

White Paper on Same-Gender Marriage
Developed by Staff Team for Westminster Presbyterian Church, West Chester, PA

Introduction

A **white paper** is a guide to help readers understand an issue, solve a problem, or make a decision. Westminster's staff has developed this paper to guide the Session in any decisions it makes, and as information for the congregation in understanding the issue of same-gender marriage within the Christian community. The paper has two primary parts. **Section A** is the view supporting the traditional view of marriage between a man and a woman. **Section B** outlines the perspective of those supporting same-gender marriages. While this paper is by no means exhaustive (many books have been written on the topic), each section will summarize some of the more common perspectives of faithful Christians who hold to one or the other understanding of marriage in general, and same-gender marriage in particular.

Why a white paper on this issue? The church and the world continue to change. In recent years, the Presbyterian Church (USA) has changed church-polity regarding persons in same-gender relationships. Standards for ordination in the church no longer include a proscription based solely on sexual orientation and practice when considering a person's suitability for ordination. That change in 2011 allowed persons in same-gender relationships to be ordained as Minister of Word and Sacrament, Ruling Elder, or Deacon.

In 2014 Pennsylvania courts legalized same-gender marriage. Weeks after that decision, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) – the denomination's highest governing body – removed the prohibition of ministers from extending pastoral ministry to those in same-gender

relationships who desired to be married by a minister, whether in a church facility or elsewhere. The General Assembly approved what is called an "authoritative interpretation" of our Book of Order which permits ministers to perform same-gender marriages in states where such marriages are legal. Explicit in this authoritative interpretation is language indicating the Session of a church has a role in deciding what marriages will be allowed on church property. Finally, Presbyteries will vote in the coming year on changing our constitutional definition of marriage from "a man and a woman" to the definition of "two people," while still retaining language that marriage has been "traditionally between a man and a woman."

These changes invite us to engage in a conversation concerning marriage, as Westminster's session discerns its way forward. It is clear that faithful Presbyterians disagree on these issues, and many Sessions like Westminster's are discussing how they understand these matters in their own context. We are blessed to be a congregation that has thrived in ministry together over many years, united by a common faith in Christ that supersedes whatever differences we have. It should be noted that many of the works listed in the bibliography have been heavily utilized in developing this text. While we have cited them on numerous occasions, their words have also been used or adjusted to complete this paper. We are indebted to their work, but did not want to make the paper overly cumbersome with footnotes and citations. Since it is not for publication, we have not been exhaustive in designating quotations. All biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted. Also at the end of the paper is a copy of a document of the PCUSA which guides how Presbyterians are to respect one another as they wrestle with issues over which they disagree.

Biblical and Theological Assumptions

As Presbyterians, we begin with Scripture. It is the authoritative rule of faith and practice for us as followers of Jesus. Scripture is where we learn to know God in Jesus Christ, and through Scripture we gain understanding of God's call to a life of faithful service in the world. It cannot be stated strongly enough that proponents of each of the perspectives on marriage in this paper believe in the authority of Scripture. The Presbyterian Church (USA) adopted a document entitled "Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Scripture" in 1983, and that document is the standard for the church on biblical interpretation and biblical authority. It contains nine guiding principles for approaching Scripture. The full document is on the PCUSA website, and is noted in the bibliography. The principles in that document are summarized below:

1. **The Purpose of Holy Scripture:** Scripture's purpose is to tell us about God and how God wants to be in relationship with humanity. It is not, for example, an astronomy or biology textbook.
 2. **The Precedence of Scripture:** In matters of faith, life, and salvation, Scripture takes precedence over all other authorities. However, the precedence of Scripture does not call for the disregard of other authorities.
 3. **The Centrality of Jesus Christ – Jesus is the central message of Scripture:** Although this does not imply a "canon within a canon," any decision made on the basis of Scripture should be coherent with the way Jesus taught and embodied God's person and will.
 4. **The Interpretation of Scripture by Scripture:** When faced with one text, investigate all the other texts relevant to the same issue. This includes interpreting the Old Testament on the basis of the New Testament, and the New Testament on the basis of the Old Testament.
 5. **The Rule of Love:** The fundamental expression of God's will is the two-fold commandment to love God and neighbor, and all interpretations are to be judged by the question of whether they offer and support the love given and commanded by God.
 6. **The Rule of Faith:** Scripture is to be interpreted in light of the past and present Christian communities' understanding of Scripture. For us, that means the confessions and catechisms. That does not mean new interpretations are automatically discounted, but anything new must be evaluated in the context of Christian tradition.
 7. **The Fallibility of All Interpretation:** Every reading, confession and theology that refers to Scripture is subject to testing by further and more faithful searching of the Scripture to see if it is genuinely in accord with the Bible's witness.
 8. **The Relation of Word and Spirit:** Our tradition has always believed that the role of the Spirit in illuminating the reader is an essential part of Scripture's authority.
 9. **The Use of All Relevant Guidelines:** Hold Law and Gospel in tension, use both Old and New Testament, and use all of these Reformed guidelines for interpreting Scripture.
- These principles will help us discern how Scripture is speaking to the church, and are affirmed by all the staff team, even if we arrive at some differing interpretations of what Scripture leads us to believe and do.

Section A: The Traditional Biblical View of Marriage, One Man and One Woman.

Introduction

Many people who hold the traditional view of marriage are fearful of being misunderstood. It can seem uncaring to others to not favor same-gender marriage. Those who do not affirm homosexuality are often labeled homophobic or bigoted. However, it is possible to care about,

even love someone but not agree with their behavior. As New Testament scholar Robert Gagnon states, "Love and tolerance overlap but are not identical concepts. The Bible describes a God who loves the entire world but does not tolerate sin." (Gagnon, p.27)

When discussing marriage we need a clear understanding of the biblical material to guide the church in discussion and discernment. Presbyterians are a people of the Book; we turn to Scripture for all matters of faith and practice. As Carol Shanholtzer says, Presbyterians embrace the central Reformation principle "sola scriptura" ("Scripture alone"), which means we look to Scripture as our sole authority to learn God's will.... For Presbyterians, it is Scripture—not human opinions, feelings, scholarship or reason—which is our authority for distinguishing right from wrong and for living in a way that pleases God. Presbyterians do not believe God gives new revelations that contradict what Scripture teaches. Scripture is our sole authority. (*Biblical and Confessional Teaching on Marriage and Sexuality* by Carol Shanholtzer).

