

Human Sexuality and the Nature of Marriage

A Denton Bible Church Position Paper

I. Introduction

Man and woman were created in the image and likeness of God with the capacity to think, desire and responsibly act both as individuals and in relationship with others. This relational aspect of man in particular is rooted in the nature of God who relates perfectly to Himself within and among the persons of the Trinity.

From the very beginning mankind was created as either male or female and these natures, while equal in their essence before God, are distinct and complementary in their relations to one another. An important part of the complementary nature of man and woman entails their capacity to relate to one another in a sexual manner.

While merely human opinions vary as to the sexual nature of men and women and the proper definition of marriage, we believe the Bible has spoken infallibly, unambiguously and unequivocally on these issues.

This position paper seeks to articulate what we understand the Bible teaches about human sexuality and the nature of marriage.¹

II. The Bible is our moral authority

Our understanding of the Bible is central to any consideration of moral questions such as the nature of human sexuality and of marriage. We acknowledge the Bible as the Word of God in written form and as inerrant and infallible, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and training in righteousness” (II Tim. 3:16-17).

We believe the clarity of the Bible’s teaching on human sexuality and marriage is such that variant positions are only possible to the degree that one rejects the clear teaching of the Bible.² Those who reject the clear biblical teaching that God has designed men and women to be by nature exclusively heterosexual and that God has designed marriage to be the exclusive union of one man and one woman in a life long covenant relationship can only sustain such aberrant beliefs by either:

1. Purposefully rejecting the clear teaching of the Bible

¹ For purposes of Denton Bible Church’s faith, doctrine, practice, policy and discipline, the Elder Board is Denton Bible’s final interpretive authority on the Bible’s meaning and application.

² Not all things are equally clear in the Bible. But on these two issues God has spoken with a profound clarity.

2. Adopting various but spurious strategies of redefining the clear teaching of the Bible, or by
3. Contextually or temporally limiting the clear teaching of the Bible.

We reject all attempts to adopt a scientifically based morality over and against a biblically based morality. Some have sought to demonstrate a genetically or physically rooted cause of homosexuality. However we reject all such attempts to base morality on scientific studies as misguided and flawed in that the studies to date:

1. have been ambiguous at best with respect to what legitimate conclusions can be drawn from such studies,
2. demonstrate at best and under the most favorable interpretation of the studies a *possible minimal* pre-disposition towards homosexual behavior, and
3. are not relevant to questions concerning the morality of homosexuality since all morals are divinely determined and reflected in the Bible.

III. What the Bible teaches about human sexuality

When God created man and woman He created them as sexual beings. This sexual nature is a good thing ³and was designed by God to be enjoyed exclusively within the relationship of marriage. Sexual intimacy was designed by God as the consummate act of intimacy between a man and woman and as the means by which children are brought into the marriage (children are a gift).

However, like all good things, mankind's sexual nature can be abused, exercised in a wrong relation, or exercised toward a wrong object.

We believe that all illicit sexual *acts* as defined in the Bible are sin. As such, we believe the Bible condemns all forms of:

1. Pornography (as it is devoid of intimacy, is directed toward a person who is not one's spouse, and as it represents empty lust; Luke 6:45; 11:34; Heb. 13:4),
2. Rape (as it is an act of violence and as such is contrary to the voluntary nature of all biblically sanctioned sexual activity; Deut. 22:25-27; Deut. 34),
3. Incest (as it is exercised towards an improper relation; Lev. 18:6-18; 20:11-12),
4. Fornication (as it is by definition sex outside marriage; Matt. 15:19; John 8:41; Hebrews 13:4),
5. Adultery (as it is an act of fraud against one's own spouse; Lev. 18:20; 20:10; Hebrews 13:4),

³ See Gen 1:31 ("all good"), 2:18 ("helper suitable"), Song of Songs 5:1 ("imbibe deeply")

