

NOTES ON SAME-SEX “MARRIAGE” AND HOMOSEXUAL BEHAVIOR

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Prepared for a forum on this subject at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Loveland, CO, this essay is written from the perspective of the ministry of pastoral care. The author, an ordained pastor in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, has served churches in Colorado, Missouri, Arkansas, and Illinois, including a pastoral care ministry at a treatment center for alcoholics from 1971-78. His B.A. and M.Div. are from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis; his M.A. is from Regis University in Denver; and he has done graduate study and much additional continuing education throughout his career. In May of 2017 he taught pastoral care for church leaders in Asia. He and his wife, Flo, have seven children and seven grandchildren.

The culture that is developing today and that the rest of the world seems to be following is throwing a challenge at traditional religious and cultural values, especially the Christian values, about human sexuality and sexual behaviors. The conflict has come to this, that same-sex “marriage” has been declared the law of the land. The Christian church opposes this law and may become liable for court action. Immanuel Lutheran Church has prepared specific statements about its beliefs and practices that deal with same sex “marriage” and homosexuality to insert into the documents that this church operates by, in order to protect itself from prosecution. This forum has been called to inform the members and friends of what the church’s beliefs and practices are, and what these additions to our constituent documents are. These changes are available as handouts at the forum and from the church office.

It must also be noted that Immanuel Lutheran Church is a member of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and holds to the historic faith and practices that are maintained by this church body. The position for belief and practice regarding the present conflict with the culture and the law of the land that Immanuel takes is the same as that presented by the Synod. Conditions of the congregation’s membership with the Synod require this agreement, and enable the support of the national church body for this member congregation.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

People accept as true what they have heard and seen. Perception is taken as truth, whether accurate and factual or not. Today the public is shown and told that a wide range of sexual behaviors is to be taken as normal, whether one likes it or not. Former value judgments do not hold anymore, it is being persistently and pervasively promulgated in the media and in the entertainment world. Also, that the times are changing and we have to change with the times. Nothing is stable and there are no absolutes. Is there no God? Did God really die back in the ‘60s?

The lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-questioning (LGBTQ) activists insist that homosexual and other sexual deviations from the previously held norm are in reality normal and must now be accepted so. They claim that the public is coming around to their view. Some survey results seem to show that the public perception has indeed changed 180 degrees since 1972. What are the facts in this matter?

NO DOCUMENTATION THAT HOMOSEXUALITY IS A NORMAL CONDITION

Churches that hold strictly to Biblical teachings have and still do consider homosexual behavior to be sinful and must be repented of. This behavior is understood to belong to the life that is prior to the life of faith in Jesus Christ and opposed to the Christian way of life. The grace of God brings the power to change the Christian's heart and correct the life. Ministry of caring provides the agency to make it happen in the life of a church member. In the secular field of counseling and rehabilitation homosexuality has until recently been understood as a disorder that can be treated with current modes of practice. The changes in this field have been tracked in the document from the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod listed below.

Studies have been done in the field of psychology to find the origin of homosexuality and behaviors that go with it. Research has been done to find out the answers to the age-old question: is it nature or is it nurture that has caused this presenting condition and this behavior? All surveys have come out "inconclusive" about this question as it applies to homosexuality, as it is also with other disorders such as addictions. I have written an earlier essay on this subject, listed below, and I gladly share it. The Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the LCMS has published a thorough study, and it is available through the church office. Dr. Edward Seely has given the data in his book, and it is available on his website given below.

A basic fact of life, especially life together with others in relationships and in community, is that one must take responsibility for one's own behavior. We must help, not harm, our "neighbor". In Scripture we learn that homosexual and other deviant sexual behaviors violate the male-female design of our Maker, and disrupts the husband-wife and family relationships at the heart of community. In the healing arts it is recognized that family distress and troubled normal human relationships result, and also susceptibility to various diseases. This term, our neighbor, that is familiar to us from Bible passages remembered, refers to those who belong in our relationships. This may be in family, at work or school, or in the community of which we are citizens. Also, of course, and especially, the church to which we belong.

WHAT DOES GOD SAY ABOUT MARRIAGE?

