

Alliance Theological Seminary

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Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church Summary Paper

by

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In the book published by Zondervan (who else), and edited by Preston Sprinkle and Stanley N. Gundry, *Two Views on Homosexuality, Bible, and the Church*, ed., is proving to be a useful source among Christians who are concerned with ministering to a contemporary world with the truth of the Bible. In this writer's opinion one cannot do this effectively (no matter their position on an issue) if they do not understand different sides of the argument. Coupled with what my men's group calls *eloquent listening* correct understanding of the arguments from both sides can really help Christians to minister to a modern populous.

The book presents four authors in all, two of which hold a traditional view and two that hold the Gay-affirming view. The traditional view also known as the binary view, holds that the Bible clearly supports a straight model that proports male and female sexuality ONLY and that those activities practiced outside of this otherwise known as homosexuality or the anti-binary view (the view of the other two authors) is in violation of the text and therefore sin. The main concern of this paper is to summarize the principial and cultural concerns of each author. A principial concern is that which the author believes the Bible posits truths that are everlasting in nature, they are still true for all today, they are timeless. On the other hand, a cultural concern says that the biblical truths are "*timebound*" (Frank Chan). By timebound, we mean they are true and bound to the time they were written but are not necessarily true for a contemporary society.

### **William Loader (Affirming View)**

William Ronald George Loader is a minister of the Uniting Church in Australia and emeritus professor of New Testament at Murdoch University in Perth, Western Australia (Wikipedia 2020). Loader, as you can see is a scholar and a theologian looks at this controversial subject through specific lenses. He considers human experiences in the contemporary world and asks the questions what is a person to do if they find themselves to be gay? Do we change

scripture to provide for them or is it possible to uphold scripture and help people? In his answers to these questions, he uses as a basic of understanding that there must be a reckoning between “how we understand Scripture on the one hand and contemporary experience on the other” (p. 20). For example, Loader relates, scripture clearly states that God’s covenantal people (Israel at the time), were to be circumcised (See Gen. 17), and yet when the Gentles began to come to Christ the Judaizers demanded they be as well. This led to what is known as the council at Jerusalem. At which it was decided that the Gentile converts did not need to be circumcised – (see Acts 15). So, Loader effectively shows that the scripture regarding circumcision is timebound. But it is noteworthy he does not use this example to say that the Gen. 1 and 2 accounts of human sexuality is timebound. On the contrary he sees this as the “divinely intended order, the creation stories leave no room for notions of people being anything other than heterosexual...” (p. 23). His intent is to show how adjustments are made to accommodate the need and situation at hand. So, while Loader would agree that the scriptures regarding human sexuality are principial, adjusting to the culture can be done without compromising the principle. For Loader, the fact that an airplane can fly, does not eliminate the law of gravity, the supersedes it through the laws of lift and aerodynamics. Jesus demonstrated this when the woman caught in adultery dome how escapes with her life and receives forgiveness even though the Levitical law said she should be taken outside the camp and stoned (See John 8 and Lev. 18). Again, Loader maintains that we should clearly “acknowledge with respect” what was written but then acknowledge what were the “grounds for making changes, based on new understandings and driven by the same focus on love that informed Jesus’ stance” (p. 47).

### **Megan K. DeFranza (Affirming)**

After reading DeFranza's words "Still, I could not ignore the growing number of Christian voices...from heterosexual pastors and theologians...calling for a reconsideration of what I had always believed to be self-evident *but* are less so upon closer study (*italics mine and added*)" (p. 69), it is very understandable why she has become gay affirming. The reasons of which are vastly different than those of William Loader. While Loader maintains the Scriptures regarding the subject matter are principal and that conditions call for a different application, DeFranza, (despite her formative training) has determined that they may not mean what we have traditionally believed them to mean. As a basis for her thesis that some people are not "fully or clearly male or female" she uses Jesus' words regarding the eunuch; "There are eunuchs who have been so from birth" - Mt. 19:12; (p.70). She even points out that in fact, ancient Christians and Jews were remarkably familiar with those that did not fit neatly into either category, thus Jesus' statement. DeFranza is affirming and a non-traditionalist because she posits the scriptures are timeless regarding the issues of homosexuality as condemned by Leviticus, Paul's Romans 1 text or his sin list such as 1 Cor 6, and do not refer to "normal or loving" homosexual relationships (some of what we see today), rather they refer to rape, incest and like.

Further, her take on Gen. 1 and 2 is that it is not an exhaustive account of all "God's good creation". So, just as amphibians are not named in the creation and yet they exist, why is it hard to believe that those who do not fall neatly into the male or female categories were not also created? "Simply because persons of mixed sex are not listed in the creation account does not prove that they are therefore not good or not part of God's plan" (p. 71).