We need to take a critical look at what Scripture says concerning same-gender marriage. As New Testament scholar Robert Gagnon says, "...on this issue, as on any other, if a clear, unequivocal, and pervasive stance in the Bible can be shown to exist – across the Testaments and accepted for nearly two millennia of the churches existence – then the burden of proof lies with those in the church who take a radically different approach to the issue." (Gagnon, p. 29) Scripture reveals that God created humanity as male and female and established the relationship of marriage. Within a life-long covenant of marriage, a man and a woman are to fully experience and enjoy sexual intimacy as God's good gift. (Gen. 1:27-28, Gen. 2:24-25, Psalm 127:3, Psalm 128:3-4, Matt. 19:4-6, Eph. 5:22-33, I Cor. 7:1-9)

This discussion is personal; it has a face to it. We all know and love someone who this discussion affects personally. This is not a diatribe against persons of same-gender orientation; God loves all people regardless of sexual orientation. Rather it is a quest for biblical truth that might allow of us to more fully know God's story of grace and freedom for all people. While we need to listen to the stories of people experiencing same-gender attraction we also need to make sure we are not being driven by our own stories. Every Christian must consider this issue in relation to their own fallen nature, with biblical clarity, and with deep compassion for all people. The biblical focus on conduct rather than sexual orientation establishes a basis on which we can separate a person's conduct from our love and care for them. And here is even better news, "Our cravings, with all their complexities, point beyond themselves. They are insatiable signposts directing us away from temporal relief. We need God to search our hearts. We need God to

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satisfy our hearts. When I coddle or resist a craving, I will remain unsatisfied if I am seeking satisfaction in human sources. No heterosexual or homosexual relationship can fulfill the "eternity" that God has placed in the human heart." (*Lead into Light*, p. 41).

The goal of this section of the paper is to summarize the traditional biblical understanding marriage as a covenant between God and a man and a woman. This will be done by looking at Old and New Testament passages that talk about heterosexual and same-sex intimacy and relationships. Necessarily, this discussion on marriage must also engage the passages in the Bible that address homosexual practice and conduct.

Additional points to be addressed:

1. The Bible and the ancient world seem to have no awareness of contemporary understandings of homosexual orientation or the possibility of covenanted same-sex partnerships, so how can it speak to today's issue?

2. The church has changed views on slavery and women in leadership, why not same-gender marriage?
3. References to homosexuality are infrequent in the Bible; why make a big deal about them?
4. The Bible is opposed to same-sex unions because in Biblical times they were associated with ritual, power and abuse.
5. If God gives a person same-sex attraction then it must be natural for them.
6. If our culture is changing, the church should change as well.

Specific Biblical Texts About Marriage and Sexuality

God's original intention for humanity is found in Genesis, so let's start at the beginning.

Christians believe God created humanity as spiritual and physical beings (which include our sexuality). Male and female were created equally in God's image, so a man and a woman could enjoy personal and spiritual union, intimacy, and possibly the gift of children. Christian marriage serves as an earthly model of Christ's love for his bride, the church. (Ephesians 5:25-33). Marriage is not something we created; rather it was something made known to us by God. As Stan Jones of Wheaton College points out, "The traditional Christian understanding of same-sex

conduct is but a small portion of a broader understanding of sexual morality, which in turn is embedded in a broader understanding of what it means to be human, which in turn is embedded in a broader understanding of humanity in relationship with the sovereign God of the universe." (Jones, p. 5). How do these understandings guide our relationships and influence how we live? Genesis 1 and 2 are the foundational texts for understanding God's intentions for marital relationships. God the Creator had an intentional design in mind, and we trust God's intentions are always best for our lives. The parallel creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 are key as they describe the creation of humanity, and set the stage for all that follows in Scripture. Chapter one provides a summary overview of creation, teaching that humanity – male and female in 5

relationship with one another – is created in God's image as the pinnacle of God's creation. Chapter two focuses on the distinct creation of man and woman and their complementarity.

Genesis 1:26-31

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Genesis 2:18-25

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken." Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.

And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

God says, "It is not good for the man to be alone" (v.18), and so God creates Eve, a "companion who corresponded to him" (v.20, New English Translation). In the midst of the "goodness" of creation God says there is one thing that is not good – it is not good for the man to be alone. God says, I will find a helper—a counterpart for the man. Why the search for a helper? So far in creation there is no corresponding opposite counterpart to complement his being. So God takes from his side and builds (literally in the Hebrew) a woman. This results in Adam's love poem. *"This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken."* (v.23) To which the narrator states, *"Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed."* (v.24-25)

The creation narrative has great significance for this discussion. In the perfect, pre-fall state, God determines the most suitable companion for man is someone different from, yet complementary to, him. God's gracious gift of a suitable companion comes after Adam realizes no other creature will meet his needs (v. 20). The perfect complement for Adam and the resolution of his loneliness was Eve. The couple celebrates the complementarity they share; they are joined together. The word means united, stuck, being a single flesh.

The man and the woman find in the other half the part they were missing. Why are the male and female united to become one flesh? It is because they initially emerged out of one. The fullness

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of God's image is seen in the union of male and female in marriage. (Not, one could infer, from same-gender unions.) The woman is the one the man longs to reunite with. This union restores their original wholeness, their oneness. The woman is not just "like himself" but "from himself" and therefore a complimentary fit to him. She is a complementary sexual "other." Becoming "one flesh" indicates both the spiritual bond and the act of sexual intercourse that consummates this covenant relationship, and is the sign of that established covenant.

The passage establishes God's created purpose and parameters for human sexuality: God meets the man's need of companionship by creating a woman. The result is a heterosexual marriage relationship. So from the man (*ISH* in Hebrew) the woman is taken (*ISHA* in Hebrew). The male and female embody aspects of God's being. We are created in the image of God and being made male and female is related. We are image-bearers of the divine, and sexuality reflects that image. God fashions a body for us, and it matters what we do with it.

The heterosexual relationship is a relational, complementarity partnership. The two are not the same. Intimacy and growth come from differences. The man and woman enable each other to be more whole in life; they rely on each other and bring a different perspective about life. Their growth in marriage comes from loving each other and growing as a result of those differences. It is true this foundational text leaves much unanswered. Single people are not included. Are we to conclude theirs is a sinful lifestyle, falling short of an ideal described here? Or, is the presentation of Adam and Eve here simply descriptive of one viable way of living and expressing sexuality, or is it prescriptive, indicating what is acceptable and suggesting that which is forbidden? We can answer these questions by examining the rest of the biblical witness.

We must ask whether there is additional evidence to suggest that same-gender intimate relationships, though not mentioned in creation in Genesis, are nevertheless acceptable. So we turn to evaluate key passages.

Although brief, the biblical view and discussion on this subject is straightforward, concise, and consistent: same-sex practice/behavior is forbidden in both Old and New Testaments. This

section of this paper attention will review the main passages dealing with same-sex conduct.

1. The Old Testament Holiness Laws of Leviticus 18:22 and Leviticus 20:13.
2. Jesus and his view of divorce and marriage in Mark 10 (also Matthew 19).
3. Paul's teachings in the early church related to marriage and sexuality found in Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-20 and 1 Timothy 1:1-11.