When disagreement or even conflict arises between the world's teachings and the church's beliefs, Christians must choose: adjust to the world we live in or hear what God teaches and obey? Today the culture around us, and now even the law of the land challenges what we believe God intends with marriage and human sexuality. We will take our position with the

words of the psalmist: "The earth is the Lord's, and all that fills it, the world and all who dwell in it." For the God we have come to know – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, triune and creator of all that exists – has designed it all wonderfully. Life works when we obey God. God is to be praised, heard and obeyed. Contrary teachings must then be seen as false, thus sinful, and will be harmful.

Our Lord Jesus Christ affirmed the divine institution of marriage during his earthly ministry. Out of faithful belief in the Scriptures, Lutherans teach that God instituted marriage and directed that "a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Matthew 19:5). Marriage is then meant to be a life-long union between a man and a woman. The great blessing of marriage from God is designed for husbands and wives to love, honor and serve each other and to "bring forth children" (Genesis 3:16) and to "bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). The theologian Paul, being the scholar in Scripture that he was, picked up the theme of God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants, the people of Israel, and made an analogy with marriage. His focus is on the faithfulness required of the two, a man and a woman, who live as life-long marriage partners. Ancient Israel had not been faithful to the Lord God who had chosen Israel and made covenant with that people. Yet, God forgave them and took them back. This was the message of the story of Hosea and his wife Gomer who divorced and then reconciled. The Apostle Paul writes that "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle of any other blemish, but holy and blameless." Ephesians 5:25-27.

The Bible tells realistically of the various disorders found in human relations. Here we can also learn clearly what God wills and how God by his grace rescues, redeems and restores people to wholesome and holy relationship with himself and with each other. This work of God the church is involved with through the Holy Spirit's guiding presence and power.

WHAT ABOUT GRACE?

Grace is a covenant word. The word grace is used in the Bible to point first to the faithfulness and reliability of God who has made us his beloved children, his sons and daughters in Jesus Christ. Grace means steadfastness of God's intention with us, loyalty to his own; it is the good will toward the human race that God created, and that the song out of heaven heard at the birth of Jesus announces. The word grace reminds us all that God is for us, not against us. Like a good Father, God works for our good, and not harm. He does not reject us. However, he does discipline us, because of his love for us, so that we turn from sinful ways and gain the good life that our Father in heaven wants us to experience.

Grace does not mean permissiveness. Grace does not mean that God only leaves us where we are. He meets us where we are. Pastoral care meets people where they are. The church's loving and caring for its own meets people where they are. Grace does not mean rejection. Grace

means looking out for the good. Grace means helping people not be hurt or hurt themselves or hurt others. As the grace of God means that we can trust God for good, so the grace that the church exercises must be just as reliable and trustworthy. As the grace of God looks out for our good, so the grace of the church and its leaders must look out for the good of people. The church will not let people live a life that is sinful and that leads to harm and grief, without warning them and trying to get them onto the right way. God's grace, his faithfulness and commitment to those he loves, works to change heart and mind of the faithful toward godly living and away from sinful ways.

In this matter of mistaken view of human sexuality, the church must speak the truth in love for people. God works through the agency of the fellowship of faith. For the church not to do so, not to warn the erring, is not an act of grace or love, but failing to act responsibly. Galatians 6:1-10.

IT IS THE BEHAVIOR THAT MUST BE CONSIDERED

The culture that we live in takes homosexuality as a condition. The behaviors that follow are then taken as natural and normal. In the practice of therapy the first question that is asked is whether the manifesting problem is due primarily to condition or behavior. Necessary therapeutic practice then follows. What we learn from God's Word addresses both the heart estranged from God and the human behavior. God in his grace calls the unbelieving to turn and repent. The Bible teaches the good and wholesome and desired behavior for our life together. God's Word warns against the disturbing and harmful behavior that is said to belong to a life away from and before the turning to life in Christ. Let us then look at what leads to one's behavior.

What leads to one's behavior or action? First comes knowledge and the thought. There are of course many factors in our life that play into this. There is however a simple line of stages that can be recognized to lead to intended behavior. We are how we think.

