

THERE ARE HEAVY CROSSES THE CHURCH SHOULD BE PREPARED TO BEAR
WHEN HOLDING TO THE SCRIPTURAL TEACHING ON HOMOSEXUALITY IN A
CULTURE THAT PREACHES TOLERATION OF IMMORALITY

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DIVINITY

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MARCH 2013

Abstract

Homosexuality has gradually been coming more out in the open and more socially acceptable. What was once viewed as perverse and immoral is now defended as an acceptable alternative lifestyle. While many may now want to defend homosexuality and demand its acceptance, Scripture has always been clear in calling it a sin. Bible-believing Christians who hold to the Scriptural teaching on homosexuality, in this society that wants to accept it, should expect persecution and pressure to change their beliefs. These persecutions and difficulties that come from following Christ and his Word, Jesus describes as crosses. These crosses that come from believing and teaching that homosexuality is a sin will be heaviest among young people and in places where the homosexual influence is felt the strongest. These crosses will have different effects on Christians. They may be faithfully carried or dropped. These crosses are absolutely necessary for the Church and the individual Christian to carry. Love demands that they are carried. These crosses, however, can only be carried by the strength that God graciously provides.

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INTRODUCTION

What is acceptable to society is always changing. Because the teachings of the Bible do not change with the times, certain teachings become viewed as outdated. Some teachings start to come under attack more so than others. It could be argued that today the teaching that is most under attack in the North American culture is what Scripture says on homosexuality. Fifty years ago nearly all Christian denominations would have agreed that the Bible labels homosexuality as a sin, and nearly all people who called themselves Christian would have agreed. Even those who were not religious would have believed it to be perverse and immoral. But gradually, homosexuality has become more socially acceptable.

There is a movement to accept homosexuality that is gaining popularity throughout much of Western Civilization. In 2001 the Netherlands became the first country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage. Belgium followed two years later in 2003. Since 2001 eleven countries in total have legalized same-sex marriage. As of January 2013 nine states have legalized same-sex marriage and two other states recognize same-sex marriages on a conditional basis. In January 2013 President Obama made history by becoming the first president to address gay rights during an inauguration speech.

It is possible that a person supports the civil rights of a same-sex couple while still maintaining that homosexuality is a sin. However, the fact that the homosexual lifestyle is becoming more accepted by different governments shows that it is also becoming more accepted by the common person. There are many loud voices in politics and in various media outlets that are portraying homosexuality as a normal alternative lifestyle. Those who are accepting of the homosexual lifestyle may not yet be the majority population, but they are certainly the vocal majority. Homosexuality has gone from being the perverse thing that no one feels comfortable talking about, to the new poster child for acquiring equal rights.

Because of the homosexual movement, homosexuality is being socially praised and lauded. Christians must take a stance against all sins, including their own, but no other sin has so many different voices loudly demanding its acceptance. When the Christian Church speaks out against the sins of adultery, greed, and drunkenness, it is praised for the good social work it is doing. When Christians call homosexual actions a sin, they are criticized.

So where does this leave Christians and Christian denominations like the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod who are bound by the teachings of Scripture to maintain that the

Bible condemns homosexuality as a sin? They should expect there to be persecution and pressure. They should expect what Jesus describes in Mark 8:34 as crosses. “Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’”¹ Part of following Jesus is holding to what his Word teaches. Confessing and upholding what Scripture says on homosexuality in a culture that preaches a toleration of immorality will come with heavy and painful crosses.

It is the aim of this thesis to demonstrate that there will be crosses for the Church to bear when it holds to the Scriptural teaching on homosexuality. It will seek to do this by identifying not only what those crosses are but also their origin. In addition, this thesis will offer encouragement for Christians to continue bearing these crosses. This encouragement will come from demonstrating the necessity of holding to the Scriptural truth against the false interpretations of the Bible that seek to condone homosexuality. This encouragement will also come from showing where Christians find the strength to maintain this Scriptural truth.

THE CROSSES TO BE CARRIED

Anyone who would follow Jesus as his disciple must take up their cross. The Bible does not describe it as optional. Jesus said, “Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple” (Lk 14:27). Luther also describes the necessity of the cross in *The Large Catechism*:

For where God’s Word is preached, accepted or believed, and bears fruit, there the holy and precious cross will also not be far behind. And let no one think that we will have peace; rather we must sacrifice all we have on earth – possessions, honor, house, and farm, spouse and children, body and life. Now, this grieves our flesh and the old creature, for it means that we must remain steadfast, suffer patiently whatever befalls us, and let go whatever is taken from us.²

Daniel Deutschlander in his book, *The Theology of the Cross*, sums up the cross that Christ calls Christians to bear in two words: Self denial. “[The cross] is the struggle to deny *self* and instead to follow Jesus. It is the struggle to follow him willing, even joyfully, in defiance of the adulterous and sinful generation that still remains in one’s own heart as well as in the

¹ All quoted Scripture in this thesis will come from: International Bible Society, *Holy Bible New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984).

² Martin Luther, *Large Catechism*, in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, trans. Charles Arand et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 448-449.

world.”³ On this issue of homosexuality, Christians follow Christ by teaching and believing what God’s Word clearly reveals. What sinful people reason and want due to worldly influences must be denied in favor of God’s Word. A Christian’s sinful flesh will fight fiercely against following Christ in this way. The final result of this will be pain and struggles as though Christians are carrying a heavy flesh ripping and backbreaking cross.

Cross of Persecution

A specific cross that results from holding to what Scripture teaches about homosexuality is the cross of persecution. This persecution shows itself in many different forms and comes from several different places. A Christian should not be surprised to be persecuted for this or for any other issue. Jesus tells his disciples, “All men will hate you because of me” (Mk 13:13). That Christians are hated for teaching what the Bible says is nothing new. Teaching what it says about homosexuality is really just one more thing to be hated for. Unfortunately, the sinful flesh would much rather be hated by Christ and loved by the world. Deutschlander explains the connection between persecution and the cross:

Outward persecution that may come because of a confession is a cross. Why? Because in and of itself it is painful? No doubt. But even more than that, it is a cross because the flesh, the self, loathes the real cause and source of the pain, namely, Christ and his gospel. And the self is quick to point out that persecution and ridicule would be very easily avoided just by keeping quiet, by keeping the connection with Christ and his Word a secret, that is, by divorcing faith from life.⁴

When holding to the Scriptural teaching on homosexuality, one of the persecutions to be expected is the accusation of being the persecutor. This may sound like an easy accusation to accept, but it is very hurtful to be accused of oppressing and harassing a group of people. It is even worse when it is the Christian Church that is being accused of this. Most Christian churches work hard to be viewed as organizations that serve and benefit the community they are in. They want to have a reputation of sharing God’s gospel of love. For a congregation to be accused of persecuting people is a damaging and hurtful charge. However, this is exactly what the homosexuality movement is doing. Many proponents of homosexuality want to blame Christianity for all persecution against homosexuals. They point to Christianity as the root cause of oppression and persecution against homosexuals.

³ Daniel Deutschlander, *The Theology of the Cross* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1998), 30.

⁴ Deutschlander, *The Theology of the Cross*, 31.

For the Bible Tells Me So, an award winning documentary, blames “misinformed” Christians for the persecution of homosexuals. It does this in subtle ways. For example, the video discusses what the Bible says on homosexuality and then cuts to a clip of a teenager proudly telling the camera that he likes to beat up gays. It even outright says conservative Christians are to blame. An unidentified man interviewed in the documentary says, “[The conservative Christian stance on homosexuality] legitimizes violence and discrimination because the church teaches it’s a perversion. It’s wrong. It’s sinful. It creates an environment in which gay people becomes victims, become abused.”⁵ As the man is stating this, the video shows pictures of beaten and bloodied bodies to invoke the emotion of the viewer.

The documentary interviewed Jorge Valencia who works at the Trevor Project Suicide Hotline. The Trevor Project describes itself as “the leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth.”⁶ Jorge Valencia says in the documentary, “It’s estimated that every 5 hours, a LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender] teen takes his life, and for every teen that takes his or her own life, there are 20 more who try. One of the top five reasons why teenagers call us is for religious reasons. They’re feeling there isn’t a place for them and God.”⁷

Mel White, one of current key leaders of the homosexuality movement, was also interviewed in the documentary *For the Bible Tells Me So*. In the interview he blames conservative Christians for creating fear and a false stereotype of homosexuals, “So many people who are victims of the fundamentalist-Christian caricature of gays become fearful and stay fearful until they meet one.”⁸ In 1998 Mel White founded Soulforce, a large organization that seeks to promote the acceptance of homosexuals by using large protests and demonstrations that grab media attention. Like their founder, Soulforce views conservative Christianity as one of their main opponents. The following excerpt is taken from the mission statement on their website.

Soulforce is a national non-profit that works nonviolently to end the religious and political oppression of LGBTQ⁹ people. While we are not ourselves a faith-based organization, we lead from the understanding that oppressive religious beliefs, civil rights

⁵ *For the Bible Tells Me So*, DVD, (New York: First Run Features, 2007).

⁶ The Trevor Project, “Organization,” (2010), <http://www.thetrevorproject.org/organization> (accessed Nov 27, 2012).

⁷ *For the Bible Tells Me So*.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Occasionally, the common LGBT abbreviation will also have a Q to stand for queer.

abuses and anti-feminist attitudes that oppress LGBTQ people are interrelated... Our roots are in challenging religion-based oppression because the religious right is a powerful cultural and political agent with financial force underpinning its work. The beliefs, actions and rhetoric of the religious right lead to the loss of jobs, healthcare, educational access, financial security, and social inclusion for LGBTQ people.¹⁰

Another common charge that is commonly made against conservative Christians is likening them to racist and sexist groups in the past. This was common in the documentary *For the Bible Tells Me So*. The movie began and ended with clips of the Ku Klux Klan, Hitler, and Nazi consecration camps. Mel White says in the movie, “For a long time the Bible has been misused to support prejudice, apartheid, segregation, slavery, the second class citizenship of women and now it is being misused to condemn gay people. It’s an old trick fundamentalist Christians have been using throughout the ages and now they are doing it again.”¹¹ Furthermore, Linda Patterson, a homosexual activist and author of *Hate Thy Neighbor*, makes this same charge against conservative Christians when she writes:

Over the centuries some of Jesus’ followers have used the Bible to support such horrors as the Crusades, the Inquisition, oppression of women, burning of ‘witches’, anti-Semitism, and slavery. Remarkably, many Christians appear to have learned little from such offenses, and they continue to use the Bible as an excuse to oppress some of their neighbors, including their homosexual neighbors, like me.¹²

Of course, not only is the church as a whole blamed and persecuted for the mistreatment of homosexuals, but also individual Christians who hold to Scripture’s teachings. Individuals who speak out and share their beliefs may be verbally attacked and persecuted. In July of 2012 Dan Cathy, the president and chief operating officer of Chick-fil-A, was interviewed by the Baptist Press. During the interview he shared his beliefs in the biblical definition of marriage, “We are very much supportive of the family – the biblical definition of the family unit. We are a family-owned business, a family-led business... We want to do anything we possibly can to strengthen the families... We know that it might not be popular with everyone.”¹³ Dan Cathy received a myriad of negative criticism for this from numerous media outlets. After the interview was publicized, the Jim Henson Company decided to sever their partnership with the

¹⁰ Souforce, “Who We Are: Mission, Vision, Analysis,” <http://www.souforce.org/about/mission/> (accessed Nov 27, 2012).