Why are references to homosexuality infrequent in the Bible? The frequency (or infrequency) of a statement is not necessarily an indication of its importance. As we have seen, same-sex activity stood in obvious variance to the design of creation. The scarcity of references, in other words, is exactly what we would expect in a tradition universally affirming the God-giveness of heterosexuality and deplored deviations from that norm. Note also where biblical authors were writing to Jews in a Jewish environment, references to homosexuality are infrequent. The

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pattern changes, however, when the New Testament authors began to address Greek believers where homosexuality was practiced. As James Edwards points out, "A similar pattern is evident in the New Testament. Thus, Jesus, who moved in a predominantly Jewish milieu, made no reference to homosexuality, whereas Paul, who ministered in a Hellenistic milieu, makes specific reference to it in obvious places like Corinth and Rome." (p. 37)

The Old Testament Holiness Laws of Leviticus 18:22 and Leviticus 20:13

Leviticus 18:22 *"You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination."*

Leviticus 20:13 *"If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them."*

The question pertaining to these passages is, are they still applicable to the church today? Proponents of same-gender marriage say no. Their argument is that these laws are outdated codes from a historical, cultural context no longer prevalent today; there are certain rules we no longer observe. For example, today we eat shellfish, we cut our sideburns and get tattoos, yet each was prohibited by religious law. So why say some laws are still authoritative?

Edwards explains the Reformed (Presbyterian) view of Old Testament Law:

The Reformed tradition differentiates between cultic laws and moral laws in the Old Testament, the former being fulfilled in Christ, the latter retaining their moral force. This is evident in Scripture itself. Jesus, for example, permitted the eating of unclean foods (Mark 7), but he upheld the heterosexual model of creation (Mark 10:6-9). It is equally significant that although ritual prohibitions in the Old Testament are often ignored or violated by the early church, the prohibition against homosexuality is never questioned, but repeated and maintained in the New Testament and early church. (Edwards)

Thus, moral laws like "Thou shall not commit adultery," are applicable today. To say Holiness codes were temporary would lead to the conclusion that incest, child sacrifice, and other offenses listed in Leviticus are matters merely of cultural taste. These laws were aimed at creating a distinctive culture for the people of God so they might have a clear identity apart from the pagan people around them. Even Jesus says he did not come to abolish the law, but rather to fulfill it. Even though Jesus fulfills the law (see Matt. 5:17-20) he does not eliminate all moral boundaries.

2. Jesus and his view of divorce and marriage in Mark 10 (also Matthew 19)

Some ask why Jesus is silent on the issue of same-gender intimate relationships. Of all people surely Jesus would be for same-gender marriage and relationships. Jesus was always in favor of the underdog, he broke many ritual rules, he ate with sinners and tax collectors, brought the marginalized and outsiders in and gave them a place at the table. Jesus corrected the selfrighteous

religious elite. But as Robert Gagnon says,

It is time to deconstruct the myth of a sexually tolerant Jesus. Three sets of Jesus' sayings make clear that, far from loosening the law's stance on sex, Jesus intensified the ethical
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demand in this area: (a) Jesus' stance on divorce and remarriage (Mark 10:1-12; Matt. 5:32); (b) Jesus' remark about adultery of the heart (Matt. 5:27-28); and (c) Jesus' statement about removing body parts as preferable to being thrown into hell (Matt. 5:29-30; Mark 9:43-48). Simply put, sex mattered to Jesus. Jesus did not broaden the range of acceptable sexual expression; he narrowed it. (Gagnon).

When Jesus was asked about divorce in Mark 10, he referred back to Genesis and creation saying, "Male and female he created them." In the New Testament there are two passages on Jesus' view of divorce which tell a lot about his view of marriage. In fact his response was an attempt to raise the value of marriage rather than give a full account on divorce.

Mark 10:2-9.

Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her." But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

Here Jesus fields trick questions concerning divorce. But look closely. Jesus refers back to Genesis. "Male and female he made them... and the two became one flesh." (v. 8). By quoting Genesis, Jesus says marriage is not a socially engineered structure, but a union established by God in creation. Jesus is always "tougher" when it comes to sexuality, not more "lax." Jesus equated lusting after a woman in your heart with adultery. He is firm in his sexual ethics. Jesus did not have to speak of homosexuality; it was already prohibited in Mosaic Law. The Hebrew rules were clear. Homosexual practice undermines the created order and denies our creation in the image of God as male and female. Jesus did reach out to all people regardless of their lives, in order to reclaim them for God. But he does not open his arms to all behaviors. For example, in John 8, Jesus forgives the woman caught in adultery, yet tells her to go and sin no more. He undoes the death penalty, but still holds her to a moral code.

3. A survey of Paul's teachings in the Early Church related to marriage and sexuality.

In three passages in the New Testament Paul lays out guidelines for sexual relations in the early church. They are found in Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-20 and 1 Timothy 1:1-11. As stated earlier, in the Hebrew worldview, same-sex intimacy was forbidden, but in the Greco-Roman culture it was not. As a result of this difference in cultures, Paul's letters address churches where believers are coming out of the Greco-Roman culture and he has a lot to say about proper sexual conduct.

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In Romans, Paul lays out the case that all people have fallen short of the glory of God (3:23), and because of this we are all in need of a savior, namely Jesus Christ. Later Paul will contrast this fallen nature with the free gift of God in Jesus Christ that is available to all people (6:23).

In Romans Chapter 1, Paul talks about our propensity to go our own way, to not follow God's ways, to think we know a better way. This tendency leads to alienation from God. In this

chapter we find Paul's most thorough discussion of homosexuality in the New Testament:

Romans 1:24-27

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

This passage refers to abandoning the natural order and worshipping the creature rather than the Creator. Anytime people worship the creature or created things rather than the Creator, they commit idolatry. Paul gives two examples of idolatry. First, creating images of God, thus worshipping something created, rather than the living God (v. 23). This was often done in the Old Testament by carving an idol believed to have power to make life better (Isaiah 40: 18-20).

Secondly, another form of idolatry, according to Paul, is when people defy the created order by engaging in sexual relations that are not God's intention from the beginning of creation.

Romans 1:26-27 broadens the biblical condemnation of homosexuality to include female same-sex

intimacy. Here homosexuality is not cited because it is worse than other sins, but because it illustrates the problem of idolatry (1:18-32). As Gentiles "exchange" the truth of God for a lie and worship the creation instead of the Creator, so gay and lesbian people "exchange" a natural relationship for an unnatural one, rejecting the Creator's natural order of creation in the image of God, united as male and female. Idolatry and homosexuality in Scripture represent rebellion against God. In both idolatry and same-sex intimacy the creature exchanges the image of God for their own image – thus diminishing the Creator's intent. This is why same-sex intimacy is often linked to idol worship, because it exchanges the glory of God for the creation. Idolatry and homosexuality inevitably result in a turning back on self for a fulfillment God intended to be completed by the other. The result, Paul states, is alienation from God (Romans 1:28).

Some suggest this passage is not a condemnation of homosexuality per se, but of persons who "exchange" their natural heterosexual orientation for homosexual acts. But as Edwards explains, "This view wrongly projects the modern concept of orientation onto the Scriptures." (Edwards).

Neither Paul nor the Old Testament addresses the origins, motivations, or gratifications of same-sex

intimacy. Sexual orientation is not the issue from a Biblical standpoint. The Biblical admonitions are not concerned with attraction, but with what someone does with those attractions. For Paul, all such desires are manifestations of the power of sin to confuse and blind human thinking (Romans 1:28).