- Something comes to mind/attention, something that will lead to action
- You deliberate, either quite briefly or consider it at some length, even agonize over a long time, about what is to gain or suffer in doing this, or taking this action
- You decide, either to do it or not to do it, because of the gain or the pain
- You act on the decision
- Then you reflect (if ever so little), you weigh/evaluate the experience of this decision, whether gain or pain came of it
- You decide, if only for the moment, to consider doing it again or behaving in this way, or never again

On one level we do this all the time and see it simply as natural human activity. For the Christian who wants to live a life that pleases God, prayer and searching God's Word and

consulting with trusted Christian friends or a pastor are vital. In this matter of sexual and gender issues, the Christian person will think deeply about his/ her behaviors. One who knows himself or herself to be a child of the heavenly Father will think of the self as given and designed by God to live a godly life. This person will think prayerfully: what is God's will for me and my life?

WHAT ABOUT MY FEELINGS?

The subject of one's feelings is always brought up. "My true feelings" are taken popularly as reliable guides to one's behavior. But are they? Feelings are very strong motivators, it must be recognized. But are they reliable? Safe? In the field of psychology and counseling feelings or emotions are called "reactions." Feelings are not primary, but they are the result of other processes that are not always consciously observed. Reactions they are, nevertheless, to other judgments that have been previously made at earlier experiences. Something feels good or not, depending on prior life experiences. The memory directs the reaction, the feeling. One may have had a pleasant experience that is long remembered. The alcoholic remembers the first experience of intoxication and keeps trying to find that feeling again, but in vain. A friend of mine faced a large and threatening dog early in his life. He winces and feels pangs of panic at every meeting with a dog.

There are four basic feelings:

- Glad
- Sad
- Mad
- Scared

Our Creator endowed us human creatures with the ability to experience life emotionally. Our feelings are God's good gifts. They are directed by the brain. Our feelings are strongly influenced by how we think about ourselves. Our faith has powerful influence on our feelings. Feelings are not a basis for decision-making. Faith and knowledge and deliberative thought will finally manage our feelings.

WHAT MOVES PEOPLE TO DO WHAT THEY DO?

The standard for understanding the motivations for human behavior was written by Abraham Maslow, when he published the results of his study of human needs, "A Theory of Human Motivation," in 1943. In later times he added to those observations. This recognition of needs and action taken to satisfy our needs is used in nursing and therapy, in education, in industry and sales, and in other areas of our culture. Some aspects are debated, but the observations hold widely. He saw a hierarchy of needs that drive human behavior. They do not however always run in a straight line through the stages of life, but like a woven blanket these driving needs or hungers are active, always, or at times, operate interactively. We find our needs being satisfied. At other times we find them unsatisfied and problems arise for us. We feel the lack of

satisfaction. We may not know how to satisfy these unfilled needs. We may pursue wrong and harmful ways to satisfy our compelling needs.

- Physiological needs: air, water, food, protection from the elements, sexual, sleep
- Safety: from family violence, child abuse, accidents, war and conflict, post-traumatic stress disorder; for job and financial security
- Social belonging/interpersonal: friendships, intimacy, trust, family. Humans need to LOVE and be LOVED. Note that this may override concerns of safety and even physiological needs; e.g., cling to abusive parent or long for absent parent; make dangerous liaisons; deficiencies in this matter can adversely affect your ability to maintain emotionally significant relationships
- Esteem: need to feel respected, mastery, status. This is satisfied by recognition and by a sense of self-confidence. A lack of self-confidence may disable your ability to receive recognition.
- Self-actualization: "I gotta be me!" (Here I have to insert a quote from Martin Luther who makes this declarative statement: "Tun wir immer noch was wir sind!" That is: Still we are always doing just what we are! Quoted in Concordia Theological Quarterly (CTQ) January 1977 by Lewis W. Spitz, now retired from Stanford University.) Here one is either sinner or saint.
- Sometime later Abraham Maslow also observed the need for Self-transcendence, a motive clearly to be seen especially in idealistic young people and, in part at least, in many ambitious adults: giving yourself to something outside of the self and for a higher cause.

So then, the human person will strive to fulfill these needs. We who believe that God has made us along with all that exists will say, Amen! "We are fearfully and wonderfully made, and that our spirit knows fully and well." We also believe that our God does, and has always, fully provided for all our needs. Therefore we can trust and rely on him and praise and give thanks always. When life's stresses and distresses trouble us, as it happens, we will turn our hearts and thoughts to our loving and providing Father in heaven. When, however, human nature is distanced from God, disengaged from our Maker and Savior, then one is left to provide for oneself alone. The sinful nature looks not to the Father in heaven, but elsewhere, and often that will be the wrong places for fulfillment. God is disregarded, ignored, rejected and life goes wrong.

