

Compassion without Compromise

Points for Debate Related to Homosexuality

By WP Campbell

WP Campbell's book "Turing Controversy into Church Ministry: A Christlike Response to Homosexuality" has recently been published by Zondervan. Resources for church ministry to supplement the book can be found at ChurchReflections.com.

The topic of homosexuality is impacting our congregations and our denomination perhaps more than any other social concern. It is the centerpiece of our debates and a motivating force behind major issues that have been handed to us for vote from the 2010 General Assembly. By understanding this subject matter better, we will be more prepared for upcoming discussions and debates.

When challenging and correcting others, let us remember that we are called to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), for love alone will cover our corporate shortcomings and sins (1 Peter 4:8). The following points of defense center around **Using Logic, Upholding Marriage, and Defending Scripture**. Consider in each category how we can speak truthfully while demonstrating the kind of love that will help our words to be heard.

A. Using Logic

1. Argument Made: The church is filled with broken and sinful people. How can we elevate one sin above all others?

A Possible Response: We should not highlight any one form of sexual brokenness as being worse than others. The truth is that many heterosexuals are engaged in adultery, promiscuity, or the viewing of pornography. These problems are not only found in society, but in our churches. How could it be otherwise if we are making Christlike efforts to minister to people at their point of need? But the solution is not to give blessing to every form of sexual sin, but rather to show love toward those trapped in sin and to help them follow the standards given to us by our Lord.

The primary reason that this one issue, homosexuality, has been debated over and over and apparently "singled out" from other sins is that the progressive elements in our denomination keep pushing it forward for debate and vote. And it is the one area of sexual sin that some are seeking to redefine as acceptable in the sight of God.

Love Covers: We agree that we must be careful to help people who experience sexual brokenness of any kind to know that we do not see ourselves as better than they. Rather, we are all together in this struggle to honor God. We each have our areas of weakness. We are all sinners without hope except in God's sovereign mercy.

2. Argument Made: The real problem for people who are against homosexuality is prejudice. People need to get over their fears and to let go of their bigotry.

A Possible Response: It is true that there are people inside and outside of the church who are uncomfortable when around homosexuals. When such insecurity is turned to meanness and bullying, that is wrong. Our first concern as Christians should be to please God, however, and not to bend to the pressures of society to endorse lifestyles that the Bible calls sinful. Those who truly respect God will obey His Word, even when it seems “politically incorrect” to do so (Isaiah 66:2).

Love Covers: Nevertheless, if any of us is uncomfortable when around gays or lesbians to the extent that our inhibitions block an expression of genuine love for them, we need to repent. We are called to love all people and to reach out to everyone with the Gospel of Christ.

3. Argument Made: But I believe gays and lesbians are “made that way” by God. Homosexuality is genetic. Why would God make people one way, and tell them to behave in another way?

A Possible Response: Science has at best shown only a possible weak linkage between genetics and homosexuality. Even if such a linkage were one day to be proven, such a linkage would only *influence* a person’s sexual inclinations. Genetics do not dictate behavior. Studies demonstrate that other potential influences on a person’s sexual behavior may be dysfunction in one’s family of origin, abuse, and other factors that do not involve genetics. We believe therefore that genes do not inhibit either homosexuals or heterosexuals from obeying God and from living according to biblical standards. We are all born with desires and inclinations that, if followed, may violate God’s standards for holiness. We do not have the “right” to do what feels natural when our feelings or attractions lead us into sin.

Love Covers: We acknowledge that the challenges faced by Christians experiencing same-sex attractions can be very difficult. Furthermore, we have a great deal of sympathy for people who are influenced by genetic or prenatal conditions leading to sexual anomalies such as sexually ambiguous organs. These are not the cases about which we are debating, however.