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The gospel is a holistic life readjustment which transforms the individual into a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). For Paul our sexuality is an important aspect of that. Romans 1:23 echoes Genesis 1:26. Human beings are created in the image of the Creator. Part of the way we worship the Creator is by affirming the creation as male and female. Idolatry and same-sex unions deny the Creator's intent. Nature points to the reality of God (see Romans 1:19-20); through creation God is made visible, so also God's created order is visible in male and female relationships. Homosexuality points away from God. Idolatry is contrary to nature and suppresses the truth about creation.

Some would say, "Paul is against same-sex unions because all such practice in the ancient world was abusive (where others were forced into such acts because they were slaves or younger boys). The argument goes, if Paul had known about committed same-sex relationships his view would have been different. There is in fact evidence of committed same-sex relationships in the ancient world (e.g. Homer's Iliad), but a committed same-sex relationship would make no difference to Paul on this issue. Like Jesus, Paul's views are founded in the creation story (see Gen. 1; 2; Rom. 1; 1 Cor. 6; and I Tim. 1). Paul argues from nature and focuses on the natural created order. Humanity was created as male and female, and proper sexually intimate relationships are exclusively between one man and one woman.

The Apostle Paul tells believers to "flee" sexual immoralities, and states that sexual sin is unlike other sin in that it produces a personal union disapproved by God and is a sin against our own bodies. In his letters to the Corinthians and to Timothy, he works to establish a moral compass for new believers coming out of a different cultural backdrop. Many times he urges them to remain as they are, married, single, or even a slave. The reason for this is to be good models to others, in order to win them for Christ. But other times he tells them to stop doing certain things, i.e., fornication and homosexual relationships. Why is this? Because:

The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, "The two shall be one flesh." But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body. 1 Corinthians 6:13-20

We have been joined in one spirit with Christ. To illustrate his point Paul uses an analogy of sex with a prostitute, saying one united with a prostitute becomes one flesh with her (v.16). This comment goes straight back to Genesis. We are the bride of Christ. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit (v.19). What we do with our bodies matters immensely, and what we do sexually affects our bodies. When we sin sexually, we sin against our own bodies (v. 18). He ends by reminding us we were bought with a price, our bodies do not belong to us, they belong to God. So glorify God in your body! (v.20).

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1 Corinthians 6:9-11 is the earliest New Testament text bearing on homosexuality.

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes (Greek: malakoi), sodomites (Greek: arsenokoitai), thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers — none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

Additionally a second list is found in **1 Timothy 1:8-11**

Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it legitimately. This means understanding that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their father or mother, for murderers, fornicators, sodomites (Greek: arsenokoitai), slave traders, liars, perjurers,

and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

Two terms in the text deserve attention. The first is the Greek word *malakoi*, translated as "male prostitutes" (v.9). The translation of *malakoi* in Greek literature is "soft," such as soft garments (Luke 7:25). It can, however, carry a connotation, as it does here, of "soft" persons or passive partners in same-sex relationships.¹

The second term is *arsenokoitai*, which the NRSV translates, "sodomites," a term deriving from the evil behavior of Sodom described in Genesis 19. The compound word, *arsenokoitai* means "(males) going to bed (or having sex) with males." It is sometimes argued these two terms condemn only sexual relations between an adult male and a "call boy," (called pederasty) rather than two consenting adults. Yet numerous scholars have argued convincingly that Paul coined *arsenokoitai* from the presence of two adjacent words in Leviticus 20:13 being *arsenos koiten*.² Leviticus 20:13, as discussed earlier, is the strongest prohibition of homosexuality in the Old Testament. If, as appears likely, Paul had this text in mind in utilizing *arsenokoitai* in 1 Corinthians 6:9, then the term cannot be limited simply to the Greek practice of pederasty, but must be seen as an all-encompassing condemnation of same-sex intimate relations (as in Leviticus 20:13), including consenting adult homosexual relationships. Advocates of homosexual behavior often claim these passages refer not to homosexuality in general, but only to male prostitution (i.e., slave boys and their male customers). A serious problem with this interpretation is that Paul would then be condemning both the offenders (*arsenokoitai*) and the victims (*malakoi*) of this cruel institution. More likely, Paul is referring to homosexual behavior in general, where both are willing participants. This is confirmed by the fact that other terms in the list are general ones, like idolaters, adulterers, and the sexually immoral.

¹ See Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon, p. 489; The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament defines *malakoi* in 1 Corinthians 6:9 as "reprehensible examples of passive homosexuality."

² See D. Malick, "The Condemnation of Homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9," *Biblioteca Sacra* 150 [1993] 479-492.

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A few additional points:

1. When looking at the Hebrew Bible concerning sexuality, any genre always presupposes a male and female relationship. Whether it is poetry, proverbial statements, Psalms, Song of Songs, or narratives, this is always true. Throughout Scripture marriage is exclusively heterosexual. There are many allusions to God as a husband, and Israel or the church as a wife. Robert Gagnon says, "When the relationship between God and Israel or between Jesus and the church is depicted as an intimate covenant relationship, it is always imaged as a heterosexual relationship, never as a same-sex relationship. Why? Because the idea of a same-sex union denied marriage as God created it and intended it to be. (Gagnon).

In the book of Hosea, God, depicted as a "husband," speaks to his "wife" Israel, who has committed adultery by following after other gods, "In that day," declares the LORD, "you will call me 'my husband'; you will no longer call me 'my master.' I will remove the names of Baal's from her (Israel's) lips..." (Hosea 2:16). Later God says, "I will betroth you to me forever..."

2. What about other issues on which the church has changed its stance over the years?

The argument has been made, and rightfully so, that scripture has been abused and manipulated unfairly over the centuries to enforce abuse and prejudice, e.g. women in leadership and slavery. So is this what is happening with same-sex marriage?

There are big differences between comparing the issue of same-sex marriage to the abolition of slavery and the affirming women as leaders in the church. Issues like slavery and women in

leadership find Scriptural support for both sides of the argument. However the Scriptures are clearly one-sided about homosexuality – it is forbidden. Nowhere do we find an exception to the rule. There is not a gay couple, or a homosexual man in leadership. In all the discussion of acceptable and unacceptable heterosexual conduct, we never hear mention of acceptable and unacceptable homosexual conduct. Why? Because all homosexual conduct is forbidden. The passages expressing prohibition are all dealing with the actions of homosexual behavior. There is no evidence to indicate that homosexuals were allowed to practice homosexuality within the church, or within leadership in the Early Church.

3. “God made me this way, so my homosexual desires are natural and must be a good thing.” Questions about sexual orientation are complex and not fully answered. It seems likely there are genetic, environmental, and social factors which can affect sexual orientation. However, even these factors do not legitimize homosexual behavior. The cause of all sin may be said to be “inborn” a result of a fallen human nature. God did not make us this way. Rather, we inherited from Adam a natural inclination to sin: “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned” (Rom. 5:12). Since the fall, we are all inclined to reject God, to act selfishly, to hate our enemies, and more. Salvation is about being delivered from these fallen desires and given a new Spiritempowered

desire to pursue God. It is about exchanging our old sinful nature for a new redeemed one: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Cor. 5:17). The simple truth is that we live in a fallen world and are all 13

sinners. We all have sinful thoughts and desires. For some these are same-sex attraction; for others they are heterosexual attraction. In either case, it is behavior not attraction that the Biblical texts talk about.

