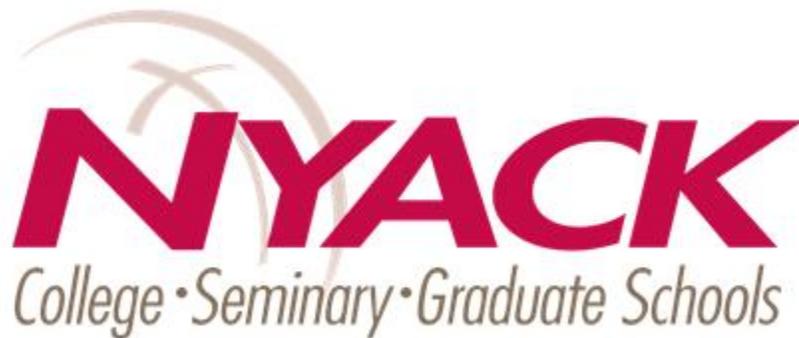


SUMMARY PAPER # 2

Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church

Preston Sprinkle, William Loader, Megan K. DeFranza, Wesley Hill, Stephen R. Holmes



Herve Talom

Alliance Theological Seminary

New York City

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Dr. Frank Chan.

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The topic of homosexuality is one of the major controversies in the Christian Church today. Many books have been written from both the affirming and non-affirming views. Christians are wrestling with how exactly LGBTQ people fit into the Church. Homosexuality is one of the most hotly debated topics in the evangelical Church today. In *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church*, four contributors, two defending a traditional view and two defending an affirming view, address biblical and theological questions and the pressing pastoral questions for the Church. There is a long tradition of exclusion and ostracization by the Church. There are gay and straight Christians and scholars on affirming and non-affirming sides. Most Christians believe that the Bible condemns many kinds of sexual Sin, both homosexual and heterosexual. Does the Bible address—and prohibit—these types of relations? This paper is the debate on the book the two views of homosexuality. The two views are the traditional view, which views homosexuality as a sin, and the non-traditional view, refraining from considering homosexuality a sin. William Loader and Megan DeFarnza present an affirming perspective, and Stephen Holmes and Wesley Hill represent traditional (non-affirming) views. We will start by considering some of the broader issues and divisions behind this debate, and then we will move to a closer examination of the primary biblical texts involved in both views. Then we will offer some concluding remarks on the two views of homosexuality

The Church remains substantially divided over homosexuality today. On the one hand, the most common themes that support changing traditional church teachings on homosexuality are acceptance, inclusion, and love. While on the other hand, those who opposed these changes expressed concerns about sexual purity. Hominess. And most fundamentally, the place of Scripture in our communities. Are we continuing to uphold the Bible as authoritative, and are we taking biblical teachings seriously, even if they make us uncomfortable? The first section of this paper will focus on the traditional interpretation of Scripture on this subject. The second section will explore the non-traditional view, and the last section will wrap up our debate.

The book is based on the premise that Christians' affirming and traditional views on homosexual practice are equally legitimate options. "No longer is this a Christian vs. non-Christian debate." Sprinkle claims the book will be unique because it will give attention to "our rich history of received tradition" and will have a different tone that is "respectful and humanizing" in

discussing diverse views among evangelicals. *Two Views* is a peculiar book. The four authors represent at least three different views:

1. The Old and New Testament texts uniformly oppose homosexuality, but that does not count today as we now understand this orientation (Loader).
2. All the Biblical texts speak about something else, not homosexuality (DeFranza).
3. Augustinian Christianity has been opposed to homosexual practice, yet people with this orientation should remain celibate (Hill) and be accepted in a community (Holmes).
4. Stephen Holmes holds a "traditional view" that this label describes only the position that all forms of same-sex sexual behavior are prohibited by Scripture and Christian theology. It does not mean that Holmes and Hill adopt a "traditional" view of marriage or same-sex orientation across the board. Likewise, Loader and DeFranza do not necessarily affirm everything about gay and lesbian relations or activists' concerns in the political arena. The term "affirming" refers to their view that gay and lesbian marital relations are sanctifiable before God. (p. 15).

In Leviticus, male same-sex relations are prohibited and labeled an abomination. In Romans, Paul speaks of women exchanging natural relations for unnatural ones. Men abandon natural relations with women and commit shameful acts with other men. According to the traditional interpretation. The old and the New Testaments are consistent in rejecting same-sex relationships. From the traditional viewpoint, they gain broader meaning and coherence from the opening chapters of Genesis. In which God creates Adam and Eve. Male and female. That was the original creation before the fall, before Sin entered the world, that was how things were supposed to be, and so, according to this view, if someone is gay, their sexual orientation is a sign of the fall, a sign of human fullness and brokenness. That was not the way that things were supposed to be.