¹¹ *For the Bible Tells Me So*.

¹² Linda J. Patterson, *Hate Thy Neighbor* (West Conshohocken: Infinity, 2009), 1.

¹³ K. Allan Blume, “‘Guilty as Charged,’ Cathy Says of Chick-fil-A’s Stand on Biblical and Family Values,” *Baptist Press*, Jul 16, 2012, <http://www.bpnews.net/BPnews.asp?ID=38271> (accessed Nov 27, 2012).

food chain.¹⁴ With regards to this same interview by the Baptist Press, the mayor of Boston told the Boston Herald, “Chick-fil-A doesn’t belong in Boston. You can’t have a business in the city of Boston that discriminates against the population. We’re an open city, we’re a city that’s at the forefront of inclusion.”¹⁵ For merely saying he supported “the biblical definition of the family unit” Cathy was publicly chastised for weeks and had many boycott his business.

Actor Kirk Cameron is another example of an individual being attacked for sharing his beliefs. In an interview with Piers Morgan in March of 2012, he said that “marriage was defined by God” and that gay marriage is “destructive to so many of the foundations of civilization.”¹⁶ Cameron also was attacked in the media for his comments. Piers Morgan, for example, called his language used to express his beliefs as “bigoted and inflammatory” towards homosexuality.¹⁷

What goes on publicly, it would stand to reason, goes on privately. While individual Christians sharing their beliefs on marriage and homosexuality may not be chastised publicly in newspapers or on the Internet, the cross of persecution may still be present in their lives. This persecution can come from friends, co-workers, family members and anyone they share their beliefs with. Many conservative Christians are afraid to share their beliefs because of the repercussions they may receive.

In an interview with this author in February 2013, a WELS member shared an experience he had while working at the University of Toronto. The president of the workers union at the University of Toronto is a lesbian, and many of the members of the union’s board are also homosexuals. Because of this, this union is involved in supporting gay rights. At a union meeting where the union showed support for a political party that promoted gay rights, this individual voiced his disagreement about the union becoming so involved with politics. He shared in the interview that his opinion was not received well, and he felt like he was booted out of the meeting. This individual later found out that his union, and therefore his union dues, would also be going to support a Gay Pride Parade in the city. He was not happy about his

¹⁴ The Jim Henson Company, Facebook, comment posted on July 20, 2012, <http://www.facebook.com/notes/the-jim-henson-company/july-20-2012/10150928864755563> (accessed Nov 27, 2012).

¹⁵ Eliana Dockterman, “Boston Mayor Blocks Chick-fil-A Franchise from City over Homophobic Attitude,” *Time News Feed*, July 23, 2012, <http://newsfeed.time.com/2012/07/23/boston-mayor-blocks-chick-fil-a-franchise-from-city-over-homophobic-attitude/> (accessed Nov 26, 2012).

¹⁶ Katherine Fung, “Piers Morgan Hits Back at Kirk Cameron on Homosexuality: I’ll Let Others Decide If He’s ‘A Bigot’,” *The Huffington Post*, March 20, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/20/piers-morgan-kirk-cameron-homosexuality_n_1367173.html (accessed Nov 25, 2012).

¹⁷ Fung, “Piers Morgan Hits Back at Kirk Cameron on Homosexuality.”

indirect support, but he dare not say anything because of how poorly his previous comment at the union meeting was received. Because of the homosexual movement, it is becoming more common for a Christian to be in a situation such as this where he or she may feel intimidated to express their biblical beliefs on marriage and homosexuality.

The persecution that most Christians receive for expressing their beliefs that homosexuality is a sin may come in the form of negative labels. One of the labels that those who are bound to Scripture's teaching on homosexuality can expect to receive is "unloving." Proponents of homosexuality will commonly accuse anyone who does not support homosexuality of failing to honor Jesus' greatest command to love. Those who say homosexuality is a sin are accused of committing a sin themselves, just as Reverend Peter Gomes of Harvard University says, "The sin with which we should be concerned is not homosexuality, because I don't believe that is a sin. The sin, however, is homophobia¹⁸ – the fear and loathing of homosexuals. That is a sin, and it's a more egregious sin because it's often in the name of Scripture by religious people."¹⁹

Christians who hold to Scripture's teachings can also expect to be called "bigoted" for judging and putting down a group of people. In our culture all opinions and beliefs are to be respected except for those beliefs that are considered bigoted towards others. "Bigoted" is one of the worst labels our society could give someone. To many in our culture, not supporting a practicing homosexual's lifestyle is bigotry, on the same level as the world's history of bigotry against different races.

Another common label is to be called "old-fashioned" or "backward" in thinking. Bible-believing Christians are often viewed as stubborn and unwilling to get with the current times. They are accused of holding on to the old views and misunderstandings of homosexuality. The proponents of homosexuality will accuse conservative Christians of failing to look at the new research and the progressively better understanding of homosexuality. Instead they say Christians get their opinions from an old book that is interpreted by old and outdated methods. Mel White accuses Bible-believing Christians of this in a pamphlet called "What the Bible Says – and Doesn't Say – On Homosexuality." In it he compares the use of the Bible as the final

¹⁸ This is a term the homosexual community has adopted as a name for those people who oppose homosexuality. This term comes from the belief that an anti-homosexual attitude is a result of fear. It is a fear of the unknown aspects of homosexuality.

¹⁹ *For the Bible Tells Me So.*

authority on sexual orientation to using the Bible as the final authority on space travel, gravity or the Internet.²⁰

The sinful flesh of the Christian hates enduring these persecutions. It hates these labels it receives from society and wants nothing more than to rid itself of them. The sinful flesh is quick to point out that in order to be free from these persecutions, all one has to do is compromise and distort God's Word on this one point. It is quick to point out how much easier life would then be. For a Christian to deny his sinful flesh of what it wants and instead to endure these persecutions is a painful cross. But it is a cross that Christ in his wisdom has given the Church. And it is a cross that he calls his disciples to carry.

Cross of Denying Sinful Reason

The cross of the Christian is not just the denying of the sinful will that does not want to suffer persecution, but it is also the denying of sinful reason in favor of God's Word. The natural and sinful reason of all people, both that of Christians and unbelievers, fights against God's Word. Our corrupted reasoning and logic stand against it and want nothing to do with it. The more homosexuality becomes an acceptable lifestyle defended by our culture, the more sinful logic will also want to accept it as a permissible lifestyle. Christians will hear arguments like this one from Linda Patterson: "Why should the love between two people be disparaged just because [they] are of the same sex?"²¹ Sinful logic may also find appealing statements like the following from Mel White:

There are millions of gay and lesbian persons who have accepted their sexual orientation as a gift from God and live productive and deeply spiritual lives. The evidence from science and from the personal experience of gay and lesbian Christians demands that we at least consider whether the passages cited to condemn homosexual behavior should be reconsidered.²²

Some of those who claim the Bible does not condemn homosexuality as a sin will make many arguments that sound convincing on the surface. They know Scripture and have studied it for the purpose of using it to trap and trick Bible-believing Christians. Not all who support homosexuality are blatant atheist. Many of the predominant spokesmen for the homosexual

²⁰Mel White, "What the Bible Says – and Doesn't Say – About Homosexuality," Soulforce, <http://www.soulforce.org/resources/what-the-bible-says-and-doesnt-say-about-homosexuality/> (accessed Feb 6, 2013).

²¹ Patterson, *Hate Thy Neighbor*, 110.

²² Mel White, "What the Bible Says – and Doesn't Say – About Homosexuality."

movement call themselves Bible-believing Christians. For example, Mel White, along with being the leader of the organization Soulforce, is also a pastor of mega church in Dallas, Texas.

Mel White and other leaders of the Christian movement who promote homosexuality seek to provide Christians with an appealing opportunity. They teach that a Christian can keep their church and keep their faith yet still be accepted by society and be rid of the burden of the crosses that pertain to homosexuality. The biblical scholars like Reverend Peter Gomes of Harvard University, the pastors of Christian churches like Mel White, and all who in their teaching deny Scripture's clear condemnation of homosexuality are the false prophets that Jesus describes as wolves in sheep's clothing. They are what Paul warned about when he wrote, "The time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear" (2 Ti 4:3). What the itching ears of people want to hear is that they can merge their doctrine and faith with what society teaches. A Christian's itching ears want to hear biblical teachings that do not contradict sinful reasoning. To deny sinful reasoning and insist on the truths of God's Word is a constant struggle but, again, to do so is a cross that Christ calls his disciples to bear.

WHERE THE CROSSES COME FROM

This attitude of our culture that wants to accept homosexuality as a permissible lifestyle did not spring up overnight. A progression of literature, a loosening of morals, and various social and religious theories have gotten us to this point. A number of things came together to create the right environment for the homosexual movement to take off.

Scripture Lost Its Authority

What had the strongest impact on this change in culture is the fact that people stopped viewing God and his Word as authoritative. They stopped looking at Scripture for guidance as the source of absolute truth. God was already being pushed from the center stage of scholarly discussion in the 18th Century by Voltaire and other philosophers, and the Bible began being viewed as a hindrance to progress. In the 19th century Charles Darwin proposed his evolutionary theory so that mankind no longer had to accept the biblical creation account. Deutschlander writes about the effect these philosophical movements had:

By the end of the 19th century, direct assaults on the Bible had become so common that the only arguments left in the scholarly world were between different schools of unbelief. Only a relative handful of scholars still defended the proposition that the Bible is the ultimate source of truth, verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit, and therefore without error in all that it teaches. They were dismissed as ignorant miscreants from a bygone age.²³

Moral Relativism

Christians are more and more going to have to learn to live and work in a culture that does not want to give ear service to the teachings of the Bible. “Homosexuality is wrong because the Bible says it is wrong” is no longer considered a valid argument. Many people do not want to hear, nor do they care, what the Bible says on homosexuality or any other questions of morality. Scripture is gradually being pushed aside and is being replaced by moral relativism. Now, instead of having absolute truth in Scripture, there are no absolute truths. Everyone is their own source of truth with their own relative values. The only universal value is that people should appreciate and respect the values of other people.

When the existence of God and his Word is denied, it is easy to see how moral relativism can easily enter society. If a person is not accountable to his creator God, then all people are free to come up with their own system of morals. Deutschlander explains the connection between a creator God and humankind’s accountability to him: “Many suppose that we are but a random conglomeration of genes, hormones and electrical charges in the brain. These are said to be conditioned and programmed mechanically in such a way that the concepts of free will, morality, good, and evil are impossible to define.”²⁴

This is not to say that moral relativism does not have its limits. Every society has always set up its own moral norms of what it views as right and wrong. These moral norms are formed by popular opinion and therefore are always changing. An article on sexual morality, written for the academic journal, *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, suggests the current moral norm of our society is that consent is the only thing needed for sexual relations to be socially acceptable.²⁵

As societal mores loosen, sex became more permissible outside of a monogamous marriage. Author Erwin Lutzer proposes in his book that the invention of the birth-control pill and the general loosening of societal mores in the 1960s spawned a revolution in sexual attitudes.

²³ Deutschlander, *The Theology of the Cross*, 66.

²⁴ Deutschlander, *The Theology of the Cross*, 68.

²⁵ Igor Primoratz, “Sexual Morality: Is Consent Enough?” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 4, no. 3 (2001): 201-218, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40018070> (accessed Oct, 16, 2012).