4. The church is so far behind our culture. Why not change like the culture is changing? Now that society is more accepting of homosexuality, why shouldn't Christianity change its position? Why should this teaching be inalterable? Christianity never adopted the position it should alter its ethical standards simply because the broader cultural milieu was more accepting of some practices. In fact the people of God in both the Old and New Testaments were meant to be counter-cultural, bringing light into the darkness. They lived in environments where samesex relations were often an accepted practice, yet they maintained clear distinctions between their own practices those outside God's community.

Even as Paul lists the things to avoid, he has a word of transformation and hope in 1 Corinthians 6:11, “And this is what some of you used to be (see verse 10). But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” Paul's desire for them is to experience the full life God intends for all people. To short cut God's plan or make our desires trump God's commands leads to lives outside God's will. The Christian is called to a new way of life led by walking in the Spirit.

Concluding Comments to Section A:

The Scriptures cannot be interpreted to legitimate same-sex marriage. As Edwards summarizes, “A survey of the biblical and extra-biblical evidence regarding homosexuality results in a massive and unqualified condemnation of the practice. Richard Hays rightly summarizes the evidence thus: “Every pertinent Christian text from the pre-Constantinian period... adopts an unremittingly negative judgment on homosexual practice, and this tradition is emphatically carried forward by all major Christian writers of the fourth and

fifth centuries" (Response to Boswell's Exegesis of Romans 1, JRE 14/1, 1986, p. 202).

The Scriptural witness is consistent and direct, a Biblical marriage is a relationship between a man and a woman as God's created and designed it to be. Our calling as followers of Jesus Christ is to mold our lives to Scripture rather than interpret Scripture to fit our lives, as uncomfortable or unpopular as it may be. God's people have always been a called out, set apart people, following God's call and mandate on their lives.

The church is made up of people trying to live into the reality of the new creation that we have in Christ. We are all sinners saved by grace. Our desires do not define us; our identity is found in being God's children, called to glorify God with our lives. We live broken lives that God is healing and reconstructing into new creatures – we are being transformed. As 1 Corinthians 6:9 says, "And that is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."

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Section B: The Perspective Supporting Same-gender Marriage in the Church Biblical and Theological Reflections

As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, the principles of biblical interpretation affirmed by Presbyterians include interpreting portions of Scripture through the lens of the whole of Scripture. In other words, we understand the meaning of any specific text by the broader view of Scripture in its entirety. An example of this was when the church was discerning the role of women in leadership in the church after centuries of never having women in ordained leadership. Texts in Scripture were used to deny women leadership roles. For example, "*As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.*" (1 Cor. 14:33-36). "*I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.*" (1 Tim. 2:12-14). This latter text was particularly forceful, because it based the prohibition of a woman teaching or holding authority over a man in the very order of God's creation, and the fact that woman was deceived in the Genesis story before the man. The church divided over this issue, disagreeing over biblical interpretation in general, and women's ordination specifically.

There were many, however, who appealed to the wider scope of the biblical record in this matter and found in Scripture support for women in leadership. The fact that Deborah was a judge over the people of Israel (Judges 4: 4) showed a woman in authority when both faith community and culture were far more patriarchal. Women were the first witnesses to Jesus' resurrection in a day when women were not "acceptable" witnesses in the religious culture. Paul supported a woman and a man – Priscilla and Acquilla – as leaders within a congregation, and Paul reports prophetesses speaking in worship. Paul's words in Galatians 3:28, "*There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus,*" were a core, watershed text for those supporting women's ordination as they interpreted Scripture through Scripture.

More generally, supporters point to the words of Jesus, "*By their fruits shall you know them,*" (Matt. 7:20) as our Lord's suggestion for what faithful leadership looks like. Scholars and leaders lifted up the countless ways the gifts of women – in the mission field, in Christian education, and in compassionate service – were evidence of the fruits of the Spirit, the blessing of God, and the upbuilding of the Kingdom. Westminster has ordained women since the 1960's,

and has seen profound evidence of God's blessing and use of the gifts women bring to ministry. While not the only principle of biblical interpretation for any such study, interpreting individual Scripture passages through the wider lens of all Scripture has proven to be critical as the church has wrestled with issues like the ordination of women, slavery and divorce, as well as over issues like "How much water is required at baptism?" Supporters of same-gender marriage find this very Presbyterian approach to Scripture to be helpful, pastoral, faithful and essential in considering this issue.

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Scripture and Marriage

The Bible is hardly univocal on marriage. Scriptures often cited with regard to marriage – "... *a man shall leave his mother and father, and cling to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh;*" and Jesus' own recitation of that text in Matthew 19:5 and Mark 10:8; or Adam's "*Now at last this is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman for she was taken out of man,*" (Genesis 2:23) – are hardly the sum total of Scriptural allusions to what we now call marriage. There are numerous patterns of marriage evidenced in Scripture that differ from our contemporary and Western view of two equal partners.

Polygamy is common in biblical testimony. It is in the earliest record of God's people, and is not only practiced but is, by implication, allowed by God. King David – who had many wives – is over and over commended as a supreme example of faithfulness and righteousness. Numerous other faithful leaders in the Old Testament are examples of faithful leaders who were polygamous. In the New Testament, some scholars suggest that when the early church was discerning the requirements of its leaders, the commendation that leaders should be "the husband of one wife" indicated there were those in the early church who were the husband of more than one wife. While we no longer affirm plural marriage as a desirable model for marriage, it was clearly practiced among people of faith in many times and places in Scripture.

Levirate marriage is when the brother of a deceased man is obliged to marry his brother's widow. This was for inheritance, securing land, maintaining the clan, and providing for a woman where women had few if any rights. At one point, Jesus is questioned about a woman whose husband died, who then married a brother, which brother subsequently died, and so on through each of the man's remaining brothers. Jesus did not at that time condemn the practice of Levirate marriage. In addition, one could assume in a culture that expected men to marry, it is unlikely all seven brothers would be bachelors. Jesus did not use that test to say "only if none of the brothers is already married." No one is commending the biblical practice of Levirate marriage in our culture or tradition, yet it had biblical sanction (Deuteronomy 25:5-6).

Arranged marriage was (and continues to be) the norm in many times and places. Arranged marriages are generally not centered on the role of love and companionship, but are about clan, culture, propagation, securing borders, creating alliances and the like. Such arranged marriages appear often in Scripture, yet we do not consider them the norm in our modern, Western culture. The fact is, one is hard pressed to find in Scripture many models of the one man/one woman, happily married for love, as we commend in our faith tradition today. That is not to say it is not a good model – or even the best model – it is simply to note that the testimony of Scripture witnesses a multiplicity of marriage practices throughout the history of the faith, and not simply the "traditional" view we hear affirmed today.

Likewise, marriage as we know as our norm today – a state-sanctioned, as well as often churchblessed

union of a man and a woman – is not something we find described in Scripture. The

practice of legal and ecclesiastical marriage does not appear in the Bible, but has developed over time in a variety of ways, as civilization and the ordering of life have changed. Its practice certainly has biblical roots, but the practice itself is not directly linked to specific biblical texts.