4. Argument Made: How can you deny fulfillment to people who are different than you? It is unfair.

A Possible Response: It is no more unfair that the Scriptures require Christians who experience same-sex attractions to refrain from acting on their attractions than is it unfair that the same Bible requires Christian heterosexual singles to refrain from sexual activity. There are far more heterosexual singles in the country than the total number of gays and lesbians, and each group must exercise restraint. Many

singles may never find a mate, and some Christians who experience same-sex attractions may never overcome their inner proclivities. Both groups have Christ's example and the aid of the Spirit of God. With God's help and the support of the Christian community, we can each be faithful to God's standards for sexuality.

Love Covers: Untold numbers of people in our society and even in our churches experience sexual brokenness. True Christian communities should provide a safe place for the hurting and rejected to find acceptance and healing. We need each other.

B: Upholding Marriage

1. Argument Made: Marriage is a right that must not be denied to anyone.

A Possible Response: When we begin to redefine marriage based on majority opinion and people's demands for rights, will not groups other than homosexuals be provided a platform for gaining their "rights" as well? Consider the growing demand for polyamorous marriage, for example. The July 2009 issue of *Newsweek* claims there are half a million households in the United States today comprised of "ethical nonmonogamous" adults, who are each engaged in intimate relationships with more than one person, with the mutual consent of everyone involved.ⁱ In 2006, over fifteen hundred gay, lesbian, transgendered, and bisexual activists, authors, attorneys, actors, film-makers, educators, and community leaders, called for the rights of multiple sex partners.ⁱⁱ

Love Covers: We are grateful to be part of a country where homosexuals and all citizens already are granted fair protections and rights under our constitution. Christians should not jump on the bandwagon to redefine marriage, however. For Christians, marriage is first and foremost a sacred covenant, established by God. If the church does not embrace and uphold God's standards, who will?

2. Argument Made: Whether or not we accept gay marriage as a right, our churches will be required to support gay marriage as more and more states approve it.

A Possible Response: There are many things the world *allows* that Christians are commanded by God to *avoid*. Many pastors, for example, have chosen not to perform a wedding uniting a Christian with a non-Christian. The day the state *requires* ministers to perform weddings for situations that go against the Scriptures and the pastor's conscience is the day that state and religion will have been wedded together through unconstitutional bonds.

Love Covers: Our hope is that through prayerful consideration about such difficult issues, our denomination will become a positive influence, taking a constructive

leadership role for our country rather than being led down the road of compromise by each new set of cultural mores.

3. Argument Made: By sanctioning marriage for gay couples, we can help them to engage in faithful, lifelong, monogamous relationships to promote their wellbeing and safety.

A Possible Response: If two people have a problem with lying or stealing, does putting them together in a life-long relationship in which they support each other's habits suddenly make them faithful? We must define faithfulness by the standards of Scripture, not those of our culture.

And regarding wellbeing and safety, anyone who takes time to read unbiased sites and articles on the internet about the medical consequences of homoerotic sex will quickly learn that such sex, even in monogamous relationships, can be very harmful to the body (even if we ignore AIDS as a concern). These concerns are greatest for males, and approximately two-thirds of homosexuals are men. God designed males and females both physically and emotionally as complementary pairs to make a whole.

Love Covers: It is sad that our denomination has been so long embroiled in a debate about issues of sexual brokenness on a surface level that we have not engaged in serious conversation about the long-term and deeper consequences that may be experienced if we decide to follow the pathway of our culture. Love does not sidestep truth. Honest conversation is one of the first steps we must take to position ourselves to help those who experience sexual brokenness of all types, that we might help them to find healing.

C: Defending Scripture:

1. Argument Made: There are different ways to interpret Scripture, and the traditional perspective about homosexuality is no more biblically valid than is the newer, more progressive approach.

A Possible Response: A majority of biblical scholars tell us that homosexual practice violates biblical norms. The rise of the minority opinion among teachers with degrees who argue otherwise is primarily based on arguments that have only been promoted in the last few decades based more on cultural and historical considerations than on a proper exegesis of Scripture.