He writes about the current attitude towards sexual relations: “Of course, promiscuity has always been with us, but previous generations shared an understanding that although sex outside of marriage happened, it should not be so.”²⁶ Once sex can be removed from inside its frame of marriage and consent is all that is needed, the door can easily be opened for homosexual relations to become acceptable. If two consenting same-sex adults want to have sexual relations, it is not acceptable to tell them it is wrong.

Homosexuality Normalized

Homosexuality is not only permissible and acceptable, but it is even being normalized. Constant exposure to something, even if that something was once deemed perverted, can make that thing seem normal. This is known as the contact hypothesis. Credited to Gordon W. Allport, it states that “interpersonal contact is one of the most effective ways to reduce prejudice between majority and minority groups.”²⁷ In 1956 Donald Horton and Richard Wohl published an article that applied the theories of the contact hypothesis to the media. They wrote, “One of the striking characteristics of the new mass media – radio, television, and the movies – is that they give the illusion of face-to-face relationship with the performer. The conditions of response to the performer are analogous to those in a primary group.”²⁸ This became known as the para-social hypothesis. Even if people have no real world contact with a homosexual, the television gives them the opportunity to know one. It gives people the opportunity to view the homosexual lifestyle as normal and acceptable.

If the para-social hypothesis is true, then the popular shows on television will have played a big role in the acceptance and promotion of homosexuality. An article written for the *Journal of Homosexuality* researched the connection between television media and people’s views on homosexuality. It says, “In the first decades of television, homosexuals were mostly absent or portrayed negatively as deviants... In the 1990’s the number of gay characters on television increased significantly.”²⁹ One of the most popular of these shows from the 90’s was *Will and Grace*. No other show with gay principal characters has received the same level of

²⁶ Erwin Lutzer, *The Truth About Same-Sex Marriage* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2004), 17.

²⁷ Schiappa, Edward, Peter Gregg, and Dean Hewes, “Can One TV Show Make a Difference? *Will and Grace* and the Parasocial Contact Hypothesis,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 51, no. 4 (2006): 28.

²⁸ Donald Horton and Richard Wohl, “Mass Communication and Para-social Interaction: Observation on Intimacy at a Distance,” *Psychiatry* 19 (1956): 215.

²⁹ Edward Schiappa, “Can One TV Show Make a Difference? *Will & Grace* and the Parasocial Contact Hypothesis,” 15.

popularity and critical acclaim that *Will and Grace* has. It ran for eight seasons on NBC, earning 16 Emmy Awards. Suddenly with this show a large portion of America knew people who were homosexuals. They could weekly sympathize with their problems and laugh at the humorous situations that their lifestyle caused. The popularity of the show paved the way for shows like *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, *Six Feet Under*, *Modern Family*, and the reality television shows in which producers are sure to include a homosexual in the cast. The television played a role in homosexuality becoming normal and accepted. Once homosexuality became normal and accepted, it was not long before Christians were blamed for the reason it was not accepted in the first place.

Another reason why homosexuality is no longer labeled as wrong but an acceptable lifestyle is because in the scientific community it is no longer considered pathology. Gregory Herek, a psychologist and internationally recognized authority on many topics related to homosexuality, writes, "In 1973, the weight of empirical data, coupled with changing social norms and the development of a politically active gay community in the United States, led the Board of Directors of the American Psychiatric Association to remove homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders."³⁰ A sizable group of psychologists rejected the decision at that time, but it was ratified by vote the following year. There is still debate today as to whether it was removed more for empirical data or societal pressure.

Homosexuality is officially no longer a disease, and it is becoming more widely believed that it is not a choice either. Some scientists will argue that sexual identity is for the most part biological, while others say that it is mostly a learned behavior. A gay gene has not yet been found, but nearly every homosexual insists that they are acting out on natural urges that they have had since childhood. It is also argued that no sensible person would bring upon themselves the pain and struggles of having to come out publicly as a homosexual unless they were fighting real homosexual urges. It is not the goal of this thesis to determine whether or not homosexuality is a choice or a matter of biology. Regardless, Scripture makes clear it is a sin.

Homosexuality is widely viewed as acting out on what an individual is by nature or what God created him or her to be. It is because of this belief that many people justify comparing conservative Christians to racists. In the eyes of many, for a church to not permit an open and

³⁰ Gregory M. Herek, "Facts About Homosexuality and Mental Health," Department of Psychology University of California, http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow/html/facts_mental_health.htm (accessed Nov 26, 2012).

practicing homosexual to become a member of the church or partake in communion is no different than telling that to someone because they are an ethnic minority.

Politics

Finally, the politics surrounding homosexuality has caused a backlash against Christians for their biblical teaching. The homosexual movement is seeking the legal rights for same-sex couples to be married. This debate on whether they should have the same rights as a married man and woman has helped fan the flames of public interest on the issue. Homosexuality no longer affects only homosexuals and their families and friends; now, it also affects all voters.

The leaders of the homosexual movement are blaming orthodox Christians for preventing same-sex couples the right to marry. An article printed in the *Journal of Religious Ethics* begins by saying, “The major obstacle to the full legal recognition of same-sex marriage in the U.S. is Christian opposition to it.”³¹ Mel White also writes in his auto-biography that “conservative Christians use their misinterpretations of biblical texts and homophobic traditions to enforce their own secular agenda with biblical authority.”³² To many people, Christians are no longer keeping their beliefs to themselves but are imposing them upon others by denying them of the right to marry. This is causing backlash against Bible-believing Christians from not only the homosexual community but also from political organizations and others supporting their cause.

WHERE AND WHEN THE CROSSES ARE HEAVIEST

These crosses are heavier in some places than others. A church in a smaller conservative city will probably not feel much of the persecutions and the pressures directly from those who support the homosexual lifestyle. This is not to say that the persecutions and pressures are entirely absent. They will still witness and feel the pressure of the homosexual movement from the media and possibly from some isolated sources like a vocal proponent of homosexuality they may know. However, in certain settings where the pressure to accept homosexuality is greater, the cross and the temptation to get rid of the cross is also greater.

College Campuses

One place where the temptation is particularly heavy is on college campuses. For most young adults, college is the first time they leave home. In high school and grade school, kids are

³¹ Jeffrey Stout, “How Charity Transcends the Culture War: Eugene Rogers Others on Same-Sex Marriage,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 31, no. 2 (2003): 169, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40018164> (accessed Sep 29, 2012).

³² Mel White, *Stranger at the Gate: To Be Gay and Christian in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 39.

influenced by friends and teachers during class and after school programs. Fortunately, they will still come home in the evening to be with family and parents who share and reaffirm their same beliefs. When many young adults leave for college, they live in dorms or campus housing, and as a result this daily spiritual support a family can offer is lost. They are primarily surrounded and influenced by friends, co-workers, and teachers.

This initial separation from the spiritual support a family offers would be difficult enough, but additionally, universities are often the center of and starting point for many progressive and liberal ideologies. College students are likely to be exposed to alternative social norms and the pressure to change their core beliefs, perhaps more so than any other group of people. The beliefs and values they were instructed in for years will be questioned and many students, especially those who attend Lutheran elementary schools and high schools, will have some beliefs challenged for the first time. For many who attend a public university, it will be the first time in their lives that they are in the minority with their religious beliefs and values. They will almost assuredly be in the minority in their belief that homosexuality is immoral and sinful.

In order to better understand the effect that the homosexual debate is having on college students, a survey was written by this author and sent out to WELS college students.³³ The survey was e-mailed to fifteen campus pastors who then passed it on to the college students they minister to in their campus ministries. In total this survey was sent out to approximately 200 WELS college students. Seventeen were filled out and returned to provide insight for this thesis.

The students were asked, “Do you believe the Bible clearly teaches homosexuality to be a sin?” Despite the pressures put on them, all but three responded that they do. If the word “clearly” was taken out from the question, probably only one student would have responded that he or she did not believe the Bible teaches it to be a sin. When asked, “Has your view on homosexuality changed since you have left for college?”, only one indicated that it has changed to the point that he or she is not sure it is a sin any more. Others said that their view has changed but not their belief that it is a sin. The changes mentioned were changes in their views for more tolerance towards homosexuals or in their political views on same-sex marriage.

Many of the students stated that they had friends or people they commonly associated with who are homosexual. The students did not merely write that they knew of or would occasionally see homosexual students on campus, but instead, many wrote that they have

³³ See Appendix A

personal interaction with them. Six of them mentioned that they have friends or common acquaintances who are homosexuals. Some of them even mentioned that they had more than one homosexual friend. This survey was sent out to WELS college students who are involved in a campus ministry, so they are likely more isolated from homosexuals than the average college student. One could reason from this survey that homosexuality is very common, and even normal, on college campuses.

Six of the students responded that they have been persecuted for their beliefs. Two more wrote that they choose to avoid the subject so they would not be persecuted. Most of the persecutions they mentioned came from negative labels and verbal attacks. All but one of the students wrote that they have felt pressure to change their beliefs and they cite these pressures as coming from friends, classmates, professors, and in class discussion.

Congregations in Liberal Cities

To better understand the effect that the homosexual influence is having on churches and Christians living in more liberal cities, a survey was sent out to six WELS pastors who serve or who previously served in cities with a substantial homosexual population.³⁴ Surveys were sent out to pastors who serve in the cities proper or in the suburbs of Toronto, San Francisco, Portland, and Seattle.

Pastor Thad Bitter, serving at Grace Lutheran Church in Portland, writes that the sin of homosexuality is present in almost every neighborhood. “Perhaps the street on which I live, which is in a simple residential neighborhood in Portland, is indicative of the homosexual population when around our cul de sac and up the street are five known homosexual households.” Another pastor who chose to remain anonymous, also serving in the Portland area, describes the homosexual influence as “in your face” and observes, “Every aspect of homosexuality is celebrated.” Pastor Daniel Moll, serving at Gethsemane Lutheran Church in Tigard which is a suburb of Portland, writes, “The homosexual community is just part of the fabric of Portland society. It isn’t even considered counter-culture here, rather homosexuality is almost proto-typical Portland, and the city embraces it.” Pastor Thomas Gumm, serving at Grace Lutheran Church in Seattle and Salem Lutheran Church in Edmonds, writes that there is an “extremely heavy homosexual population.” He writes as an example, “My next door neighbors at both churches are gay and openly practice their lifestyle.” Pastor Joel Schulz serving at Cross

³⁴ See Appendix B

of Life Lutheran Church in Mississauga, Ontario which is a suburb of Toronto, writes that, “As far as the image and media are concerned, Toronto is as pro-gay as cities come.” But he also wrote, “Homosexuality seems to be a problem I haven’t encountered yet in the people we have drawn.” Pastor Timothy Shrimpton, serving at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Belmont which is a suburb of San Francisco, writes, “I’m sure there are homosexual couples in the immediate vicinity but it’s by no means on the level of the stereotypes of (or actual) scenes in San Francisco proper.” Pastor Shrimpton has only served at Gloria Dei for a year and believes that homosexuality will be more “of an issue of ideology than that of confronting specific sin.”