6. Polygamy (as it violates the original divine standard of exclusivity in marriage; Gen. 2:18, 24; Mal. 2:14; reiterated by Jesus in Matt. 19:5),
7. Pedophilia (as it is by definition sexual relations with a child who lacks the ability to consent; It is also a “lust of the flesh” directed towards children; Gal. 5:16-21; Mark 7:21-23; Matt. 18:10),
8. Bestiality (as it is by definition sexual relations with a non-human subject; Lev. 18:23; 20:15-16),
9. Homosexuality (as it is sexual relations with a person of the same sex; Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; I Cor. 6:9⁴),
10. Transgenderism⁵ (as it is a purposeful and sinful rejection of one’s divinely ordained sex at birth; Gen. 1:27; Psalm 139:13-16; Deut. 22:5; I Cor. 6:9⁶), and
11. Cross-dressing and Androgyny (as they are purposeful and sinful confusions of one’s divinely ordained sex at birth; Deut. 22:5; I Cor. 6:9⁷)

We further believe that all illicit sexual *desires* are also sin especially to the extent that they are acted upon and lead to voluntary thoughts, fantasies or actual physical behavior.^{8, 9}

Other than attributing illicit sexual desires to the sin nature that is inherent to all human beings, we need not resolve the question of a more specific cause of sinful sexual desires. We simply call upon all who are tempted by illicit sexual desires of any kind to look to Christ for the sanctifying and cleansing effects of the Gospel. The Apostle Paul specifically highlights these Gospel blessings in the context of serious sexual sins (I Cor. 6:9-11).

⁴ In I Cor. 6:9 Paul uses two distinct words to refer to both the passive (“effeminate” from GR *malakoi*) and the active (“homosexual” from the GR *arsenokoite*) partner in homosexual unions.

⁵ Sometimes known as “Transsexualism,” “Gender Identity Disorder,” or “Gender Dysphoria,” it is a desire to change one’s sex or to fulfill the role of the opposite gender.

⁶ See footnote 4.

⁷ See footnote 4.

⁸ The principle that sin begins first as a matter of the heart is illustrated in Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount in Matt. 5-7. (see especially Matt. 5:21-32; See also Luke 6:45)

⁹ We believe the human condition is fundamentally flawed—what theologians call “total depravity.” All humans are sinful not just in our choices but also in our nature. See the comments of the great 19th cent. Theologian Charles Hodge: “We do attribute moral character to principles which precede all voluntary action and which are entirely independent of the power of the will . . . We hold ourselves responsible not only for the deliberate acts of the will, that is, for acts of deliberate self-determination, which suppose both knowledge and volition, but also for emotional, impulsive acts, which precede all deliberation; and not only for such impulsive acts, but also for the principles, dispositions, or immanent states of the mind, by which its acts whether impulsive or deliberate, are determined.” (*Systematic Theology*, II.107)

Homosexuality

While the Bible deems all sexual sins to be serious sins, homosexuality deserves special mention in light of increasing social and political pressures to normalize homosexuality. We oppose such efforts being advanced through legal and governmental channels as well as from other sources—including from within the religious community—as contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture.

The Old Testament and the New Testament are united in their condemnation of homosexuality as sin in all cases. In Genesis 19 we see that God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah for, among other things, the sin of homosexuality.¹⁰ In the Mosaic Law Moses specifically condemns homosexuality in unmistakable and especially severe terms.^{11,12} All homosexual acts are described as “an abomination” (Lev. 18:22) and as a “detestable act” (Lev. 20:13).

In the New Testament the Apostle Paul condemns the sin of homosexuality in Romans 1:26-27 as a “degrading passion,” as an “unnatural” behavior, and as an “indecent act.”¹³ Such actions are also said to carry with them a punishment in keeping with the offense.¹⁴ In I Cor. 6:9-11 Paul condemns homosexuality as unrighteous and unchristian behavior.¹⁵

¹⁰ We reject efforts to attribute the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah to the sin of inhospitality by an appeal to Ezekiel 16:49-50 or other texts. A careful examination of the context of Genesis 19 as well as Ezekiel 16 shows that these cities were destroyed because of rampant sexual immorality. In addition, later non-canonical and New Testament writings clearly attribute the destruction of these cities to the sin of homosexuality.