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Same-gender marriage is never contemplated in Scripture, either positively or negatively. The concept of two persons of the same gender uniting for companionship, love and intimacy is simply “not on the radar” of the biblical record. As we will see in our review of biblical texts about same-gender **sexual behavior**, there is nothing to suggest the concept of two same gender persons joining in a covenant of mutual support, love and care was ever contemplated within the biblical testimony. The word “homosexual” was coined in the late nineteenth century by German psychologists, and only introduced into English in the 20th Century. (Caldwell, p. 64) There is no word in Greek or Hebrew (the Bible’s languages) one can accurately translate with “homosexual” or “gay” as we use those words today. The idea of same-sex orientation (as opposed to a sexual practice or behavior) was simply not a concept in biblical literature.

It is important to note that biblical language about marriage is used for the covenant relationship God has with God’s people. Marriage is used by the prophets as a symbol of God’s relationship to Israel. Usually it represents the exclusive attachment of Israel to God. Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel all refer to Israel as a wife or bride of God. These marriage allusions to the relationship between God and Israel are not about gender, but about fidelity between God and Israel – and reflect that same concern for faithfulness and fidelity in covenant relationships of marriage. Mirroring God’s loving establishment of covenant relationships with human beings, the language of marriage between persons reflects the value and nature of those covenants. Similarly, an analogy is drawn in the New Testament between the marriage of a husband and wife and the union of Christ with His church (Eph. 5; Rev. 19; 21). Again, this is not about gender, but about covenant relationships.

Specific Biblical Texts about Same Sex Practice and Behavior

While the biblical record is silent on the concept of consensual, covenanted same-gender relationships or marriage, it does include a number of verses regarding same-sex practice and behavior. These are the verses most often quoted with regard to the issues regarding samegender relationships in the church.

Genesis 19:1-29

The story of Sodom and Gomorrah, often cited in connection with homosexuality, is not found by many scholars to be particularly applicable to discussion of same-gender relationships. This story is about a mob outside a house, demanding its owner deliver his house guests to the mob for their sexual use. In essence, this is a description of a gang rape. Ultimately, the mob is struck blind by the house guests (angelic visitors), and sexual violence is thwarted. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah that subsequently takes place is described as the result of injustice, pride, oppression of the poor, failure to care for the needy, and a general moral decay. (Caldwell). (See Is. 1:4, 10; 13:19; Jer. 23:14; Ez. 16:49-50; Amos 4:1-11; Zeph. 2:8-11).

Sexuality is not mentioned with regard to Sodom in Old Testament references after Genesis.

Jesus associated Sodom with the sin of inhospitality (Matt. 10:14-15; Lk. 10:10-12). Two verses (2 Pet. 2:7 and Jude 7) speak about sexual sin in connection with Sodom, but do not specify same-sex behavior. Other New Testament references to Sodom associate the city with general sin and wrongdoing. Despite use of the city’s name in the coining of “sodomy laws”, it is not the specific sin for which the city is destroyed.

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Old Testament Holiness Laws of Leviticus 18:22; 20:13

"You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination."

"If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them."

While aspects of ethical and moral behavior in the Holiness code of Leviticus guide us today, we ignore many laws in Leviticus (and elsewhere in the Old Testament), or see them as no longer applicable (Caldwell, p. 62). Scholars suggest there are in Leviticus both moral laws, as well as ritual or ceremonial laws having to do with purity and boundaries, as opposed to the inherent evil of particular actions. There is a prohibition in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 of a man lying with a man as he lies with a woman; it is an abomination. But it is also an abomination for a man to have sexual relations with a woman when she is menstruating, something we do not consider sinful today. Elsewhere in Scripture it is an abomination to charge interest on loans (Ezekiel 18:13) or burn incense (Isaiah 1:13). One must determine within the holiness code whether or not a particular law is focused on ritual purity or is a law having to do with moral prohibition. In appealing directly to Leviticus as a standard for opposing same sex unions, it means one will be met with the equal force of dietary laws, laws about mixed yarns in cloth (there goes your cotton/polyester blend); laws about touching the skin of a pig (out with NFL games); length of hair; etc. In addition, the citation of the death penalty for this sexual abomination is also met with the fact that elsewhere in Scripture, children who rebelled against their parents were also to be stoned (Deut. 21:18-21), as were those who used the Lord's name in vain (Lev. 24:16). Since the New Testament does not deal with the laws in Leviticus consistently, it is difficult to excise these two verses and say they should specifically guide the understanding of all same-gender behavior when we do not do the same with many other texts from this portion of Scripture. As already stated, nowhere in Scripture is the idea of a same-gender relationship between two loving, committed persons contemplated. There are however in Scripture, multiple references to cultic male prostitutes (Deut 23:17; 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46). The pagan cults that were a dangerous influence to Israel often had both male and female prostitutes, and Leviticus was clearly directed at keeping Israel separate from the practices of the Canaanite tribes surrounding them. Many biblical scholars interpret these prohibitions in Leviticus as addressing idolatrous sexual behaviors practiced by the pagan peoples around Israel, and having nothing to say about a loving, covenantal relationship between two persons of the same-gender.

A survey of Paul's teachings in the Early Church related to marriage and sexuality Romans 1:26, 27

For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

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This is the longest Scripture passage referring to same-sex behavior. The first chapter of Romans describes Gentiles turning away from God and worshipping idols. They *"exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles."* (Romans 1:23). God let them have their way, and *"gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies for themselves. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator."* (Romans 1:24-25). It was due to their idolatry that God gave them up to the lusts of their hearts. Paul condemns the behavior in a context of idolatry and as a lustful behavior. There is no

mention of love, faithfulness or commitment. (Achte-meier). While many believe Paul condemned same-sex behavior because same-sex unions violate God's "natural" intention of an anatomical complementarity between men and women, there are scholars who contend Paul was condemning only same-sex behavior practiced by *heterosexual* persons – denouncing behavior unnatural to individuals engaging in it. The text describes those who *abandon* or *exchange* what is natural for them (heterosexual behavior), for what is unnatural, implying they were capable of heterosexual attraction. In other words, these persons who engage in same-sex behavior *could* be satisfied with opposite sex partners, but rampant lust leads them beyond it. (Vines, p. 103). Common same-sex behaviors in the Greco-Roman world were the raping of prisoners of war; pederasty (young boys providing sexual favors to older men in exchange for philosophical training/social patronage); cultic prostitution associated with idol-worships; and masters taking advantage of slaves of both genders to demonstrate dominance. (Achte-meier, p. 93). The men who indulged in these behaviors also engaged in heterosexual behavior. As Paul says, it was often an excess of lustfulness that led to these behaviors. Paul doesn't say they were in love with one another, or in a committed relationship of companionship; he says they were consumed with lust. The passage seems focused on power, violence and excess as dominant concerns. Paul's use of the terms natural and unnatural also raises questions. First, he uses the same word in Greek to suggest "nature" indicates it is degrading for men to have long hair. (1 Cor. 11:14). This is not a timeless truth from biology or anatomy. It is a judgment made by the dictates of custom in Paul's own era. Further, Paul's description of women changing natural intercourse for unnatural is consistently understood by scholars not as an exchange for same-sex behavior between women, but refers to women who defied the submissive role of women in a patriarchal culture, who behaved more aggressively or engaged in nonprocreative sexual behaviors with male partners, overstepping bounds of their natural, i.e. "expected" role. (Achte-meier, p. 97). It is also helpful to note that psychology, neurobiology and related fields today recognize a blurring of the old distinctions between personality and chemistry. In light of biological complications like intersexuality (the presence of some combination of male and female sex organs) and conditions like Klinefelter's syndrome (a genetic condition in which an individual has XXY chromosomes, rather than typical male, XY, or female, XX) it becomes clear that whatever we human beings are, we aren't simply male and female souls in male or female bodies. (McLaren, p. 176). Discerning exactly what is "natural" for an individual may be far more complex than a simple, male/female dualism. Clearly, those who have a same-gender orientation describe that as their *natural* orientation, rather than unnatural. Lived out in a loving,