Many of the pastors reported the effect that the homosexual movement is having on their members. Pastor Moll in Portland writes, “The assumption that any Christian who does not support gay marriage is a hate-monger is all too common.” Another WELS pastor in Portland shares that many of his members told him “their co-workers would bring up the subject because they knew it annoyed our members. It was often discussed and they were persecuted for their views.” Pastor Gumm in Seattle reports, “One of my members at Microsoft was overlooked for a promotion” because of his views on homosexuality. He also writes about his members sharing their faith at work: “When they are asked about the gay agenda, they disagree. Then they get called closed minded, bigots, and Bible thumpers. They feel very intimidated.”

According to these surveys, the greatest concern these pastors have regarding the homosexual issue is for the youth in their congregations. Cross of Life Lutheran Church rents out a public school gymnasium in Mississauga, Ontario for their worship facility on Sundays. Pastor Schulz, who serves this congregation, writes about the homosexual influence in the public school system:

The school we meet in regularly puts up propaganda for toleration of homosexuals and other kinds of lifestyles. In fact, the whole school system here has a huge pro-gay agenda in making sure children know that it is perfectly normal to be gay. We have an annual ‘pink day’ at school in which they encourage children to wear pink shirts to support the cause. In fact, I teach Bible study in the hallway of that school on Sunday mornings, and above my head hangs one of those posters promoting it. Needless to say, my kids do not wear pink on ‘pink day’. And they definitely stand out.

The two pastors who serve in Portland also write about the difficulties that the youth of the congregation face. Pastor Bitter writes, “For the most part, persecution comes in the form of ridicule in high school. I know that in different circumstances some of our public high school students have encountered criticism from teachers and other students for standing up for the truth

of God's Word in regard to the sin of homosexuality." The other pastor in the Portland area who chose to remain anonymous writes, "Gay history month was a part of the high school curriculum and teens in our congregation, if they dared to say anything, were mocked for their Christian views." He also writes that he had members tell him that the reason their child stopped coming to church was because of the church's teaching that homosexuality is a sin. Pastor Gumm in Seattle writes, "Many of my middle-school children and high school students feel a great deal of pressure to have a gay or lesbian experience so they know what it is really all about... I lost one girl to this, and she became a bi-sexual."

If Current Trends Continue into the Future

According to an article on pewforum.org from November 2012, "In 2001 Americans opposed same-sex marriage by a 57% to 35% margin. Today there is slightly more support for same-sex marriage than opposition to it, with 48% in favor and 43% opposed."³⁵ A November pool from ABC News-Washington found that 51% of Americans support gay marriage. This is up from 32% as recently as mid-2004.³⁶ George Will, a columnist for ABC News said, "It's clear where public opinion is headed... Quite literally, the opposition to gay marriage is dying. It's old people."³⁷

If same-sex marriages are legalized in a majority of states, it is hard to predict the impact that this will have. It will likely further make homosexuality appear to be an acceptable alternative lifestyle. As it is now, certain states prohibiting homosexuals from being legally married and adopting children probably helps curb the temptation for a homosexual to seek out a same-sex relationship. According to a study published in *American Sociological Review* from April 2001, children with homosexual parents are more likely to engage in homosexual behavior.³⁸

If the trends continue into the future and same-sex marriages are made legal in a growing number of states, it would be reasonable to conclude that there will be more pressure and

³⁵ Pew Research Center, "Changing Attitudes on Gay Marriage," The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (Nov 2012), <http://features.pewforum.org/same-sex-marriage-attitudes/> (accessed Feb, 20, 2012).

³⁶ Greg Hoyk, "Majority Supports Path to Citizenship; Greater Division on Other Social Issues," *ABC News*, Nov 14, 2012, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2012/11/majority-supports-path-to-citizenship-greater-division-on-other-social-issues/> (accessed Feb 20,2012).

³⁷ George Stephanopoulos, "George Will: 'Quite Literally, The Opposition to Gay Marriage Is Dying,'" *ABC News*, Dec 9, 2012, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2012/12/george-will-quite-literally-the-opposition-to-gay-marriage-is-dying/> (accessed Feb 20,2012).

³⁸ Judith Stacey and Timothy Biblarz, "Does the Sexual Orientation of Parents Matter?" *American Sociological Review* 66, no. 2 (2001): 159-183, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2657413> (accessed Feb 20, 2012).

persecution on those Christians who maintain that it is a sin. It would also be reasonable to conclude that more church bodies will also decide to change their stance on same sex marriages. This would further add to the pressure put on Bible-believing Christians.

MISINTERPRETATIONS OF SCRIPTURE TO DEFEND HOMOSEXUALITY

Both the Old and New Testament condemn homosexuality as a sin. The Bible is not unclear or ambiguous in calling it a sin. Christians can be absolutely certain, no matter the persecutions and pressures, that when they say homosexuality is a sin, this truth comes from God's Word. It rests firmly upon the foundation of the Word, which is more certain than the changing philosophies and cultural norms. Christians have no reason to be ashamed of the teaching or to doubt it. Praise God that he has given his people clear direction and guidance on this issue.

But if the Bible is so clear, how is it that so many people will turn to Scripture and not see that homosexuality is sinful? This comes from faulty hermeneutics that deny the relevance and authority of God's Word for people today. It also comes from a gross twisting and manipulation of the words of Scripture to defend sin. This next section will look at some of the passages in the Bible that condemn homosexuality and how they are commonly misinterpreted.

Old Testament Passages

The Old Testament talks about homosexuality primarily in two places. The first is in the account of Sodom and Gomorrah from Genesis. God describes Sodom and Gomorrah as wicked cities: "Then the Lord said, 'The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know'" (Ge 18:20-21). God sent two angels into the city disguised as men, and they stayed at the house of Lot. What follows in Genesis 19:4-9, shows just how wicked the city was:

Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom – both young and old – surrounded the house. They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them." Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him and said, "No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing. Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don't do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof." "Get out of our way," they replied. And they said, "This fellow came here as an alien, and now he wants to

play the judge! We'll treat you worse than them.” They kept bringing pressure on Lot and moved forward to break down the door.

Some will interpret these verses with the belief that inhospitality is the chief sin being addressed. As Linda Patterson writes, “The story describes the Sodomite’s gross lack of hospitality, and their desire to dominate and humiliate strangers. It is not a story about sex *per se*, or about ‘homosexual proclivities.’”³⁹ Even an Orthodox Rabbi, Steven Greenberg, shared this belief, “Sodom’s story is not about license or promiscuity or even perversity. Sodom, according to the rabbis, is about cruelty. It’s about inhospitality.”⁴⁰ Some will also say that the story more than anything else condemns homosexual rape but not consensual homosexuality. Patterson writes, “The most that can be said about the story of Sodom with respect to homosexuality is that the story condemns same-sex gang rape. The threatened gang rape of two men (or angels) in Sodom is no reflection on consensual homosexuality.”⁴¹

These arguments are only partially true. The men of Sodom were certainly sinning by their inhospitality and by attempting to rape these visitors. If this was the only place in Scripture where homosexuality was condemned, the argument could be made that the only sins committed were attempted rape and inhospitality. But God has shown us elsewhere that homosexuality is a sin. And just like the sins of inhospitality and gang rape it demands punishment. The fact that “all the men from every part of the city of Sodom – both young and old – surrounded the house” (Ge 19:4) shows us that homosexuality was very rampant sin in the city. Using other portions of Scripture to properly interpret these verses, we can include homosexuality as one of, if not the primary, sin that brought God’s judgment upon the city.

In clear terms homosexuality is condemned as a sin in Leviticus 18:22: “Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.” It is condemned a couple chapters later in Leviticus 20:13: “If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.”⁴² But because this command from God is listed along with other Old Testament Laws, some will say it is not valid. It is a common argument of proponents of homosexuality to point to the surrounding Levitical Laws and claim that it is unjust to pick out this one law on homosexuality

³⁹ Paterson, *Hate Thy Neighbor*, 25.

⁴⁰ *For the Bible Tells Me So*.

⁴¹ Paterson, *Hate Thy Neighbor*, 33.

⁴² The Hebrew word for detestable in both verses from Leviticus is often translated as “abomination”. Many people will cite these two verses calling homosexuality an abomination.

that must be followed but not the others. Dan Savage, a popular voice for the homosexual movement in just about all media outlets, likes to make this argument in interviews he has done. He made headlines this last year when he made crude statements about the Bible before a group of high school students at a high school journalism convention:

We can learn to ignore the bullshit in the Bible about gay people the same way we have learned to ignore the bullshit in the Bible about shellfish, about slavery, about dinner, about farming, about menstruation, about virginity, about masturbation. We ignore bullshit in the Bible about all sorts of things... I apologize if I have hurt anyone's feelings but I have a right to defend myself and to point out the hypocrisy of people who justify anti-gay bigotry by pointing to the Bible and insisting we must live by the code of Leviticus on this one issue and no other.⁴³

This argument that Dan Savage and others make is made from an ignorance of Scripture. The passage from Leviticus 20:13, comes from the Mosaic or Levitical law, which were laws that God gave to his Old Testament people through Moses. Some of these laws were binding only for God's Old Testament people, and others are binding for people today as well. Scripture makes it clear which laws still apply today and which ones do not. When the Mosaic or Levitical law is studied in the light of the rest of Scripture, it is clear that this law falls into three categories. One category is the laws that state the eternal immutable will of God that are binding upon all people; this is known as the Moral Law. The laws which fall into this category are known because they are described in the New Testament as being applied to all people of all time. As will be shown later, homosexuality is forbidden in the New Testament too. A second category is the laws that apply specifically to Israel's worship; this is the Ceremonial Law. A third category forms the civil or political laws of their theocracy; this is known as the Civil Law.⁴⁴

The book of Galatians, Colossians 2:14-17, Acts 10, and other places throughout the New Testament clearly show that people today are not bound to follow the Ceremonial and Civil Laws. These laws were only for God's Old Testament people. When Christ came their purpose was no longer needed. But the Bible also makes clear that all people of all time are bound to follow the Moral Law, which is listed as part of the Levitical Laws. Side by side with rules on farming, diets, and ceremonial washing, Leviticus also prohibits sins such as murder, stealing,

⁴³ Dan Savage, "Discusses Bible at High School Journalism Convention," *YouTube* (April 27, 2012), FLV file, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ao0k9qDsOvs> (accessed Oct 29, 2012).

⁴⁴ Harold Warneke, "Catechetical Resources- The Moral, Ceremonial and Civil Law," in the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library Essay File, <http://www.wlsessays.net/files/WarnekeMoral.pdf> (accessed Nov 20, 2012), 2.

cheating, and worshiping idols. No Christian would argue that these laws are to be ignored as well. It is also a point worth noting that homosexuality is listed among a list of many other sexual sins in chapters 18 and 20. It is listed with incest, adultery with another man's wife, and bestiality. Few people would argue that these are not wrong and sinful, at least for now. It is not inconsistent or unjust to Scripture to maintain that homosexuality is still a sin for people today. What is unjust to Scripture is to pull homosexuality out of a whole list of sexual sins and claim that it alone is no longer a sin.

New Testament Passages

The New Testament also specifically condemns homosexuality in several places. One place is in Romans 1:26-27:

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. 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.

In this section Paul describes homosexuality as a sin that, just like all other sins, starts with a sin against the first commandment. It stems from a sinful heart that loathes the idea of worshiping and serving God. Romans 1:18-21 is a description of a godless world where men suppress the truth of God's Word and no longer care about glorifying God. After describing this godless attitude Paul describes the sinful thoughts and actions that come as a result. In verses 26 and 27 he talks about homosexuality. In verses 29 and 30 he has a whole list of sins such as envy, murder, gossip, and slander.

