the interpretation offered by the pro-homosexual theologians just does not make sense.

My considered opinion is that there are no reasonable Biblical grounds for homosexual activity. I find all attempts to interpret away the passages of Scripture prohibiting homosexual activity to be fanciful and unconvincing. In order to give even reasonable credence to the explanations given, one would have to abandon belief in the authority of a divinely inspired Bible. I do not therefore believe that homosexual activity is a godly option for any Christian who respects Biblical authority. Same-sex marriage stands on even flimsier foundations. Not only is the homosexual underpinning Biblically insupportable, but the Scriptural definition and purpose of marriage also rule it out.

It is from this theological position that I now address the implications of the current debate for church life.

8. Implications for Church Life

Two challenges face Christian leaders; how to address same-sex marriage in the general South African society, and how to address the concept of same-sex marriage within the church.

8.1 An approach to same-sex marriage in general society

Separation of church and state is a time-honoured distinction. The church has a prophetic role in informing and challenging the state, but ultimately it must

submit to the legitimate decrees of a legitimately appointed government (Rom 13:1). I am not going to attempt, in this article, to argue what constitute legitimate decrees and legitimate government. My point is simply that the church, having objected to and warned concerning the Biblical illegitimacy of same-sex marriage, needs to position itself within the rulings of state and civic law. This positioning might be one of conscientious objection or it may simply consist of a clear call on its members to live according to the higher law of the Word of God.

I believe that the church should continue to warn the government, and society at large, of the negative implications of same-sex marriage. I think however that it is too much of a stretch of the imagination to equate the introduction of same-sex marriage with the affect that apartheid had on the marriage and families of migrant workers and the like (Marriage Alliance, 2005). However, healthy marriages are a glue that holds society together (Wilson 2005). Anything that threatens the creation and maintenance of healthy marriages is therefore counterproductive to the good of society. Most conservative scholars argue that same-sex marriage threatens the institution of marriage in general, but there is a counter view to this. Rosemary Radford Ruether, writing in the *National Catholic Reporter*, asks why it is that we assume that same-sex marriage is a threat to marriage in general. She writes, “Ms. Scanzoni and Dr Meyers argue that accepting gay marriage, far from threatening marriage, will confirm and strengthen the ideal of marriage itself for all of us, heterosexuals and homosexuals” (Ruether 2005). For me, the jury is still out on both positions. What seems clearer to me at this time is the devastating effect that divorce and extramarital sex and childbearing is having on the status of marriage in general. Research has shown that children flourish in a family parented by a heterosexual couple (Wilson 2005), but the same research indicates that children are adversely affected by single parenting and by marital conflict. Same-sex marriages are certainly not the only cause of less than optimal child rearing.

There is a distinct possibility that by normalising same-sex marriage the Biblical Christian’s position on heterosexual marriage may be marginalised. A new constitutional norm is currently being established. This will not mean that heterosexual marriage will not be viewed as normal, but it will mean that rejection of same-sex marriage will be considered abnormal and even

unconstitutional. Before, there was no conflict between a Christian minister's refusal to marry a gay couple and their constitutional rights. In future, there will be a conflict between the rights of gay couples under the Constitution, and the Christian minister's right to religious freedom of choice and expression. This could put pressure on the church in two areas. Firstly, it has the potential of positioning the church as anti-societal and against constitutional rights and, secondly, it might result in the withdrawal of marriage licences from Christian ministers. Christian leaders will need to give careful thought to this perceptual issue. My belief is that the best approach is to present the positive case for exclusively heterosexual marriage rather than attempting to defend against accusations of discrimination and bigotry. The Biblical position is, after all, a prescription for the best common and individual good and not an attempt to prejudice anyone's real welfare.