Moreover, having a same-sex orientation is not in and of itself a sin. According to the traditional interpretation, acting upon it is a sin because the Bible is clear in what it prohibits and positively approves. Christians who are gay are only attracted to members of the same sex. To deny themselves is to take up their crosses and follow Christ, though it may not seem fair to us. God's ways are higher than our own, and it is not our role to question. But to obey? Within this framework, gay people have a problem: they want to have sex with the wrong people. They tend to be viewed as essentially lustfully sexual beings. So, straight people fall in love, get married, and

start families. But everyone has a sexual orientation. It is not just about sex. Straight people are never really paused to think about their sexual orientation as a distinctive characteristic.

However, the consequence of the traditional interpretation of the Bible is that straight people are told to avoid lust, casual relationships, and promiscuity. Gay people are told to avoid romantic relationships entirely. For gay people, though, they are capable of desired loving relationships; even lifelong committed relationships would be sinful because of their sexual orientation. It is not an issue of lust versus love or casual versus committed relationships because same-sex relationships are intrinsically sinful, no matter the quality or context. Gay people's sexual orientation is so broken and messed up that nothing good can emerge from same-sex relationships.

In the first two chapters of Genesis, God creates the heavens and the earth, plants, animals, man, and everything on the earth. God said that everything is very good, to be either good or very good. Except for one thing. In Genesis, God says it is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him. God makes Eve for Adam; a woman is a suitable partner for most men for straight men. However, for homosexuals, that is not the case. For them, a woman is not a suitable partner for a man, forgetting that it is another gay man who is a suitable partner, and the same is true for lesbians. For them, it is another lesbian who is a suitable partner. But the necessary consequence of the traditional teaching on homosexuality.

Let us reexamine the six verses that have formed the basis for an absolute condemnation of same-sex relationships. Can we go back? The closer look at these verses. Let us see what we can learn. There are three in the Old Testament and three in the New Testament. So do an order of their periods in Scripture. In the Old Testament, we have the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19. As well as two prohibitions in the most significant 18 and 20 and the New Testament, we have a passage by Paul and Romans chapter one. To begin, let us look at Genesis 19, but the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Indeed, Sodom and Gomorrah are referred to 20 times throughout the supplement books of the Bible, sometimes with detailed commentary on what their sins were. Nevertheless, homosexuality is never mentioned or connected to them. Leviticus prohibits a vast array of other behaviors, activities, and foods that Christians have never regarded as being prohibited for them. For example, Chapter 11 and 12 of Leviticus forbids eating pork, shrimp, lobster, and other practices that the Church does not consider a sin. Christians have never regarded any of these

things to be sinful behaviors. Because Christ stuck on the cross liberated Christians from what Paul called the yoke of slavery. We are not subject to the old law.

Does this passage require us to reject the possibility of loving relationships for gay people? If so, how does that make sense given the problems that we outlined earlier without position? To teach that God desires gay and lesbian people to be alone for their entire lives because of their sexual orientation is wrong. How we understand this passage hinges largely on how we understand the meaning of the terms natural and unnatural. The concept of sexual orientation is very recent. It was only developed in the past century and is only widely understood within the past few decades. So how can we take our current categories and understanding?

There is an enormous difference between lust and love regarding our sexuality. We do not bring casual and committed relationships between promiscuity and monogamy. That difference has always been central to Christian teaching on sexual ethics for straight Christians. These terms and concepts regarding sexual orientation are entirely alien, neither the digital world nor the Greek. The concept of sexual orientation and same-sex orientation did not exist in the ancient world. English term homosexual, but not even coined until the end of the 19th century. It is commonly assumed by those who hold to the traditional interpretation.

But once again, the closer examination does not support that interpretation. First, we must look at the broader context of the passage to see how the concept of nature functions within it, and secondly, we need to see how Paul himself uses these terms in his other letters. There is no biblical teaching about sexual orientation. Nor is there any call to lifelong celibacy for gay people. The Bible explicitly rejects forced loneliness as God's will for human beings. Not just in the Old Testament, when God says that it is not suitable for man to be alone. But in the New Testament as well?

In first Corinthians Chapter 7, Paul writes about marriage and celibacy. He was celibate himself. He says that he wishes that everyone else could be celibate as well. For Paul, celibacy is a spiritual gift and one that he realizes that many Christians do not have. However, many of them lack the gift of celibacy. Paul observes that sexual immorality is rampant. Thus, he prescribes marriage as a kind of remedy or protection against sexual Sin for Christians who lacked the gift of celibacy. It is better to marry than to burn with passion, he says. This is true for both straight and gay Christians.

The author of 1 Tim may be illustrating how these ancient commands are being violated in the first-century context—expanding the category of adulterers (*moichoi*) to include pornois, *malakoi*, and *arsenokoitai*. (p. 101) '*arsenokoitai*' in 1 Corinthians 6.9 and 1 Timothy 1.10 is undoubtedly a reference to Leviticus 18.22: 20.13. Jude 7 and 2 Peter 2.6-13 read Genesis 19 to warn about sexual immorality. Moreover, condemnation of homosexuality fits within a Biblical ethic on sex and marriage. Thus, intertextuality is omitted mainly in this book (Loader, to some degree, an exception), yet Sprinkle purports the authors "exhibit a high view of Scripture" (p. 14).