Paul describes the sin of homosexuality as a violation of nature according to God's order. Paul says that the women were exchanging natural sexual relations for ones contrary to nature. Verse 26 is the only place in the Bible that speaks directly of homosexual females. If we only had verse 26, it could be argued that "natural" (*φυσικός*) and unnatural (*παρὰ φύσιν*) could mean many different things. But verse 27 clarifies exactly what Paul means by "natural" and "unnatural". Verse 27 begins with "in the same way" (*ὁμοίως*). So Paul is saying the men also were committing this offense of abandoning natural relations. Verse 27 goes into more detail to define this abandoning of natural relations as committing indecent homosexual acts. Richard Starr, a WELS pastor who has written different books, Bible studies, and articles on the sin of homosexuality, describes this sin against nature: "God has established the natural order of things

and he demands that human beings stay perfectly within this natural order. This is his will. The practice of homosexuality does not allow a person to stay perfectly within this natural order.”⁴⁵

These passages condemn homosexuality as a sin against the will of God, but many pro-homosexual writers will misinterpret these words to excuse the sin of homosexuality as permissible in the eyes of God. Linda Patterson sums up many of the common misinterpretations when she writes, “As with many of Paul’s writings, this passage is somewhat obtuse, and it has been interpreted in vastly different ways by various scholars. Some believe that Paul condemns nothing; others that he condemns bestiality; others that he condemns anal intercourse; others that he condemns heterosexuals engaging in homosexuality; and still others that he condemns homosexuality in all of its forms.”⁴⁶

This passage is not interpreted in various ways because it is obtuse. It is interpreted in different ways because of a sinful nature that wants to excuse sin and an improper method of interpreting Scripture. Some will interpret this passage differently because they do not believe the letters of Paul, or any part of the Bible for that matter, to be the inspired Word of God. Therefore they say that these words are filled with the biases of Paul and his own misunderstanding of monogamous homosexual relationships. This misunderstanding of Scripture accounts for most of the wrong interpretations of this verse. This false understanding of Scripture will be covered later. When Paul’s words are taken as the inspired words of God, it would be difficult to say that God is not condemning homosexuality as sinful in these verses. To Patterson’s points, clearly Paul is condemning something and clearly that something is not bestiality. Nor is Paul condemning any specific forms of unnatural heterosexual intercourse. Paul writes, “Men abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men.” God, through the writings of Paul, in clear language condemns the sin of homosexuality.

The last misinterpretation Patterson mentions is worth taking a more in-depth look at. She wrote, “Some believe that Paul... condemns heterosexuals engaging in homosexuality.” This is a common misinterpretation of these verses. In 1980 John Boswell, a professor of history at Yale University, wrote a controversial and award winning book titled *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*. In it he writes on these verses, “Paul did not discuss gay persons

⁴⁵ Richard Starr, *Speaking the Unspeakable: Homosexuality – A Biblical and Modern Perspective* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1987), 24.

⁴⁶ Paterson, *Hate Thy Neighbor*, 50.

but only homosexual acts committed by heterosexual persons. There is, however, no clear condemnation of homosexual acts in the verses in question.”⁴⁷ But this argument is not valid. Paul writes that “God gave men over to shameful lusts,” and “[men] were inflamed (ἐξεκαύθησαν) with lust for one another.” These verses are describing someone who is filled with strong homosexual desires and follows up on those desires with actions. This is not the language that would be used to describe someone who has heterosexual desires but experimented with homosexual actions out of curiosity in an isolated incident, although that too would be a condemning sin before God.

Take the Apostle Paul’s list of sins at 1 Corinthians 6:9. The NIV ’84 translation that has been used throughout this paper translates it, “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.” The words the NIV translates as “male prostitutes” and “homosexual offenders” are debated in these passages. The Greek words are *μαλακοὶ* and *ἀρσενοκοῖται*.

On the survey filled out by WELS college students, they were asked, “Do you believe the Bible clearly teaches homosexuality to be a sin?” One of the students responded, “The way it has been translated, yes. But I have my doubts about the accuracy of the translations.” This student’s answer reflects the confusion that many people have concerning what the Bible says about homosexuality. This comes from the proponents of the homosexuality movement trying to add doubts and confusion as to how the words *μαλακοὶ* and *ἀρσενοκοῖται* are to be translated. Sadly, many people are buying into the confusion being promoted. *Claiming the Promise: An Ecumenical Welcoming Bible Study Resource on Homosexuality*, says on these words, “Most of the current translations have shifted to words that somehow imply same-sex conduct.”⁴⁸ If a person were to look up “The Bible and Homosexuality” on Wikipedia, a site that many people looking for answers will use, they will find the article cites authors who question the way these words have historically been translated and understood. The Wikipedia article says, “The extent to which the Bible mentions [homosexuality] has become the subject of debate.” According to the article many passages historically had been interpreted as condemning homosexuality. But it

⁴⁷ John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 93.

⁴⁸ Mary Osterman, *Claiming the Promise: An Ecumenical Welcoming Bible Study Resource on Homosexuality* (Chicago: Reconciling Congregation Program, 1997), 24.

then goes on to say that “other interpreters maintain that the Bible does not condemn homosexuality, saying that... rare or unusual words in the passages may not be referring to homosexuality.”⁴⁹

ἀρσενοκοίτης is a rare word. Paul appears to be one of the first to have used it. It is a compound word and when the two base words are divided it is clear what it means. It is made up of the Greek words ἄρσεν, which means “male”, and κοίτη, which means “bed” and commonly refers to engagement in sexual relations. William Danker’s third edition of Bauer’s *Worterbuch*, commonly referred to as BDAG, is one of the foremost Greek to English lexicons. It defines ἀρσενοκοίτης as “a male who engages in sexual activity with a person of his own sex, pederast.”⁵⁰

Because ἀρσενοκοίτης is rare, some scholars will claim that its meaning cannot be certain. Boswell writes,

The second half of the compound κοίται, is a coarse word, generally denoting base or licentious sexual activities, and in this and other compounds corresponds to the vulgar English word... [for] a person who, by insertion, takes the ‘active’ role in intercourse. The prefix ἀρσενο simply means ‘male.’ Its relationship to the second half of the compound is ambiguous... It is not clear whether ‘male’ designates the object or the gender of the second half.⁵¹

Boswell seeks to prove that ‘male’ is the gender of the one engaging in sexual intercourse and not the object. Based on that understanding he argues that this word is referring to a male prostitute and that this is what is being condemned by Paul.⁵²

In 1984 David Wright wrote an article in *Vigiliae Christianae* in response to Boswell’s work. In writing this article, he looked at the other compounds of κοίτη to see if the first half ever denotes the one who did the ‘sleeping’. Wright writes,

In all, it seems, of the comparable compounds the first element in fact specifies the object of the ‘sleeping’ or its scene or sphere – what one might call its indirect object... We have δουλοκοίτης (sleeping with slaves, *not* slaves sleeping with others), μητροκοίτης (*not* mother who sleeps around), and πολυκοίτης (sleeping with many others). Invariably –

⁴⁹ Wikipedia, “The Bible and Homosexuality,” (Feb 8, 2013), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bible_and_homosexuality (accessed Feb 12, 2012).

⁵⁰ Walter Bauer, ed. Frederick Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: Third Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 135.

⁵¹ Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 342.

⁵² *Ibid*, 344.

κοίτης has, as one might expect, a verbal force on which is dependent the object or adverb specified in the first half of the word.⁵³

A look at two passages from Leviticus as found in the Septuagint provides some insight into what Paul meant by ἀρσενοκοίτης and what his first century readers would have understood the word to mean. In Leviticus 20:13 and Leviticus 18:22, the two base words ἄρσῃν and κοίτη that form ἀρσενοκοίται are used. “καὶ ὃς ἂν κοιμηθῆ μετὰ ἄρσενος κοίτην γυναικός...” (Le 20:13). “καὶ μετὰ ἄρσενος οὐ κοιμηθήσῃ κοίτην γυναικός...” (Le 18:22). Wright writes about the connection between the Septuagint and Paul’s word ἀρσενοκοίται, “The parallel between the LXX’s⁵⁴ ἄρσενος οὐ κοιμηθήσῃ κοίτην and even more κοιμηθῆ μετὰ ἄρσενος κοίτην and Paul’s ἀρσενοκοίται is surely inescapable. If, as seems likely, the ἀρσενοκοίτ- group of words is a coinage of Hellenistic Judaism or Hellenistic Jewish Christianity, the probability the LXX provides the key to their meaning is strengthened.”⁵⁵ Wright proposes that Boswells theory that the first half of the compound (ἄρσενο-) denotes not the object but the gender of second half (-κοίται) “is patently not the case if the LXX of the verses in Leviticus lies behind ἀρσενοκοίται, whether in encouraging the formation of the word itself or in informing its meaning.”⁵⁶

It is reasonable to assume that the Paul coined this term from the juxtaposition of the two words, ἄρσῃν and κοίτη, found in the Septuagint. This is not out of character for the apostle to do this. He often quoted the Septuagint in his writings. He also coined many terms in his writings that are found nowhere else in pre-Christian Greek literature. Though Paul likely coined this term and there were many other Greek words Paul could have used for homosexuality instead, the meaning of ἀρσενοκοίται is obvious. Paul used two common words that when put together describe male homosexual activities. That the Septuagint also uses these two words gives further evidence as to not only why Paul used this term but also what he meant by it and what his original readers would have understood it to mean.

μαλακοὶ is not a rare word. But Boswell and others argue that it is not referring to homosexual activities. BDAG defines it as “(1) pertaining to being yielding to touch, soft. (2)

⁵³ David Wright, “Homosexuals or Prostitutes? The Meaning of ἀρσενοκοίται (1 Cor.6:9, 1 Tim. 1:10),” *Vigiliae Christianae: A Review of Early Christian Life and Language* 38 (1984): 130.

⁵⁴ LXX is an abbreviation for the Septuagint.

⁵⁵ Wright, “Homosexuals or Prostitutes?” 129.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 129.

Pertaining to being passive in a same-sex relationship, effeminate especially of catamites, of men and boys who are sodomized by other males in such a relationship.”⁵⁷ There are not doubts among scholars that this term can and often does refer to the passive partner in a homosexual relationship. BDAG cites several Christian and secular writings ranging in time from the last century B.C. through the 3rd century A.D. to support this definition. But *μαλακός* may also refer to an effeminate male without describing their sexual preferences. Dale Martin, a professor of religious studies at Yale University, makes the argument that all penetrated men were considered *μαλακός* but that not all *μαλακός* were penetrated men.⁵⁸ He also maintains that the definition of *μαλακός* cannot be determined from *ἀρσενοκοῖται* when he writes,

“A common practice among New Testament scholars has been to define *malakos* as the ‘passive partner’ due to its proximity to *arsenokoites*, which is taken to be the ‘active partner.’ But this is circular reasoning. The meaning of *arsenokoites* is famously problematic... To define *malakos* by *arsenokoites* is to define something already clear by something that is obscure.”⁵⁹

As has already been shown *ἀρσενοκοῖται* is not obscure but can only be understood as referring to a person who engages in homosexual actions. If *μαλακοὶ* stood by itself, logically it would be best understood as referring to a homosexual. Being paired with *ἀρσενοκοῖται* makes the meaning of *μαλακοὶ* all the more clear. *ἀρσενοκοῖται* is the one who beds other males. BDAG says that when *ἀρσενοκοῖται* is used opposite *μαλακός* it is the one “who assumes the dominant role in same-sex activity.”⁶⁰ The two words complement each other as *μαλακός* refers to the passive sexual partner, an effeminate male who plays the role of a female.