¹¹ Some have sought to interpret Leviticus 18 and 20 as denunciations of a ritualized form of homosexuality associated with pagan religious worship and not to homosexuality *per se*. However, nothing in the text entitles such a special pleading of the case.

¹² The word “abomination” translates the Hebrew *toevah* and refers to what is “loathed” or “repugnant” or “shocking to the sensibilities.” In the Old Testament the “abomination” may be of a physical, ritual or ethical nature and refers to what is abhorred by God or man.

¹³ In this passage the *exchanging* of “the truth of God for a lie” (v. 25) is followed by another exchange—the upsetting of the normal course of nature in sexual relations. Paul notes that this “sin against nature” carries with it a punishment in keeping with the offense.

¹⁴ From verse 27 we see that “sexual deviation contains in itself a recompense, a punishment for the abandonment of God and his ways. This need not demand the conclusion that every homosexual follows the practice in deliberate rebellion against God’s prescribed order. What is true historically and theologically is in measure true, however, experientially.” (EBC)

¹⁵ Those who sin willfully and persistently in these ways are giving evidence that they are not true children of God. We are *not* suggesting that some genuine believers could not be caught up in these sins and find it extremely difficult to escape such sins—perhaps even becoming so hardened that they become desensitized to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. We *are* however suggesting that a genuine believer could not so sin willingly and deliberately without experiencing the conviction of the Holy Spirit that such behavior is sin. The tragic consequences of all sin is that it deadens as it darkens the soul of believers and unbelievers alike.

And yet, the Bible is equally clear that God can and does forgive penitent sinners of all kinds. The Apostle Paul wonderfully describes the redeeming power of God's grace immediately after listing a number of especially severe sins—including a variety of sexual sins:

“And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.” (I Cor. 6:11)

All sin places us in desperate need of God's forgiveness. However, *no sin* places us beyond God's capacity to save and to redeem.

IV. What the Bible teaches about the nature of marriage

The Nature of Marriage

Just as God relates to Himself within and among the Persons of His Trinitarian nature¹⁶ even so man and woman are intended *by nature* to relate to one another in a particular manner. We believe that the health and vitality of all male/female relationships is rooted in the divinely designed natures of men and women. The life long marriage of one man to one woman is the only sexual union divinely sanctioned by God.¹⁷ This is clearly and unambiguously attested in the Bible.

Marriage is a life long covenant relationship¹⁸ between a man and a woman for the purposes of mutual companionship,¹⁹ marital satisfaction,²⁰ and inherently ordered to the bearing and rearing of children and the broad sharing of family life.^{21,22}

We see marriage preeminently as the concrete, visible setting in the relationship between God and His people is displayed to the church and the world.²³ This

¹⁶ The Biblical doctrine of the Trinity teaches that inherent to the relations between the Persons of the Trinity there exists an ontological equality that is harmonious and consistent with a functional hierarchy.

¹⁷ By “man” and “woman” we mean the biological sex as determined by a person's chromosomes. For purposes of Denton Bible's policies and practices any ambiguity concerning the biological sex of an individual is to be resolved on a case-by-case basis solely by the Elder Board.

¹⁸ See I Cor. 7:39; Malachi 2:14

¹⁹ See Genesis 2:18

²⁰ See Proverbs 5:18-19; I Cor. 7:2-5

²¹ See Genesis 1:28

²² This is a biblical definition of marriage. However, even proponents of a natural law defense of historical marriage would agree: “Our laws . . . reflect the judgment that marriage is the conjugal union of spouses, rooted in the sexual-reproductive complementarity of male and female, which brings together a man and a woman as husband and wife to be father and mother to any children born of their union. As a social institution, it aims to secure for children the inestimable blessing of being brought up in the committed love—the marital bond—of the man and woman whose union brought them into being, and the related benefit of both maternal and paternal influences and care.” (*Marriage and Equal Protection*, Robert George)

²³ See Eph. 5:22-33

provides the ultimate rationale for seeing marriage as a permanent,²⁴ exclusive²⁵ and comprehensive union that is inherently oriented to family life.