## **Wesley Hill (Traditional View)**

Hill is a self-professed gay Christian who affirms the Bible's view that proper and normal human sexuality is between a male and a female. However, he asks and answers the question; considering the Bible's position what must one who is naturally attracted to the same sex do? The short answer is that they are to practice "sexual abstinence" while maintaining "spiritual friendship" (p. 146). But the way he gets to the answer is noteworthy. In answering the question, Hill considers the Augustinian perspective on marriage from his work *On the Goods of Marriage* in which he claims there are three virtues or "goods" to which a biblical marriage must adhere, procreation, faithfulness to each other and a visible sign of the relationship between Christ and the Church. Based on these "goods" Hill then reasons, first, since same-sex couples cannot procreate naturally with each other same-sex unions are outside of the biblical order. He says that among what the Imago – Dei (Image of God) means from Gen. 1:26-28, most assuredly must include "the divine blessing of giving birth to offspring [AND SINCE] *Adam* is differentiated as 'male and female' and given the commission to fill the earth..." (p. 128), the Augustine's first "good" is clear. But second, this matter of faithfulness to each other or (fidelity) is seen in the proclamation given in Gen. 2:24, the so-called leave and cleave text, that since woman is created out of man and are indeed one, he is to "leave his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh" (NIV). The idea is that he and she become exclusively one with each other, forming a bond of fidelity. And third, this is built on the first on these "goods" (male and female procreation). And third, building on the offspring & fidelity principles is this idea that the two become one expressed in Gen. 2:24 is tied specifically to Jesus and the Church (see Eph. 5). But this also points back to the marital bond love language we see in the OT between God and Israel (Isa. 62:5; Jer. 2-3; Ezek. 16; Hos. 1-3).

Even as a gay Christian, Wesley Hill affirms that the scripture regarding our subject is principal and therefore timeless and as such binds himself to celibacy and the love of others in a deeper way.

C.S. Lewis suggests that rather than fixating on the psychological roots of same-sex attraction and seeking to pinpoint its origin, modern-day Christians would do well to focus their attention on more on what the person experiencing same-sex attraction is capable of offering to the church in which she finds herself (p. 146, 147).

### **Stephen R. Holmes (Traditional View)**

Like Hill, above Holmes leans heavily upon Augustine's "goods of marriage" thesis and reminds us that the is foundational for much of what the protestant church believes about marriage. "It has become normative for the church and remains embedded in our thought and practice" (p. 173). Additionally, he clarifies some misconceptions regarding Augustine's thesis, one such is that sexual desire is "evil" (p. 172). Holmes maintains this is not true, that in fact "pride is the root sin in his theology" (p. 172). I would also point out that our author readily admits that the church in the West has disproportionately criticized LGBT persons while being particularly light of those sins of the so-called straight people. He admits this is wrong and that we must go back to the text and address both and all, equally.

What I find fascinating about Holmes' approach to the subject matter is that he does not argue from the typical Gen. 1-2, Leviticus 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> chapters, or Romans 1 or 1 Cor 6 texts. He reasons, the whole question of whether Homosexuality is permitted by scripture is a recent one. That in fact, those of the past 1500 years of Church history did not ask these questions since the answer was abundantly clear, NO! Rather, this is a question of our recent culture and the reflect the signs of the times. There is much to report on Holmes' proof of this recent "signs of the times" statement and that this was known and addressed by those in the past, but time will

not permit. Suffice it to say, men like Thomas Aquinas and Clement of Alexandria have dealt with the issue of same-sex activity in the church. For Aquinas it was a matter of ethics, which he dealt with in his *Summa Theologica*. As does Clement in his work *Instructor (Paedagogos; c. AD 200)*, Instead, Holmes posits there are three reasons the church might allow sexually active lesbian and gay people into the church are,

1. This Christian understanding of marriage might be developed in a way that opens it to same-sex couples.
2. We might create a wholly new way of life that sits alongside marriage and celibacy, that offers an ethically acceptable sexually active mode of life for same-sex couples.
3. We might accept the wrongness of same-sex sexual activity but make pastoral accommodation for some people to live that way (as many protestant churches have done with divorce). (All of above from p. 175)

From the above statements, Holmes makes clear his principal position as each share a two common themes; first, a misunderstanding of the Biblical definition of marriage as being between a man and a woman only for the purpose of procreation, fidelity and to model the relationship between Christ and the church. And second, that it is a failure on the part of the church to adhere to the traditional views and therefore acquiesce to the signs of the times. Holmes stands strong on the Augustinian thesis and considers it “biblically plausible... and to overthrow it will require a new theology” (p. 193).