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committed, faithful partnership, it is possible that such *natural* expressions of affection and intimacy are another model of what God desires in healthy, *natural*, covenant relationships.

1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:9-10

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers - none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. This means understanding that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their father or mother, for murderers, fornicators, sodomites, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching.

These two "vice lists" mention same sex behaviors that are incompatible with inheriting the kingdom of God. As mentioned in section A, the text uses two Greek words "malakoi" and

“arsenokoitai.” Tony Campolo writes, “Among some of the most respected biblical scholars, there is wide acceptance of the opinion that in these passages Paul was condemning the ancient Greek practice of pederasty.” (p. 114). “Whether these words refer to the partners in a pederastic relationship, or to male prostitutes and their customers, it is clear that neither of these words refer to behaviors that look like a marriage relationship.” (Achte-meier, p. 99).

Paul’s larger argument was to those practicing an “anything goes” version of Christianity, believing because of God’s grace, they would be forgiven of anything. This false teaching brought disrepute to the Gospel, and included behaviors that shocked even the pagans. His vice lists are illustrative examples of unrighteous behavior. Given the context of exploitive, pederastic and cultic behavior, it is understandable why in some vice lists Paul might include violent, idolatrous same-sex behavior as at odds with God’s purposes. It does not necessarily follow from these verses that gay and lesbian persons should be prohibited from entering into committed relationships which might help two people grow in faithfulness to God. The 1 Tim. text with its “fornicators, sodomites, and slave traders” language may well refer to sex trafficking in the Roman Empire. This hardly seems descriptive of the kind of loving same-gender relationships we are concerned about today. (Achte-meier, p. 101).

Reflections on Genesis and Marriage

Genesis sets forth the customary pattern for God’s ordering of human life in the establishment of a commitment between a man and a woman that endures and is fruitful in every respect. Our question is not whether there is a standard pattern for marriage in the Bible. Arguably there is. Our question is whether the existence of that standard pattern means God automatically condemns lives ordered differently from that pattern. (Achte-meier, Covenant Network address.) For many people, that ideal is not their experience; their lives are ordered differently. They may be single and not know an enduring, intimate, man-woman relationship. They may be childless, not knowing the procreative fruit of the relationship God intends. They may be homosexual and not know the experience of a sexual relationship with a companion of opposite gender. Yet all of these persons, whose numbers are legion, are truly members of the human community God has made and members of the community of faith. As persons who in their varied ways and

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relationships live out lives of faithfulness, love, and justice, caring for one another and loving God, their place in the community of faith and our judgment of them must not be determined by their conformity to the kind of relationship given central place in Genesis. (Miller, p. 4).

Jesus does reference the Genesis 2 text about a man leaving his father and mother and clinging to his wife. Some opponents of gay marriage claim this reference constitutes Jesus’ endorsement of heterosexual marriage as God’s exclusively authorized pattern for human life. But there is a bit of irony in using Jesus’ citation of Genesis 2 to argue for heterosexual marriage as the only acceptable pattern for human life, since Jesus’ own life does not conform to the pattern! Jesus does not cling to a wife, nor does he recognize a personal obligation to be fruitful and multiply. This is significant, because classical Christian teaching about Jesus insists that in him we see not only “the image of the invisible God,” but also an image of perfected humanity. Jesus’ sinless life provides us with a picture of what God intends human life to be. That being the case, it is very hard to claim the heterosexual union of male and female in marriage is the only acceptable pattern of God’s will for human beings, and without such a union, the person is not complete. The Savior’s own life departs from the pattern. So does the Apostle Paul’s. (Achte-meier)

The Wider Biblical Lens

After working through the specific texts on same-sex behavior, it is helpful to look at the broader

view of Scripture when considering same-gender marriage. In Scripture's earliest testimony, God declares it is not good man should be alone. (Gen. 2:18). Many Jewish theologians consider this to be a primary declaration of God, describing the essential nature of human beings – social creatures, made for companionship. (Nevins). For Christians, since God is the author of love, and is in God's own self a plurality (Trinity), it appears being created in God's own likeness (the image of God), we have been given the capacity to love and be loved. The biblical testimony overwhelmingly supports that God intends for us to live in community, not solitude. The initial bond between Adam and Eve is not described linguistically in Genesis as sexual. Adam's expression, "*bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh,*" is a kinship formula, the same language used elsewhere to describe, for instance, the bond between two men – Laban and Jacob (Gen. 29:14), or the bond between David and the tribes of Israel (2 Sam. 5:1). As for the word translated "clings" in the Genesis text "... *a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife,*" this word too invokes a feeling of kinship rather than a sexual act, as when Ruth "clung to" (same Hebrew word) her mother-in-law, Naomi (Ruth 1:14). (Diggory, online).

A favorite wedding passage is Ecclesiastes 4:9-11: "*Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone. And though one might be prevailed against, two will withstand.*" It doesn't say a man and a woman. It just says two – a helper when one has fallen; a partner when facing the challenges of life; a companion when the cold of the day or of life has arrived. Companionship, partnership and support – all described in "two are better than one." Many who deny the legitimacy of same-gender marriage from a biblical standpoint are still willing to agree that sexual orientation is not something that can be changed, and is likely an

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orientation (in most cases) with which an individual is born. Their answer to those with samegender

orientation, however, is that celibacy is their only choice when it comes to sexual intimacy. Yet clearly, according to the New Testament, celibacy is a gift – not given to all – but only to some (1 Corinthians 7:8-9). It hardly seems reasonable to suggest that every person who has same-gender orientation must also therefore have been given the gift of celibacy.

Given the created design of social engagement and companionship, there are many who believe God's will for lesbian and gay persons includes the possibility of covenant relationships that exhibit the exact same qualities we expect from heterosexual married couples – faithfulness, commitment, tenderness, concern for the other's well-being, and physical intimacy as an expression of love rather than lust. Since we no longer hold that procreation by every couple is an essential element to the propagation of the species or to increase a nation as in ancient Israel, is it possible there are other factors that have replaced those needs in relationships? There are many who would say a resounding "Yes!" As in the replacement of arranged marriage, polygamy and Levirate marriage with a model of two persons, choosing one another out of love and companionship, perhaps there are additional models of committed relationships that reflect God's desire for individuals in faithful living.