Love Covers: We are grateful for the emphasis on love and grace that we share together. We will not find peace in our denomination, however, until we also unite in the truth proclaimed in Scripture.

2. Argument Made: The biblical argument against gays and lesbians is based on only six or seven passages. The whole of Scripture, however, overrides those texts with a call to love those who are different from us.

A Possible Response: The whole of the Bible affirms God's plan that sex is to be preserved for marriage between a man and a woman for life. This affirmation is woven like a golden thread throughout Scripture, from the creation account, which was affirmed by Christ, to the imagery of Christ as the Bridegroom of the Church. The several passages that specifically prohibit homosexual behavior are an interwoven thread in the fabric of God's clear and unchanging revelation.

Love Covers: Thus the whole of the Bible not only affirms God's love, but also God's truth. Where we have failed on either side of the equation, we must repent.

3. Argument Made: Christ said nothing about homosexuality—why should we?

A Possible Response: The idea that our Lord's silence about any particular sexual sin is an endorsement of such sin is illogical. Christ didn't speak against incest, but we agree that incest is wrong. By his affirmation of marriage (Matthew 19:4), our Lord made public statement against not only incest, but against adultery, fornication, homosexuality, and every form of sexual activity that deviates from God's clearly stated plan in Scripture.

Love Covers: We look forward to the day that the church can stop talking so much about homosexuality and focus on its greater mission. The ongoing debate about this topic is harming our denomination. It is time to agree that we will follow Scripture's clear teachings about sexuality and then put our greater energies into ministry.

4. Argument Made: The Old Testament prohibitions against homosexuality are antiquated, and have lost their relevance for today much as have ancient dietary and ceremonial laws from the Old Testament.

A Possible Response: Not every law or practice in the Old Testament was destined by God to be carried forth into the era of modern Christianity. Timeless principles, like those contained in the Ten Commandments, on the other hand, are binding on every generation. They reflect the unchanging nature of God. The laws in Leviticus 18 to 20, where homosexuality is specifically prohibited, contain a mixture of timeless and temporal principles. Some of the sins listed in the Levitical holiness code were labeled "abominations" and the prescription for violations of the same was death. Most of the sins listed in this category are still considered egregious today, ranging from incest to adultery and homosexuality. Guidelines in the same

Levitical texts for how to dress and how to sow one's field and other lesser matters, however, were not called "abominations." Nor was the punishment for violating their guidelines as severe.

Thus the Levitical texts supported the clear moral standards of the New Testament for human sexuality, and lesser concerns such as one's clothing type or procedures for planting a field, do not carry great relevance for the modern church.

Love Covers: We confess that some Christians have used the Levitical word "abomination" in an inappropriate manner. It was used in Leviticus to speak against all types of sexual brokenness, not just against one type. Furthermore, the word itself, in the Hebrew, gives a sense of God's desire for sinners to turn back to righteousness. May this compassionate heart of God always undergird our words as we discuss this difficult topic.

5. Argument Made: The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19 was precipitated by a violation of ancient hospitality customs and had nothing to do with homosexuality.

A Possible Response: A plain reading of the Genesis 19 account and biblical references to it make clear that regardless of what hospitality customs may have been violated in Sodom, God judged that city also for sexual perversions (Jeremiah 23:14, Isaiah 3:9, Ezekiel 16:48-50, Luke 17:28-29, 2 Peter 2:6-7, 10, and Jude 1:7). Thus Genesis 19 is a declaration of God's coming judgment, not only for homosexuality, but for all kinds of sin.

Love Covers: Thankfully, the Sodom account is also a story of the grace and salvation of our God for Lot and his family, and for all who turn to the Lord in repentance. We praise God that his mercy, grace, forgiveness, and life-changing power is available for every person—for those engaged in adultery, fornication, or homoerotic sex, as well as for the greedy and for those who cannot control their anger. His grace reaches out to each of us (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

6. Argument Made: The Romans 1 text describes something very different from the monogamous and faithful relationships experienced between consenting gay adults in our society. There are at least three possibilities for what Paul was actually describing:

1. Paul may have been condemning pederasty, the well-known custom in which Roman soldiers took young men as their partners for a time, until the young men were ready to marry women.