Paul uses both these words to clearly show that God condemns same-sex sexual relations. He is not condemning heterosexual sex or effeminate behavior. He is not only condemning exploitative sex, as some will argue. If he were, Paul could have used the more common Greek word for a pederast. He also would not have condemned the passive partner since he would be the one being oppressed in exploitative sex.

Many people will argue that even if homosexuality is condemned by the letters of Paul and in the Old Testament, it is never mentioned by Jesus. It is argued that if homosexuality were

⁵⁷ Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 613.

⁵⁸ Dale Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 45.

⁵⁹ Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior*, 205.

⁶⁰ Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 135.

really a sin, Jesus would have mentioned it. Jesus does not mention homosexuality in the same specific language that Paul does, but homosexuality is included in the sins he condemned when he condemned sexual immorality. Jesus said in Matthew 15:19, “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.” Jesus did not mention any of the specific sins under the broad category of sexual immorality except adultery and lusting. This does not mean that these are the only sins Jesus condemns when he speaks of sexual immorality. Jesus was talking to his disciples who were Jews and familiar with the Old Testament laws. When Jesus condemns sexual immorality, he is referring to all those Old Testament laws that describe the sins of sexual immorality.

Jesus also addresses homosexuality in Mark 10:6-9 when he takes us back to God’s establishment of marriage. Jesus says, “But at the beginning of creation God ‘made male and female. 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” (Mk 10:6-9). According to Jesus himself, sexual relations are bound within marriage to be between husband and wife, or man and woman. Anything outside of that is sexually immoral, a condemning sin.

Improper Biblical Interpretation

Many will refute all the places in the Bible that teach us about homosexuality by using a false approach to interpreting Scripture. According to the historical-critical method the Bible is not viewed as the verbally inspired Word of God but rather the work of mortal and fallible men. Behind this method is the belief that because the writers of Scripture were human beings living at a certain time in history, their views and opinions are going to reflect the historical period they lived in. So in order to interpret the Bible, one needs to understand the history and culture surrounding the writers of the texts. This method often regards the context in which the text was written as having a higher priority than the actual words of the text.

Proponents of the historical-critical method would describe those who believe the Bible to be the very inspired Word of God that applies to all people of all time as “literalists.” Mel White wrote in his autobiography, “These fathers of the religious right base their views on their literal interpretation of select biblical passages that seem, on the surface, to support their particular biases, and on the ancient traditions that have been built up around the

misunderstanding and misuse of those passages.”⁶¹ In the documentary *For the Bible Tells Me So*, all the clergy and theologians interviewed were proponents of the historical-critical method. One of them, Reverend Laurence Keene said, “When someone says to me, ‘This is what the Bible says,’ My response to them is, ‘No, that’s what the Bible reads.’ It is the struggle to understand context and language and culture and custom that helps us to the meaning or what it is saying.”⁶²

Using this method of interpreting Scripture, many will write off those passages from Leviticus that call homosexuality an abomination. Reverend Susan Sparks of the American Baptist Church does just that.

To me, that’s the important thing to recognize... the historical context in which this was written. That particular section on a man not lying with a man goes back to procreation. It is about a nation trying to grow. At the time, the Hebrew people understood that male seed was actually all of nascent life contained right there. Women had nothing to do with actually the birth, just incubation. So that particular section was about saving seed, saving seed only to procreate so that the nation could grow.⁶³

This argument holds that the only reason homosexuality was wrong for the people of Israel at that time, was because they needed to grow into a large and prosperous nation. If they were all homosexuals there would be no descendants and the Israelites would die off. Because the earth is already full and because God doesn’t promise to grow people today into a great nation, no one is required to seek procreation. For these reasons it is argued that homosexuality is no longer a sin for people living today.

This same argument is also used in regard to Paul’s letters in the New Testament. They argue that when Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 that the homosexual offender will not inherit the kingdom of God, he is not speaking about homosexuals in a monogamous loving relationship. They claim that Paul did not understand homosexuality as it is today. Reverend Peter Gomes of Harvard University said, “[Paul’s] reference, of course, is to exploitive same-sex relationships among pagan Romans and Greeks. Paul certainly never contemplated the kind of monogamous, long-term relationships that are very much normal among homosexual people today.”⁶⁴ Some proponents of the historical-critical method argue that the homosexuality that

⁶¹ White, *Stranger at the Gate*, 16.

⁶² *For the Bible Tells Me So*.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Paul was familiar with was pederasty, cult prostitution, and the abuse of slaves. Linda Patterson writes, “We will never know whether Paul’s view would be the same if he lived today, with a modern understanding of nature, passion and gender, and with our familiarity with diverse forms of homosexual relationships, including those that lead to long term commitments, and, where possible, to marriage.”⁶⁵

Using this method of interpreting the Bible, the text can be molded to say many different things because the culture, customs, the context surrounding the text, and the impact that they had on the writer are all a matter of debate. In many cases there is no way of possibly knowing. Interpreting Scripture in this way robs it of its objective truth as God’s inspired Word. It subjects God’s Word to human theories and opinions. When this is done, even something that is condemned in clear language as a sin can be excused as permissible.

All of the arguments people will make to explain that Scripture does not condemn homosexuality as a sin are simply arguments to excuse sin. As with all points of doctrine, one must read all the parts of the Bible that talk about that doctrine. He must read them without prior biases and agendas to see what God says about that point of doctrine. It seems that many of these writers are writing with the preconceived agenda: “How can I interpret these verses to excuse this sin?” This is the only way anyone could possibly read all the different places in Scripture where homosexuality is condemned and not come to the conclusion it is a sin.

EFFECT OF THE CROSSES

Maintaining the teaching of Scripture that homosexuality is a sin in a culture that is becoming more accepting of it results in many different crosses for Christians to carry. According to his new man, the Christian rejoices over these crosses. He rejoices over the truth of the Word. But all Christians also have an old man or a sinful nature that rejects the Word, and it is because of the sinful nature that this cross is so painful. Christians will either faithfully bear up under the weight of the cross, or they will drop it to escape its taxing weight. This next section will focus on what effect the homosexual movement and the resulting crosses may have on congregations and individual Christians.

⁶⁵ Paterson, *Hate Thy Neighbor*, 60.

Outreach Problems

Many people, without prior exposure to the correct biblical teaching on homosexuality, will not understand it to be a sin. Their reason and many other influences in their life might tell them that it is an acceptable alternative lifestyle. An immediate barrier will often be set up between these people and a congregation that teaches homosexuality to be a sin. These barriers could pose a problem for a church's outreach. In cities where homosexuality is more prevalent and accepted, it is a question that prospects will ask about the church. A WELS pastor who formerly served in Portland wrote that the church's stance on homosexuality "was often the first question a prospect would ask." If same sex marriages are legalized in more states and the homosexual movement continues to grow, it will be a question that prospects are likely going to be asking of churches throughout North America.

This same pastor in Portland wrote, "Occasionally members would have spouses not join because of our stance on homosexuality. Prospects would do the same." Pastor Bitter, currently serving in Portland, wrote that the homosexual issue "has made outreach more difficult" and "on several occasions prospects have been lost over this issue." Pastor Moll, serving at Gethsemane Lutheran Church in a suburb of Portland, expressed these same difficulties for his congregation's outreach. "The assumption is that Gethsemane is like many other churches in Portland who fly that rainbow flag." However, when prospects and visitors find out that they do not, he writes, "some people have not come back because of where we stand on the subject."

When a congregation perceives that a certain biblical teaching is causing problems for their outreach, a temptation may be to give in to what people want to hear and compromise the biblical teaching. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America has already given in to this temptation. In 2009 their eleventh biennial Churchwide Assembly voted that "the ELCA should commit itself to finding ways to allow congregations that choose to do so to recognize, support, and hold publicly accountable couples who wish to have a lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship."⁶⁶ At this assembly they also voted to adopt a document entitled *A Social Statement*

⁶⁶ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, "Frequently Asked Questions about the 2009 Churchwide Assembly Action Regarding Human Sexuality," <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements/JTF-Human-Sexuality/cwafaqs.aspx> (accessed Feb 5, 2013).

on Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust. This document attempts to show biblical support for the ELCA's decision to allow congregations within their synod to support same-sex marriages.⁶⁷

WELS churches, God willing, will not go so far as to no longer teach what the Bible says on homosexuality. But it may be tempting for both the pastor and the members of a congregation to be ashamed of the Bible's teaching on homosexuality. When explaining it to a prospect, they may be tempted to apologize for what the Bible teaches. This gives the impression to the prospect that they too feel God is being unfair in condemning the sin of homosexuality.

Another way this cross may negatively affect outreach is that the members of a congregation may lose their zeal to do outreach work. Members may be hesitant to invite friends and co-workers to worship services or church events, knowing that the topic of homosexuality may come up. A pastor may tire of answering prospects' questions about it. After seeing many prospects leave over the issue, he may also be tempted to give up on reaching out to his community altogether.

Loss of faith

This issue may do more than affect a church's ability to reach out into the community. It may also individually affect the members of the congregation by weakening their trust in Scripture and ultimately their faith. Many of the Christians who teach that the Bible does not condemn homosexuality will promote the historical-critical method. By using this method of interpreting Scripture, the Christian is given the option of keeping his Christian faith without having to worry about some of the teachings in the Bible that he might find difficult. By using this method of interpreting Scripture, the difficult teachings can be discredited and ignored as the fallible words of human writers. This is an appealing offer to the sinful nature of a Christian who is struggling with the Bible's teaching on homosexuality.

It cannot be said that all of those who believe in the historical-critical method of interpreting Scripture are without faith. By God's grace even in churches that promote this method of interpreting Scripture, the gospel is still preached. But it is still a threat to faith. Siegbert Becker, a former professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, in an article written on the historical-critical method of interpretation, wrote, "It behooves us to recognize the danger in this

⁶⁷ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *A Social Statement on Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009).

approach to the Bible, lest we also be led astray by this modern form of unbelief.”⁶⁸ The historical-critical method is an attack on faith because it is an attack on the foundation of faith. It casts doubt upon God’s Word. Because it casts doubt upon God’s Word, it casts doubt upon everything God’s Word tells us, whether God is speaking about homosexuality or about our salvation.

A Christian may do more than accept a false view of Scripture that endangers his faith. He may decide to reject Scripture and abandon his faith altogether. He may decide that he does not want to carry the crosses that come from holding to Scripture’s teaching on homosexuality or any of the other crosses that go along with following God’s Word. The tempting desire of acceptance and approval from the world may become too much to resist and the cross may become too heavy. Those six WELS pastors who filled out the surveys all expressed concern for young people in their congregations for this reason. The temptation is very heavy among the youth. The temptation may also be heavy for Christians who have a homosexual family member or who may be homosexuals themselves. The devil will work hard on these people. He will work to show them how much easier life would be if they did not have their faith in the words of Scripture telling them that homosexuality is wrong.

Successful Outreach

It would be wrong to assume that a congregation will fail to grow or will lose members because it teaches and proclaims sound biblical doctrine, even if that doctrine is offensive to many people. This is not only a defeatist attitude, but, even worse, it is a failure to recognize the power of the Word and the Spirit. Orthodox Christian churches have the truth on their side, and when God’s Word is being truthfully taught and shared, the Holy Spirit is working through it.