In marriage, one is “leaving” the primary bonds of mother and father and permanently “cleaving” to a husband or wife. Marriage is designed by God to be enacted by a vow to this effect and by its consummation in a sexual union; in this way God makes the couple “one flesh.”²⁶ Every marriage then is permanently binding under God’s authority.²⁷

Divorce

The Bible is clear that “God hates divorce.”²⁸ However, the Bible is equally clear that “due to the hardness of peoples hearts”²⁹ God permits divorce under certain limited circumstances. Divorce is biblically permitted when one’s spouse either commits adultery (or serious sexual sin) or deserts the marital relationship.

In ancient Israel, it was a common misunderstanding of Moses’ words in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 that divorce was allowed simply because something was seen to be displeasing or “indecent” about one’s spouse. In Matthew 19 the Pharisees challenged Jesus on the question of when divorce was permissible citing their misinterpretation of Moses’ words. Jesus addresses their question by narrowing the grounds for divorce and by citing one of the two explicit biblical causes for which divorce is permissible, namely adultery (extramarital sexual sin³⁰). Absent biblical grounds for divorce, remarriage is adultery and brings upon the offending party the further guilt of remarriage.³¹

The second biblically explicit cause for which divorce is permissible is abandonment by a non-believer.³² If a non-believer deserts his or her marriage to a believer, the believer need not (but certainly may) pursue reconciliation; the believer, however, is “not under bondage,” which means “not under obligation” or “free to act,” without respect for the former marriage. In other words, in the eyes of God and the church they are free to re-marry.

²⁴ See Matt. 19:4-6. Life long fidelity in marriage best exemplifies the loyal steadfast love of One who has promised to never leave us or forsake us. “Great is His faithfulness.” (Lam. 3:23)

²⁵ Marriage was designed by God to be monogamous (Gen. 2:18-24). Exclusivity in marriage alone exemplifies our betrothal to one husband, namely Christ (II Cor. 11:2). Obviously there was some accommodation of polygamy in the Old Testament. However, Jesus reiterates the original design and intent of marriage as a monogamous union (Matt. 19:4-6).

²⁶ See Genesis 2:18-24

²⁷ See Matthew 19:6

²⁸ See Malachi 2:16

²⁹ See Deut. 24; Matt. 24

³⁰ The Greek word is *porneia* used in the Gospels and the Epistles to refer to any kind of sexual sin, especially including fornication, adultery and incest.

³¹ The phrases “*except for the cause of unchastity*” (Matthew 5:32) and “*except for immorality*” (Matthew 19:9) effectively allow that, in the case of adultery, the offended spouse is permitted to divorce and remarry without sin.

³² See 1 Corinthians 7:12-16.

On the possibility of other grounds for divorce, we believe that there may be circumstances in a marriage so extreme and severe that, after a thorough examination by the Elders, those circumstances may be deemed an abandonment of the marriage by the offending spouse or may permit a consideration that the offending spouse is an unbeliever, notwithstanding their profession to the contrary. Divorce and freedom to remarry for the non-offending spouse would then be permissible under the provisions of I Corinthians 7:12-16.³³

Remarriage

Remarriage after divorce, and while one's spouse is living, is considered adultery³⁴ absent a biblical cause for the divorce.³⁵ Remarriage is permitted without sin following divorce for biblical causes.³⁶ Under normal circumstances, the number of times an individual has been married does not alter this principle.

The Question of *so-called* "Gay Marriage"

As we have stated earlier in this document, we believe marriage is to be a life long covenant relationship between a man and a woman for the purposes of mutual companionship, bearing children, marital satisfaction, and to display the relationship between God and His people. Marriage is enacted not only by a vow to this effect but by a sexual consummation and in this way God makes the couple "one flesh."³⁷

As such, we believe marriage to be a divine mystical union of persons at every level including mind, body and spirit, for the whole of life and inherently oriented to family life. The complementary nature of the divine design of men and women in each of these areas (mind, body and spirit) is an essential part of the reality we call marriage. These complementary differences are harmonized in the divine relationship we call marriage. This is why the Bible *explicitly* refers to homosexual unions as "unnatural" and *by implication* to heterosexual unions as "natural."³⁸