On the one hand, *arsenokoitai* may be translated as "males who bed males," but not without noting the regular practice of masters exploiting enslaved boys, eunuchs, and men. On the other hand, *arsenokoitai* may refer to exploitation—those who take advantage of the poverty and vulnerability of others for their pleasure or gain—a category into which the use of enslaved people and prostitutes would certainly fit. (p. 80).

On the other hand, Stephen Holmes explicitly says that the relevant Biblical passages on homosexuality are of little value since the discussion needs to define Christian marriage. He thereupon builds a view of Christian marriage primarily on Augustinian terms—for which he is criticized by Loader and another of the authors, Megan DeFranza, and applauded by Wesley Hill, who makes a similar argument. If "evangelical" means anything, it means affirming Scripture's primary authority for faith and practice, whether as a Bible scholar or theologian. All the authors accept that there is such a thing as homosexual "orientation." But this needs to be argued and, at least, defined clearly. Loader's acceptance of "homosexual orientation" leads him to dismiss the Biblical texts as outdated or irrelevant. On the other hand, Holmes takes a wildly postmodern turn, saying that homosexual orientation is "locally" true for the West.

Megan DeFranza and William Loader have a traditional view with the strongest objections to homosexuality. (p. 163). Loader rightly points out that Paul believes that sinful desires, not just acts, are condemned. However, no author engages the Evangel in "evangelical," the Gospel, which is not just about defining Sin and extending forgiving grace for sins but also about the power of God's transforming grace for sinners. The problem of Romans 1.28 is resolved by Romans 12.1-2. Evangelicals have always accentuated the necessity of "conversion" (life change) as an essential element of following Christ.

Stephen Holmes as "traditional," with the understanding that this label describes only the position that all forms of same-sex sexual behavior are prohibited by Scripture and Christian theology. It does not mean that Holmes and Hill adopt a "traditional" view of marriage or same-sex orientation across the board. Liberal Protestant churches for decades have tried to persuade evangelicals in their denominations to affirm homosexual practice.

Likewise, Loader and DeFranza do not necessarily affirm everything about gay and lesbian relations or activists' concerns in the political arena. The term "affirming" refers to their view that gay and lesbian marital relations are sanctifiable before God. (p. 15). Hill and Holmes represent the evangelical/orthodox view reasonably well. Hill self-identifies as a celibate gay Christian but acknowledges his Christian identity as primary. He exegetically walks through OT and NT texts on marriage and homosexuality faithfully, focusing his attention on Rom. 1:26-27, 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10. Hill's encouragement of non-sexual "spiritual friendship" in the monastic tradition is helpful. Holmes's unique contribution is the extended explanation of Augustine's teaching on the goodness of marriage. He critiques traditionalists for their departure from the Augustinian heritage by accepting contraception and remarriage after divorce – an argument worthy of reflection.

Holmes has carefully outlined the essentials of the traditionalist approach—essentials we identify in each of our chapters as procreation and complementarity. There is much we agree upon the timeliness and theological appropriateness of this conversation, the urgency to end discrimination in the Church where LGBT Christians are held to higher standards than straight members, and concerns over how secular culture has infiltrated Christian teaching on sexuality (pp. 180, 167, 185). "Our sexual desires are not in pressing need of being fulfilled; they are in pressing need of being mastered and reordered so that we may grow in Christlikeness" (p. 184). In addition, Holmes challenges the "traditionalist" churches to redirect the energy spent caring for their gay members. The latter are bonded and vowed to specific households and therein facing profound challenges into shepherding those members through the avoidable and far more tragic heartache of unattachment.

Agreeing to disagree in a "respectful and humanizing" tone sounds pious, but it is misguided and unloving. It never loves to confirm people in their Sin – this is pastoral malpractice. It is time for the Church to rebuke professing Christians who have embraced this false teaching about homosexuality. We should pray for them to repent and return to the catholic, orthodox faith. Jude wrote to early Christians urging them to "contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" and warning them about those who "pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of fire" (Jude 3-7, ESV). Following the commands of Holy Scripture, the ancient Catholic Church and the Protestant Reformers did not tolerate homoerotic behavior among those who profess faith in Christ.

The arguments and debates that we have are both in the Church and civil society. Homosexuality tends to get lost in abstractions. Is it right for a man to marry another man? a woman to marry another woman. Well, it does not seem right. That is not how God designed us. God made men for women and women for men, which is God's definition of marriage. It is not for us to tamper with or change. We are part of God's perfect plan, including our sexual orientation. Jesus placed a particular focus on those others overlooked, on those outcast and marginalized minorities. Thus, if we are working to emulate the life of Christ, our focus needs to be true. How aware are we of how we may be contributing to the suffering and hurt in homosexual people's lives? It is still commonplace for straight Christians to blame and condemn homosexuality and sexual orientation.

Homosexuality and sexual orientation should be reviewed, and those involved should be welcomed into our families and communities. The genuinely Christian response to homosexuality is acceptance, Support, and love.