2. Romans 1 may be describing male prostitution, which was part of the cultic temple worship of the day and therefore idolatrous.

3. The text may actually be about people who were not really gay by nature, but rather those who were only experimenting with homosexuality. For them, such sexual behavior was “unnatural” and therefore wrong (Romans 1:26-27).

A Possible Response: The above-mentioned efforts (and others like them) to reinterpret the Romans 1 text do not fall in line with mainstream scholarship and standard Reformed principles for biblical interpretation. We must allow the Bible to interpret itself, and we should not ignore the plain and obvious meanings of a text. Consider the three arguments given:

1. Pederasty was between males. But in Romans 1, Paul condemns not only male-to-male sex, but also female-to-female sex (Romans 12:27), which is in itself sufficient evidence that Paul was not limiting his prohibition of homosexual activity to pederasty.

2. If Paul was only condemning homosexual practice when it was tied to idolatry and to temple prostitution, how should we view his prohibitions in the same passage of more than twenty other sins of the flesh and heart (vs. 29-32)? Consistency of argument would suggest that each of these listed destructive patterns of behavior (greed, murder, strife, deceit, gossip, etc.) may be acceptable by God as long as they are not linked to idolatry and temple worship—an argument no Christian would dare to make.

3. The notion that in Romans 1 Paul was contrasting “true” homosexuals from those who were not “by nature” truly gay, cannot be supported by the context nor by the Greek words used. Paul’s reference to the created order and his choice of Greek words (*arsenes* and *theleias*, which emphasized maleness and femaleness) make clear that the “unnatural” behavior here condemned was sexual activity between any two people of the same gender.

Love Covers: Paul’s warning about idolatry is a warning for each of us. It is easy to worship things tangible rather than to keep our hearts set on undistracted worship of the invisible, Almighty God. Such worship should impact the whole of our lives and each of our churches. One of the idols in our society today is sexual fulfillment, and we must guard our hearts from idolatry as we humbly obey the Lord through Scripture and God’s Spirit.

7. Argument Made: The words used for homosexuals in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and in 1 Timothy 1:10 referred to homosexual prostitution and had no connection with the committed same-sex partnerships or unions found among some gays today.

A Possible Response: A careful study of the Greek words used along with the scriptural, cultural, and historical context of both passages demonstrates otherwise.

The primary word that is contested, *arsenokoites*, is said by pro-gay theologians to be a new term coined by Paul that refers exclusively to male prostitutes. It seems obvious, however, that Paul here combined two Greek words (*arsen* and *koites*) from the Greek translation of Levitical texts which prohibit homosexual activity (Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13), thus creating this compound word, *arsenokoites* to make his point. This follows Paul's pattern of drawing support for his arguments from the Bible, a pattern which all Christian theologians should follow.

Love Covers: It is important to note that in these texts, along with every place that Paul speaks about the sin of homosexual activity, he also lists other kinds of sins. Each of the passages we've studied, then, is a stark reminder that we all need a Savior and that we must offer God's message of salvation to all people.

This article is a condensed and adapted version of the Jan/Feb 2010 issue of Theology Matters. For further insights about this topic and to learn how to get a free book, see also ChurchReflections.com.

ⁱ Jessica Bennet, "Only You. And You. And You."

<http://www.newsweek.com/id/209164> (July 29, 2009).

ⁱⁱ In 2006 a statement titled "Beyond Same-Sex Marriage" was crafted and then endorsed by over fifteen hundred gay, lesbian, transgendered, and bisexual activists, calling for legal recognition of multiple sex partner relationships. Joseph DeFilippis, Beyond Marriage, www.beyondmarriage.org/signatories.html (April 2006).