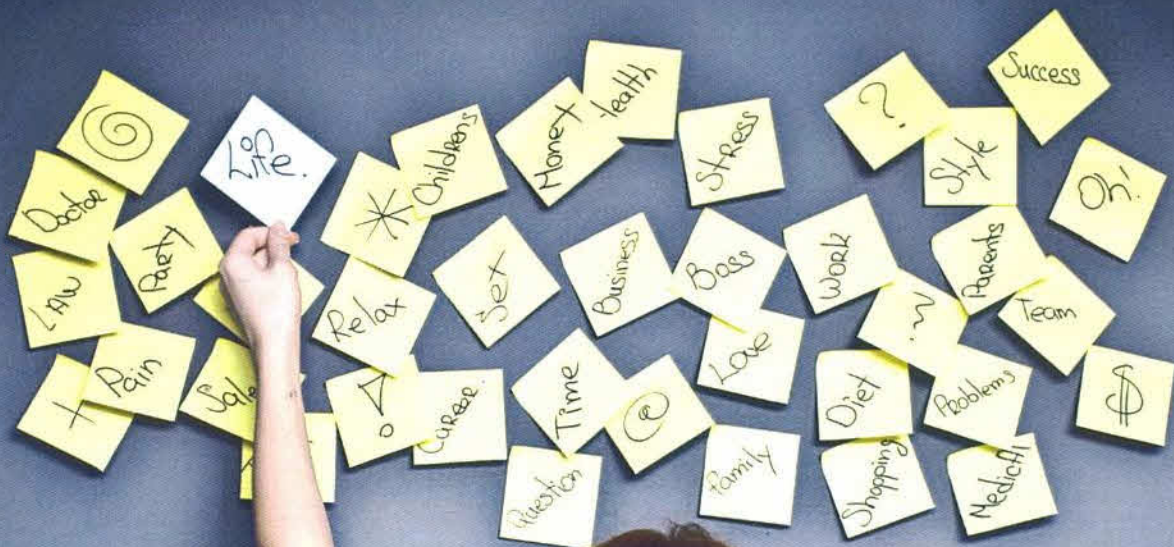




What About Homosexuality?

What the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions Have to Say

by William Bakewicz



Topical Reader Series

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Author's Introduction

In 2009, the Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) decided to endorse gay "marriage" and to allow pastors to be in same-sex relationships. In so doing the assembly voted to remove the ELCA from the universal Christian consensus on marriage and homosexual behavior and departed from the teaching of the Bible as understood by Christians for 2,000 years.

Since the beginning of the ELCA in 1988, the topic of sexuality and homosexuality has been on the front burner. In March of 1988, Bishop Herbert Chilstrom wrote a pastoral letter to all the congregations of the ELCA focusing on the issue of homosexuality. In 1994, *The Church and Human Sexuality: A Lutheran Perspective* was issued as a first draft of an ELCA social statement on this topic, and in 2004, *The Church and Homosexuality - Journey Together Faithfully, ELCA Studies on Sexuality: Part Two* was released. Finally, in 2009, the ELCA adopted *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*.

As a Lutheran pastor for the past thirty-five years I have seen many people wrestle with the issue of homosexuality and their Christian faith, especially in light of our society's growing acceptance of homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle.

And so the question, "What About Homosexuality?"

My purpose in writing this booklet is to answer that question by looking at what the Bible has to say, what Lutheran doctrine has to say, and then to take a look at what our attitude should be as Christians towards those who identify themselves as homosexuals. My prayer is that this booklet will help *you* answer the question "What About Homosexuality?"

Rev. William Bakewicz
American Lutheran Church
Long Prairie, Minnesota
September, 2009

CHAPTER 1

What the Bible Has to Say

In the context of being asked a question about divorce, Jesus spoke of God's intention from the beginning regarding the marriage of one man and one woman. He said:

Jesus said: "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." (Mark 10:6-9)

In this text, Jesus limits the appropriate place for sexual relations to the marriage of husband and wife. His command is based on God's created order, and the "reason" for the existence of two complementary sexes to begin with. It is over against this intention of God that all other sexual relationships are measured and defined as inappropriate.

With regard to homosexuality, there are a number of Scriptural texts that directly address same-sex erotic behavior. For example, God specifically laid down in the law of Moses:

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

In the same way, within the context of announcing the power of the Gospel, the Apostle used homosexual behavior as an example of the consequences of human sin:

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct. (Romans 1:26-28)

Paul relates homosexual conduct with disobedience toward God. He also talked about the eternal implications of persistence in sin, saying:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

In Genesis 19, homosexual behavior is used as an example of sin and rebellion against God, in the story of God's destruction of the city of Sodom. In this story, when the angels of the Lord had come to Lot's house to rescue Lot and his family, the men of Sodom surrounded the house saying,

"Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them." Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Behold, I have two daughters who have not known man; let me bring them out to you, do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof." (Genesis 19:5-8)

While offering meager resistance, it is amazing how quickly Lot was willing to surrender his children to the will of cultural pressure. But before this could happen, Lot and his family were rescued, and Scripture summarizes the encounter, saying: "Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord" (Genesis 13:13).

In the New Testament, the apostle Peter refers to this story from Genesis, as an example of God's grace as well as his wrath. Of Sodom and Gomorrah, Peter says,

If by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction and made them an example to those who were to be ungodly; and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the licentiousness of the wicked (for what that righteous man saw and heard as he lived among them, he was vexed in his righteous soul day after day with their lawless deeds), then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority. (2 Peter 2:6-10)

In Paul's first letter to Timothy, homosexual behavior is not only listed among many sins, it is described as "contrary to sound doctrine" (1 Timothy 1:10), incompatible with the Gospel of Christ. Paul clearly understood homosexual behavior as sin. Among other forms of immoral conduct, such behavior is something unacceptable in the sight of God. Paul emphasized to his Christian audience that God calls His people — especially those in leadership in the church — to a life that is above reproach. He wrote:

Be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is fitting among saints. Let there be no filthiness, nor silly talk, nor levity, which are not fitting; but instead let there be thanksgiving. Be sure of this, that no immoral or impure man, or one who is covetous (that is, an idolater) has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. (Ephesians 5:1-5)

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from immorality; that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like heathen who do not know God; that no man transgress, and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these

things, as we solemnly forewarned you. For God has not called us for uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you. (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8)

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you once walked, when you lived in them. (Colossians 3:5-7)

Human sexuality as a part of God's created order for the world affirms the marriage of man and woman as God's intention for humanity from the beginning of creation. As Genesis 1:27 states, "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Jesus reaffirmed this same created order in Mark 10:6-9. Throughout over 2000 years of Christianity, the biblical and historical teaching of the Church has recognized same-sex intercourse as sinful.

The blessing of same-sex unions, and the ordaining, commissioning and consecrating of people in such relationships, strikes at the very foundation of biblical authority as well as the Lutheran Confessions' doctrine of Original Sin. Such actions divide the Christian Church, undermine its mission and diminish its witness to the power of the Gospel in our world today.

Reflection & Discussion:

- a. Why was it more important for Jesus to describe what God *intended* for sexuality, rather than list what God did *not* intend?
- b. How would you define the words *immorality* and *impurity*? What do they have in common?
- c. In what way is an offense against God's creation an offense against God himself?