Furthermore, there is overwhelming biblical evidence of Jesus welcoming the outsider, enlarging the boundaries, and transforming exclusive human attitudes with the inclusive invitation of the Gospel. We consistently find Jesus mingling with and blessing those that his own religious tradition condemned and/or excluded. For Jesus, outsiders were invited in. Jesus decried those

whose religious principles were rampant with judgmentalism. The message of God incarnated in Jesus seems to be on a trajectory that (like affirming the role of women in ministry) could indeed welcome persons from same-gender relationships into leadership roles in the church, and into the legally and ecclesiastically supported covenant relationship of marriage.

Many in this debate have found encouragement for a new openness in the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch in the book of Acts. The Ethiopian eunuch was another sexual minority – excluded from the Temple – considered sexually impure and unwelcome. And yet, upon finding in this Scripture-studying outcast a man whose faith was being spirit-led, Philip took little time (and didn't call church officers back in Jerusalem), and proceeded to baptize the man then and there, extending the welcome of the community of faith to him despite his sexual condition. Scripture tells us the Ethiopian eunuch was accepted and baptized that day, but tradition tells us more – that this “sexually other” person brought the Good News of the gospel back to Ethiopia. There are striking parallels between the debate among early Jewish followers of Jesus about the inclusion of gentiles in the new covenant and the debate today about the church's welcome to homosexual persons, including their inclusion in the covenant of marriage. We discover these possibilities of wider inclusion when we look at Peter, to whom it was revealed that a Gentile named Cornelius was declared clean and fully included by God at the invitation of God through the Holy Spirit. Scripture even says God was doing something “unnatural” in this welcome to Gentiles. This was against everything tradition taught Peter about who is acceptable among God's people, and yet clearly, it was a widening of the door to those who had previously been considered unacceptable. Such is a common theme in the New Testament, and worthy of serious consideration in our discussion of the issue of same-gender marriage.

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Concluding Comments to Section B

There are many scholars, students and faithful believers who love Scripture, who believe the same-sex behaviors condemned in Scripture are limited to describing behaviors that were abusive, exploitative, lustful or part of idol worship. What Scripture describes as same sexbehavior

is nothing like the loving relationships we contemplate affirming today. It is also clear we do not affirm all the different patterns of marriage in Scripture, and that our contemporary, Western view of two equal partners differs from many marriage practices in biblical times.

The history of church and society gives us reason to pause before assuming we know the moral meaning of God's created order. Church and society have appealed to Scripture's created order to set norms for roles and relationships. We have a history of reading Scripture as declaring God created a world in which women should be subordinate to men, men should cut their hair and women should not, women should not speak in church, subjects should obey their kings, and slaves should submit to their masters and obey them with the same fear and trembling with which they obey Christ. (Miller, p. 5) Our interpretations have not always been right.

We can continue as a historically change-averse community – a church that sees this increasing acceptance of gay and lesbian persons as yet another slide down a slippery slope toward moral relativism and decay. Or, be a change-catalytic community – a church that sees this increasing acceptance as yet another step forward in removing old dividing walls between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, black and brown and white, male and female, and so on. (McLaren, p. 180)

Given the rule of love, the inclusive nature of the Gospel, the lack of scriptural testimony on anything resembling a committed, loving nurturing same-gender relationship, and the church's history of gaining new understandings that change long-held interpretations of Scripture, the

affirmation of same-sex relationships seems at least worthy of consideration, if not approval.

Conclusion To The White Paper

We recognize we are a congregation that is not united in our views on this issue. But we affirm with the strongest voice we can muster that we ARE a congregation united in our love for Jesus Christ, united by the love of Christ for us all and for the whole world, and guided by Scripture. We have journeyed together for many years with disagreement over a multitude of issues, and will surely do so until all truth is fully revealed to us. We have ministered and served side-

byside, and willingly committed ourselves and our resources to Knowing Christ and Making Christ Known in word and deed, even while laboring next to those with whom we have disagreed. We believe our strength is multiplied by our diversity. We grow in faith and understanding when we wrestle together to understand God's Word and God's will for us and the world. In humility we can still hold to our views and opinions strongly, but with the understanding that on any given issue our own fallible understanding may be imperfect and incomplete. We yearn to continue to journey together with ALL the faithful of Westminster, that together we would model within our own walls, as well as for the Church and the world the possibility that Christians who disagree on a specific issue or issues are still bound together in love for one another because we have first been loved by the One we call Lord. The witness of the Church has been divided far too many times by issues that years later have been determined to be nonessential,

or on which the church has changed its mind. We feel compelled to call THIS congregation to live in this time of tension TOGETHER – that we might continue to grow with one another and together fully proclaim the truth that Jesus is indeed Lord over all the earth.

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Appendix: Guidelines During Times of Disagreement

As Presbyterians, we are called to work for the “peace, unity and purity of the Church” as we seek to be faithful to God’s work in the world. However, conflicts are inevitable in all of life and certainly in the church. The history of the church is filled with conflicts and disagreements.

Several of Paul’s letters address the conflicts common in the early church. There have been and are going to be disagreements as Christians attempt to discern God’s work in the world and as we interpret scripture. Conflicts can be harmful and even destructive. They can cause individuals a great deal of pain and the community of faith immeasurable damage. Congregations have been divided; denominations have experienced schisms.

But conflicts can be an opportunity for new insights and individual and corporate growth.

Disagreements can illuminate a topic in helpful ways and present solutions to problems previously not seen. Successful resolution of conflict can unite people in powerful ways.

The Bible contains many stories of conflict and disagreement and advice about how they can be addressed. As those stories indicate, God is already present wherever there is brokenness, granting wholeness and peace. God promises to be with us in times of disagreement and calls us to reconciliation, trust, love and forgiveness.

We realize that our perspectives are limited, so to help us affirm each other, enhance our community, stay open to the viewpoints of others and be sensitive to cultural diversity, we commit ourselves to the Guidelines in a spirit of prayer, trust, and love, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In order to have conversations about marriage that are prayerful, deep, and fruitful, we encourage you to commit to these practices as you talk together:

Hear Scripture: “by speaking the truth with love, let’s grow in every way into Christ...” (Ephesians 4:15).

Be present: bring your ideas, beliefs, and convictions with you, and be ready and willing to contribute them to the shared conversation.

Listen well: be attentive, respectful, and patient; ask for clarification when you don’t understand. Be open to how the Spirit may speak through the other members of your group.

Speak well: speak with confidence, yet awareness others may see things differently; make space for their voices too.

Build the conversation, make connections with what others have said, so that the conversation grows and deepens as you go.

Practice friendliness: show warmth and kindness to others; be ready to receive friendship.

Don't force it: don't try to push an agenda or reach a predetermined outcome, such as "consensus" or "having good feelings."

(PCUSA: Christian Marriage in the Presbyterian Church; Discussion guide, Page vi)