8.2 An approach to same-sex marriage within the church

I make a distinction between the church's approach to same-sex marriage within its ranks, and its approach to the more general question of homosexuality. I have set out my conviction that same-sex marriage is not Biblically valid. I hold that churches should not accept same-sex "married" couples into either membership or the inner fellowship of the church family. The same should apply to unrepentant adulterers, drunkards and the like. The issue here is not same-sex marriage *per se* but a conscious and unrepentant violation of the teachings of Scripture.

Homosexuality is a somewhat different matter in that individuals can have homosexual inclinations, yet be committed to living according to Biblical values. We live in a sin-sick world and it is fairly common for individuals to develop homosexual inclinations as a result of their upbringing, formative experiences or traumatic events. It is even conceivable that pre-birth imprinting could result in homosexual propensities. Notwithstanding this, each individual has the ability to choose to live according to Biblical norms and values. Sexual expression is not an indispensable requirement for quality of life. Poverty, stress and sickness rank much higher as negative factors than does abstinence. As Paul pointed out, abstinence can be a positive and even desirable life choice even for marriageable adults (1 Cor 7:1).

We should view all people with compassion and humility, both heterosexual and homosexual. It is, however, not an expression of true love to withhold challenge and correction to anyone who violates the principles and commands of Scripture. We can and should pray for and minister to those who practice homosexuality. If they choose not to renounce that way of life, then we should deal with them on the same basis as those in a same-sex marriage. Again, I must stress that our approach to the issue of homosexuality should be no different to other unbiblical life-style issues such as adultery and drunkenness.

I believe that the church should avoid the deception of creating two orders of sin. One of the current arguments is that we should distinguish between first and second order Biblical issues. Acts 15 makes the distinction between idolatry and eating meat sacrificed to idols. Those who argue in this way regard the former as a first order issue and the later as a second order issue. The line of reasoning is that, because it is so seldom addressed in Scripture, we should regard homosexuality as a second order issue. As a result, we should regard sexual preference as a matter of individual conscience. Of course, we could say the same of adultery and drunkenness. Sin is sin and the Bible does not differentiate between degrees of offence.

In a pastoral context, we obviously need to treat couples within same-sex marriages with dignity and compassion. Some same-sex couples claim a relationship with the Lord Jesus and seek to express this relationship with other believers within the life of a local church. This constitutes a particular pastoral problem. On the one hand, by accepting them into membership or into the fellowshiping life of the church we ostensibly validate and ultimately legitimise their religious marital status. On the other hand, by denying them access to the inner life of the church we effectively preclude ourselves from ministering to them. John Stott comments that most homosexuals reject the concept of a possible “healing” because they regard their condition as innate and normal (Stott 1999). This resistance to receiving ministry will be particularly true of those who have been legally married and so I believe that the second consideration mentioned is not really a valid concern. We should, of course, welcome all people, in any condition, into the worship services of the church where they can be exposed to the preaching of the Word and where they can open themselves to interactions with God. I believe that we should apply this stance to all people who publicly violate the clearly stated moral

standards of Scripture. We should treat an unrepentant and recalcitrant drunkard in the same way. We should treat in the same way a married man or woman who wants to publicly integrate a lover into the life of the church. In all cases, we should behave with patience and compassion but we should stand our ground.

9. Conclusion

The pro-homosexual and same-sex lobby loves to portray conservative, Bible honouring Christians as archaic “mother Grundy’s,” opposed to social evolution and judgemental to a fault. My view is that God has established His laws in order to preserve and foster individual and societal wellbeing. God does not need our obedience to His decrees to satisfy a desire for status or self-worth. He prescribes the way in which we should live in order that we may have the freedom, both individually and as a part of society, to grow and prosper in righteousness. To compromise on issues such as homosexuality and its ultimate expression in same-sex marriage is to withhold the greatest good from individuals and society. Even if people and governments refuse to comply with the standards of the Word of God, we dare not allow ourselves, or our churches, to conform to a pattern that will ultimately weaken both society and individual faith and quality of life. My ultimate response to the question of same-sex marriage is ... “No!”

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