³³ In other words, there may arise circumstances so severe in a marriage that they should be deemed an "abandonment" of the marriage by the offending spouse notwithstanding their professed interest to remain in the marriage. Or there may exist upon examination by the Elders such clear and convincing evidence that an offending spouse is an unbeliever (despite their profession to the contrary) that the provisions of I Cor. 7: 12-16 would apply. In such circumstances should that spouse abandon the marriage the believing spouse would be deemed "not under bondage" and therefore free to remarry.

³⁴ See Matthew 19:6,9; Mark 10:8-12; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:3

³⁵ See Matthew 19:7-9. A primary statement in Matthew 5:32 supports this point. In this verse "...makes her commit adultery" and "...commits adultery" are passive verbs in the Greek language meaning that any guilt from remarriage is upon the deserter of the first marriage, not upon the spouse who has been unjustly divorced or the one who marries him or her.

³⁶ See Matthew 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:15,27-28

³⁷ See Genesis 2:18-24

³⁸ See Rom. 1:26-27

Properly understood, this comprehensive union requires a man and a woman and by definition excludes same sex unions. It is no rhetorical slight to refer to Gay Marriage as “so-called” Gay Marriage. It is rather to acknowledge the essential nature of marriage as designed by God to be an exclusively heterosexual union. The Bible teaches that sexual complementarity is a critical and indeed indispensable element of the divine institution of marriage.³⁹ This is also why we see all attempts to redefine marriage (same sex unions, plural unions, incestuous unions or pedophilic unions)⁴⁰ as incoherent⁴¹ and as destructive⁴² of the essential nature of marriage.

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³⁹ See Genesis 1:27 where God creates man as “male and female.” Then in 2:18-25 where the institution of marriage is established by God, Eve is described as a helper “suitable for” or “corresponding to” Adam. Eve is created as the complement to Adam, not the identical copy of Adam. The essential foundation is laid for marriage inherently oriented to having and rearing children.

⁴⁰ Legislative and judicial efforts to re-define marriage assume that the state’s historical policies of privileging or preferring traditional marriage gives it the right to modify and re-define the reality of marriage. However, God designed and established marriage before the state ever conferred any political benefits or privileges on it. Marriage then, as biblically defined, exists independent of the state. Therefore, we believe the state is not competent to define (or re-define) marriage or indeed any of our human relationships.

⁴¹ We say “incoherent” because there can exist no right to consider a “non-marital” relationship as a “marital” relationship. It is as logically contradictory to conceive of a “gay marriage” as it is to conceive of a “round square” or a “square circle.” Marriage and so-called “gay marriage” are contradictory by definition. This is also why society’s traditional preferencing of conjugal marriage with certain privileges and benefits over other relationships is not truly discriminatory. We are seeking to treat all marriages equally; that is, all marriages that are *indeed* marriages.

⁴² As to the destructive and corrosive effects of expanding the definition of marriage to include homosexual unions: “There can indeed be much harm, if recognizing [other relationships as marriage] would obscure the shape, and so weaken the special norms, of an institution on which social order depends. So it is not the conferral of benefits on same-sex relationships itself but redefining marriage in the public mind that bodes ill for the common good If the law defines marriage to include same-sex partners, many will come to misunderstand marriage. They will not see it as essentially comprehensive, or thus (among other things) as ordered to procreation and family life—but as essentially an emotional union. . . .” [T]hey will therefore tend not to understand or respect the objective norms of permanence or sexual exclusivity that shape it. Nor, in the end, will they see why the terms of marriage should not depend altogether on the will of the parties, be they two or ten in number, as the terms of friendships and contracts do. That is, to the extent that marriage is misunderstood, it will be harder to see the point of its norms, to live by them, and to urge them on others. And this, besides making any remaining restrictions on marriage arbitrary, will damage the many cultural and political goods that get the state involved in marriage in the first place. (*What is Marriage?* By Girgis, Anderson & George)