Prospects still appreciate sound biblical teaching. People still look for a church body that does not change its teachings to meet the whims of a changing culture. Pastor Joel Schulz, who serves a congregation in a suburb of Toronto, wrote in his survey that the greater Toronto area has a heavy homosexual influence. Pastor Schulz was asked on the survey, “Has holding to the biblical stance on homosexuality posed a problem for outreach?” He responded, “To tell the truth, the fact we actually stand up against homosexuality, while many other churches in our community do not, has brought a few families to us who are now members.”

⁶⁸ Seigbert Becker, “The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation,” in the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library Essay File, <http://www.wlsessays.net/files/BeckerHistorical.pdf> (accessed Dec 5, 2012), 1.

Faith Strengthened

The crosses that come to a Christian as a result of following Christ and his Word do not in themselves strengthen faith. They are not means of grace. Only the gospel has the ability to strengthen and preserve faith. These crosses, however, can be and often are a stimulating tool that drives the Christian to the means of grace. In this way the crosses that come to a Christian are a tool that can serve to strengthen a Christian's trust in God and his Word.

Crosses have a way of rousing Christians from their lukewarm faith. They give Christians the opportunity to put their faith into action, to do what they do by nature, and that is to produce fruits of faith. Pastor Shrimpton in Belmont, California, about a half hour south of San Francisco, writes about his congregation using the opportunity to express their faith: "The congregation here is pretty well minded that they are a light of orthodoxy in an otherwise wildly heterodox (at best) environment, so they stand their ground pretty well." Being a light of truth in a godless world will cause struggles and hardships, but most importantly it will serve to remind Christians of two important things: it will remind Christians of their dependence on God, and it will remind Christians of their important work as ambassadors for the truth. When Christians are reminded of these things, they will be driven to the Word.

A NECESSARY CROSS

Holding to the Scriptural teaching on homosexuality in a culture that tolerates it is absolutely necessary. Because it is necessary to follow Scripture's teaching, it is also necessary to bear the crosses that come along with doing this. The cross is not necessary because it is forced upon a Christian. God does not strap it to the back of a Christian against his will; rather, God works in the Christian the will and the motivation to carry the cross by the love he shows them. It is love that leads Christians to proclaim all the truths of Scripture, and it is love that leads Christians to bear the crosses that may come as a result.

Love for God

1 John 4:19 tells us, "We love because he first loved us." All God pleasing actions are motivated by God's love for his people. His love motivates hearts, minds, and wills to want to reflect this love. Because of the love God shows in the gospel message, Christians will want to show their thanks and love back to God. Jesus tells Christians what love for God looks like:

“Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me...” (Jn 14:21). Out of love for God a Christian will want to obey and keep God’s teaching.

In Scripture God calls homosexuality a sin; therefore, out of love for God a Christian will want to avoid the sin for himself. Out of love a Christian will also not want to change or manipulate Scripture to defend the sin of homosexuality. God says in Deuteronomy 4:2, “Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you”. For a Christian to attempt to change what God says about homosexuality is demonstrating a lack of love for God. It shows that this person loves acceptance from the world more than he loves God. The apostle Paul wrote, “Am I trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Gal 1:10). Paul is saying that the person who values approval from the world more than approval from God is not truly a disciple

Love for Mankind

It is necessary for a Christian to carry these crosses and to continue to teach and believe that homosexuality is a sin out of love for other people. The Christian must never dare to excuse a damning sin. To do this is tragically unloving and uncaring. Homosexuality is not primarily a political, psychological, or social issue; it is first and foremost a spiritual issue. The Christian must set aside all of his political and social ideas and recognize that this is about the eternal well being of people for whom Christ died.

A Christian must not shy away from telling those outside of the Christian Church that homosexuality is a sin. Christians are to be witnesses of the truth. However, those who do not believe in the Bible or their Savior need first to have saving faith before specific sins in their life can be addressed. Starting off an evangelism effort to a homosexual by telling him that he is living a sinful life by practicing his homosexuality will probably not be beneficial. Confronting him with this sin initially will likely only distract him from the truth of the gospel.

A Christian is not responsible to warn those outside of the Church of specific sins in their lives; by their unbelief they have already rejected God and his Word. To a brother or sister in the faith, however, a Christian is responsible and compelled by love to warn them of their sin. Just as God appointed Ezekiel to be a watchman for Israel, God appoints all Christians as watchmen for the other Christians in their life. God told Ezekiel about his accountability to other believers,

Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked man, you will surely die, and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. (Eze 33:7-8)

When a Christian confronts a fellow Christian who has fallen into the sin of homosexuality, he must remember to do it with a compassionate heart. Compassion is needed because the Christian who is struggling with homosexuality also has a heavy cross to bear. The homosexual’s cross is to deny sinful desires for homosexual activity. The cross of the homosexual is to suppress all the sinful homosexual thoughts and lusts that may fill his mind. All Christians will struggle with different temptations and sins, but few sins have the guilt and the public shame that often come with this one.

Pastor Thomas Gumm shared a story of a homosexual named David whom he visited in the hospital. David was formerly a member of the WELS, and his parents are still WELS members at a different congregation. Pastor Gumm’s story of visiting David demonstrates the need for compassion to homosexuals and their family:

One pastor called me along with the parents of David, who was in the AIDS ward and near death. They wanted me to go and visit David before he died. I went and you could smell death in the room. He was covered from head to toe with black/purple welts. He was blind from these welts in his eyes. His voice sounded like gravel and I could see the welts inside his mouth. I introduced myself and he responded, “You came to throw the book at me one more time before I die?” The anger and bitterness of the man filled the room, so I decided to take a different tactic. I said, “No, I have come to find out what it is like to be gay so I can understand what you are going through.” That broke the ice and he started talking and I was able to build a relationship. For two hours we talked... But David did not repent in my presence. I thought I would have one more try with David before he would die. He died four hours later. It was heartbreaking for me to call his family and the pastor. The family demanded that I recount each word to see if David possibly repented. I could not give them that comfort. It destroyed the parents’ marriage.

Pastor Gumm walked the necessary line between being compassionate and not condoning the sin of homosexuality. The compassionate heart longs to see the sinner repent and desires to tell the sinner that he will be in heaven. The compassionate Christian also wants to be able to offer comfort to a family. If a Christian is not compassionate towards the person caught in the sin of homosexuality, he will likely never even get the opportunity to share law and gospel. Even if he does, his failure to show compassion will have already set up a barrier to the message. At the other end of the spectrum, if a Christian excuses the sin and offers false hope, he is a liar.

Christians often fail to show compassion and love to people who are caught in the sin of homosexuality. This likely contributes to the reason why many homosexuals are angry with the Christian church and blame Christians for persecuting them. Going on blogs that debate the issue of same sex marriages only to write that “God will send all gay people to hell” is not being compassionate or good stewards of the Word. Holding up signs at gay pride rallies that say, “God Hates Fags,” is not winning souls for the kingdom. Not being compassionate drives a further wedge between orthodox Christians and the homosexual community. It raises barriers that may never be removed.

It is sad that many Christians receive media attention regarding the subject of homosexuality because they are failing to show compassion and love. It is even worse that many times it is the clergy who is failing to show love. Pastor Charles Worley, a pastor of an independent Baptist church in North Carolina, made headlines after a sermon he delivered on May 13, 2012. He said,

I figured a way out, a way to get rid of all the lesbians and queers but I couldn't get it past the Congress – build a great big large fence, 50 or a hundred mile long. Put all the lesbians in there, fly over and drop some food. Do the same thing with the queers and the homosexuals. And have that fence electrified so they can't get out. And you know what? In a few years they will die out. You know why? They can't reproduce. If a man ever has a young'un, praise God he will be the first.⁶⁹

Both Christians and unbelievers fail to show love and compassion to those who are struggling with the sin of homosexuality by making light of it through jokes. “Gay”⁷⁰ is a term that the homosexual community has adopted to refer to themselves. People often use the term “gay” in another context that does not at all refer to a person's sexual orientation. People may use it to insult another person or to describe something they do not like. Homosexuality is also used as the subject matter for coarse joking. These are not a way to deal with a serious sin. It is not showing compassion and love to those who are caught in this sin.

Condescending attitudes towards homosexuals may be the result of treating this sin as a worse sin than all other sins. Christians must be careful to avoid the pharisaic attitude that views homosexuality as a sin that is worse than the sins they struggle with. Homosexuality is not an

⁶⁹ Isolde Raftery and James Eng, “Standing Ovation Greets Pastor Charles Worley, Who Made Anti-Gay Statements,” *U.S. News*, May 27, 2012, http://usnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2012/05/27/11908278-standing-ovation-greets-pastor-charles-worley-who-made-anti-gay-statements?lite (accessed Feb 19, 2012).

⁷⁰ “Gay” is a term that lightens gravity of homosexuality. For this reason it is not used in this thesis.

unforgivable sin. In Romans 1:26-32, one of the key sections in Scripture that talks about homosexuality, it is followed by a lengthy list of other sins. These sins include greed, gossiping, slandering, arrogance, and disobeying parents. God does not distinguish homosexuality as a worse sin than others. It is listed with all other sins that condemn a person before a Holy God.

A Christian should never show anything but genuine Christian love for a person struggling with the sin of homosexuality. A Christian should always demonstrate love that wants to see a homosexual turn from sin and rejoice in the truth of sins forgiven. C.F.W. Walther told a group of seminary students, “The ultimate aim in our preaching of the Law must be to preach the Gospel.”⁷¹ Christians are to point homosexuals to their sins. They are not to yield in the fact that it is a sin. When there is repentance, a Christian is just as adamantly to point them to the cross of Christ where there is full and complete forgiveness. 1 Corinthians 6:9 was viewed earlier to show that the Bible condemns homosexuality as a sin. Paul follows in verse 10 with more preaching of the law:

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Co 6:9-10)

Paul follows this section with the soothing gospel: “And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Co 6:11). By following Paul’s example of preaching law and gospel to a person struggling with homosexuality, Christians are showing the God pleasing love that longs to see all people in heaven.

STRENGTH TO CARRY THE CROSSES

Left to their own strength no Christian would be able to carry any of the crosses that come into their lives. The cross can be carried only when the Christian looks for the strength outside of himself. The ability for any Christian to carry his cross is fully attributed to God. God not only calls Christians to carry the cross but he works in them the strength to carry it. Deutschlander writes, “Faith is always a miracle, a miracle which only God can accomplish; so

⁷¹ C.F.W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel:39 Evening Lectures* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 404.

too is the Christian life a miracle when it takes up the cross and follows him who carried it first and for us.”⁷²

From the Connection to the Cross of Christ

Christ calls the suffering, persecution, and the constant struggle to deny the sinful flesh a “cross” for a reason. He is intentionally connecting the crosses Christians bear to the cross he bore. It is only because Christ bore the heavier cross that Christians are able to carry their crosses. The cross of Christ was heavy because it bore the weight of the sins of the world. The crosses Christians carry are heavy too but only because sinful flesh makes them heavy. If it was not for the sinful nature, all Christians would rejoice in their crosses and long to carry more. Because Christians have a sinful nature, they need to draw strength from cross of Christ to carry theirs.

Christians need Christ’s cross for forgiveness in failing to faithfully carry the crosses he sends. Tiring of the persecution may lead the Christian to give up standing up for the truth of Scripture in a culture that disagrees with it. It may lead him to keep silent when the truth of Scripture is needed. Unwillingness to endure negative reactions may lead a Christian to restrain from confronting another Christian who is struggling with the sin of homosexuality. A pastor serving an area where there is a heavy homosexual influence may grow weary under the cross and lose his compassion for those who struggle with homosexuality. For all the times when Christians fail in faithfully carrying these crosses, they must turn to the cross of Christ for forgiveness.

After finding forgiveness in Christ’s cross, a Christian will also find strength in that forgiveness. Motivated and empowered by that forgiveness he can willingly and gladly pick up the cross again and go on to endure suffering and persecution. Jesus tells us, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Mt 11:28-30). Jesus never promises his disciples that he will take their crosses away. What he does promise is strength for carrying them.

From the Power of the Word

The crosses that come to Christians from holding to the Scriptural teaching on homosexuality are made lighter when Christians remember the power of the Word. Many of

⁷² Deutschlander, *The Theology of the Cross*, 75.

these crosses come to Christians because the world by nature finds the Word offensive. Sinful mankind will fight against the Word and those who faithfully proclaim it. When proclaiming a message that people find offensive, the natural reaction is to stop sharing it. If Christians were proclaiming just any normal message they too would have to stop. But God's Word has power, and the Spirit working through that Word has power. Christians need to remind themselves that the Word of God can overcome any obstacles that sinful logic and stubbornness present. God promises,

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (Isa 55:10-11)

Christ has called Christians to be ambassadors of his message. Christians are not called to win people over with their wit and sharp skills in debate. An ambassador simply proclaims the message he has been given. The message that Christians have been given pertinent to homosexuality has two parts. The first part to this message is that homosexuality is a sin that deserves hell. The second part is that it is a sin for which Christ suffered the punishment so that the sinner would not have to. Because Christians know this is God's message and not their own, they can share it with boldness and confidence. When it is rejected, it is God's message that is being rejected, not a congregation's or an individual Christian's message. When it is accepted, the Christian can rejoice that the power of God's Word has won another soul for the kingdom.

To be a faithful steward or ambassador to the Word, a Christian needs to be confident in the message. For a Christian to be confident in the message he must be educated in it. The information gathered in the surveys for this thesis indicated that homosexuality is more of a concern for younger Christians. They will be confronted with this sin and those who support this sin more so than the older generation. In the surveys sent out to the WELS college students, it was evident that more education is needed on what the Bible teaches concerning homosexuality.

Several of the students wrote that they could not reference the specific passages or places in the Bible where homosexuality is talked about. Ten of the respondents said they felt they had a clear understanding on what the Bible teaches about homosexuality, but ten also expressed concerns as to whether they were adequately prepared to address someone with the opposite point of view. One of the students said she was not sure that homosexuality is a sin because of

her “doubts about the accuracy of the translation.” Several of the students pointed out concerns that this sin was being treated as worse than all other sins. One of the students summed up the problems that many people have in saying that homosexuality is a sin:

Let me say yes homosexuality is a sin, but there are so many aspects that seem hard for me to swallow, for instance, genetic predisposition, early childhood development, and molestation. It is easy for us to say its sinful you cannot do this, but how does the church deal with the real feelings that these individuals are dealing with? Many people have committed suicide over the guilt for having these feelings. But also why is the issue for homosexuality a more focused issue than promiscuity of heterosexual individuals that never marry?

These are all issues that need to be addressed and discussed. Pastors and church leaders will be setting the sons and daughters of their congregations up for spiritual trouble if they do not help them work through these issues regarding homosexuality. The questions need to be discussed and worked through with pastors, teachers, and leaders of the congregation before the young adults leave for college. If they are not, then the questions the students have on homosexuality will be answered by their professors and peers.

A pro-active approach needs to be taken for both the youth and the adults. Instead of waiting for Christians to hear the arguments from the proponents of homosexuality, the church should let them know the arguments in the setting of a Bible study. Simply to hear a pastor mention it briefly in a sermon or Bible class is no longer enough. There are now too many voices out there that would deceive people. A Bible study designed to specifically address homosexuality would be enormously beneficial. The doubts many have as to whether homosexuality is a sin or not do not only come from a lack of the will to endure persecution but primarily from a lack of knowledge on what Scripture says about it. God’s Word has the answers and the power to overcome resistant hearts. Churches need to encourage and empower their people with it.

From the Promises of God

A Christian can rejoice as he toils under the cross because he has Spirit worked trust in the promises of God. The apostle Paul reminds his fellow believers, “We live by faith, not by sight” (2 Co 5:7). Paul is saying that Christians trust in the promises that God makes to his people in the Bible, even if they do not always physically see and understand just how God is fulfilling these promises. When church attendance is dwindling, when immorality seems to be more prevalent than ever before, and when God’s Word loses its respect and authority among

people, a Christian's eyes and physical senses may tell him that God is not fulfilling his promise. But it is these times when a Christian will look in faith to the promises of God.

Jesus' disciples asked him what sign they could expect to see so that they would know they were in the end times before he would come again. Jesus listed many different signs for them (Mt 24:4-35). Most of the things he lists are not very encouraging. Jesus tells his disciples that they would be hated and persecuted. He says there will be many false prophets and an increase in wickedness. Jesus lists off signs that sound much like the world today. But after listing all of these things that may cause a disciple of Christ to worry, Jesus gives a comforting promise: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (Mt 24:35).

How comforting it is for the Christian to know that even when the Church is struggling mightily against sin, unbelief, and apostasy, God's Word will prevail. Through all the difficulties the Church will encounter, its foundation will always remain intact. God's Word is being attacked by this homosexual movement. It is being written off as irrelevant for people living today. It is being mocked for being hypocritical and foolish. In spite of this, Christians can take comfort in Jesus' words knowing that even though God's Word is attacked, it will always remain. As long as the Word prevails, so will the Church; the two go hand in hand.

Another promise that Christians will find strength from is one of the last promises that Christ made to his disciples. Jesus said to his disciples, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Mt 28:19-20). As Jesus sent out his disciples to baptize and teach, he did not send them out on their own. He did not leave them with their own strength to accomplish this work. Even though he was physically leaving them, Christ assured them that he was with them.

As Christ still sends out his disciples today to teach and baptize, they have the sure promise that Christ is with them. When Christians proclaim the truth of God's Word, Christ is with them. When Christians are persecuted for their beliefs, Christ is with them. When a Christian confronts another Christian for his sin, Christ is with them. When a Christian struggles under the weight of the cross, Christ is with them. And Christ is not an idle spectator. He is always there with his love to forgive and restore and with his power to strengthen and protect.

Conclusion

The Christian Church from its apostolic beginnings has always had different crosses to bear. From the very beginning the disciples of Jesus have been persecuted and hated for their teachings. Jesus told his disciples, “All men will hate you because of me” (Mt 10:22a). He also told his disciples, “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come bring peace, but a sword” (Mt 10:34). These statements coming from the Savior initially sound shocking. They sound so un-Christian, so unloving. They almost make a person want to interject and remind Jesus that Isaiah gave him the name “Prince of Peace” (Isa 9:6). But Jesus knew how his Word would divide people and he knew how much fallen human nature fights against it. He goes on to tell his disciples how he would even turn members of a household against one another (Mt 10:35). Christians today are certainly seeing these warnings from Jesus fulfilled. A prominent way they are being fulfilled is by an immoral society rebelling against the biblical teaching on homosexuality.

While the Word causes divisions, it does this only because sinful flesh fights against it. True peace within the Church is found only by upholding the Word of truth. C.F.W. Walther makes this point when speaking to a group of men training to be pastors, but his words apply to all Christians:

When a theologian is asked to yield and make concessions in order that peace may at last be established in the Church, but refuses to do so even in a single point of doctrine, such an action looks to human reason like intolerable stubbornness, yea, like downright malice. That is the reason why such theologians are loved and praised by few men during their lifetime. Most men rather revile them as disturbers of the peace, yea, as destroyers of the kingdom of God. They are regarded as men worthy of contempt. But in the end it becomes manifest that this very determined, inexorable tenacity in clinging to the pure teaching of the divine Word by no means tears down the Church; on the contrary, it is just this which, in the midst of greatest dissension, builds up the Church and ultimately brings about genuine peace. Therefore, woe to the Church which has no men of this stripe, men who stand as watchmen on the walls of Zion, sound the alarm whenever a foe threatens to rush the walls, and rally to the banner of Jesus Christ for a holy war!⁷³

God calls his Church to proclaim and preserve his Word as the absolute truth. God calls his Church to carry all the crosses that come from doing this. This would be more than a daunting task for any Christian; it would be an impossible task. But Christ does not leave Christians to their own strength to carry the cross. The apostle Paul had many crosses to bear

⁷³ Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, 28.

throughout his ministry. Yet, he faithfully carried them not because of his own strength but because he knew the real source of his strength. Paul writes,

But [the Lord] said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardship, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Co 12:6)

Appendix A

The information gathered in this survey will be used for my senior year thesis paper at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. My paper is on the effect that holding to the Scriptural teaching on homosexuality will have on individual Christians and the church. Because college students are likely to be exposed to alternative social norms and the pressure to change their core beliefs perhaps more than any other group of people, I want to research the effect the homosexuality issue is having on you, the college student. Your input would be greatly appreciated. It isn't a long survey and most questions are yes and no answers. I will not use any names or personally identifiable information.

What college or university do you attend?

Do you believe the Bible clearly teaches homosexuality to be a sin?

Has your view on homosexuality changed since you have left for college?
If so how has it changed?

Did you attend a Lutheran high-school?

Have you felt pressure to change your belief that homosexuality is a sin from your friends, classmates, professors, or any combination?

Have you ever been persecuted for your belief that homosexuality is a sin?
(example: called unloving, old fashioned, bigoted, etc...)
If so from whom and in what way?

Do you feel that you have a clear understanding on what the Bible teaches about homosexuality?

Do you feel adequately prepared to address those who might say the Bible does not condemn homosexuality as a sin?

Has the moral issue of homosexuality and homosexual marriage ever come up in conversation with friends?

Do you generally try to avoid the subject out of fear of not being sure what to say or being persecuted for your belief?

Are there any other thoughts on the subject you would like to share?

Is it okay to contact you via e-mail for more information?

Appendix B

How long have you served at [name of church]?

Would you describe [name of city in which church is located] as having a substantial homosexual population or a heavy homosexual influence?

Has holding to the biblical stance on homosexuality posed a problem for outreach?

Has the topic of homosexuality come up frequently from members or prospects?

Have your members shared experiences they have had where they have been persecuted for their belief that homosexuality is a sin? Are there any specific examples you could share?

Have your members shared with you that at times they feel pressured to change their belief that homosexuality is a sin?

Have you experienced any negativity from the community because your church teaches that homosexuality is a sin? Are there any specific examples you could share?

Have you had any difficulties educating members or prospects on what the Bible teaches regarding homosexuality? Have you found that it is difficult for many of them to accept that it is a sin?

Have you had a Bible study going through what the Bible teaches on homosexuality?
If yes, did you find it beneficial and well received by members?

Do you have any other thoughts on the subject that you would be willing to share?

Is it okay to contact you regarding a follow up question to this survey?

Is it okay if I use your name and the name of your congregation in this thesis paper?

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