SO, NOW WHAT?

There are many stories in books, on stage, in television and films about the lives of LGBTQ individuals. The stories presented as models of human achievement over obstacles such as prejudice. These dramas make strong appeal to the human spirit of pathos. Many books and self-help materials are out for encouraging this life style, such as *Positively Gay: New*

Approaches in Gay and Lesbian Life, by Betty Berzon Ph. D.; Celestial Arts: Millbrae CA 1979.

Many of these also appeal for acceptance in the broad population. But do such works look at the truth? Do they see such life realistically? It cannot be so! If the evidences of misery, diseases and early death depicted by Dr. Seely in his carefully-researched book are considered, there is much to be said instead for human tragedy in the homosexual life.

For us who live in Christ and in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we who have become children of the heavenly Father – would it not appeal to us to look for the healing that is promised in the Gospel of Jesus? And to offer it to those we love who are caught up in these disorders? These alternate lifestyles were recognized as disorders that can be treated until the APA was dissuaded in 1973 by the activists of the “gay” subculture. Would we not want to look for healing and wholeness? This possibility of living lives in freedom and wholeness is the broad meaning of SHALOM or peace, the peace that surpasses all human understanding that God gives. At his coming out as the Man from heaven, the Man for all seasons, at the waters of the Jordan where he stepped into our place as Redeemer, Advocate and Champion over sin, death and all that the Devil has ruined, he is hailed as bringer of wholeness:

“The crooked roads shall become straight,
The rough ways smooth.
And all mankind will see God’s salvation.” Luke 3:5b; Isaiah 40:4b-5.

WHAT CAN PASTORAL CARE DO?

I argue that pastoral care helps the person to a new way of thinking about himself or herself and a new, wholesome way of life. Pastoral care points the sinner to Jesus. Pastoral care gives hope to the suffering saint, whose heart the Holy Spirit entered at his or her baptism to change heart and mind and life by the relationship with the Lord Jesus and the heavenly Father. Here is the power of forgiveness to be enjoyed. Here is the change of heart and mind at knowing divine love from Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Here is the power of grace known in the grace-filled and loving and caring fellowship of all the brothers and sisters in Christ. Here is an atmosphere for healing. Here is learning the way God intends his children to live in relationship with each other.

We know that the sinful nature persists. Therefore the Christian life is a life lived in a spirit of daily repentance. The first of Martin Luther’s 95 Theses: When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent” (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.

The discipline that must follow the Sacrament of Holy Baptism is this, that the old sinful “nature in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts and , again, a new person daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever.” Luther’s Small Catechism at the topic of Baptism.

The caring pastor and the caring fellowship of believers will hold the baptized member accountable for his or her behavior. This has always been true for our life together as the redeemed who are growing in the Christian way of life. This factor in our life together takes on

serious meaning now that a contrary value is forced in our face, as it is with the matter of “gender identity diffusion”. Let us consider some of many Scriptures to hear what God’s will is regarding behavior in matters sexual.

SOME WORDS FROM HOLY SCRIPTURE

Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man unclean. Matthew 15:19-20. (as in Decalog)

On Discipline. If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them. Matthew 18:15-20.

The strong direction for excommunication given by the Apostle Paul to the Corinthian churches, 1 Corinthians 5.

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft; discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissension, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. Galatians 5:19-21.

Among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person – such a man is an idolater – has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not become partners with them.

For once you were children of darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord... Be very careful then, how you live – not as unwise, but as wise. The days are very evil. Ephesians 5:3-10, 15-16.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude

in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Colossians 3:15-17.

Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman. That is detestable. Leviticus 18:22. The Hebrew word here is *to'ebah* = abomination, immoral, detestable, corrupted; God does not like it; see lexicon Brown, Driver, Briggs. Page 1017.

Saint Paul explicitly names male to male sexual acts in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10, and again at Hebrews 13:4. *Arsenokoitos* is part of a lengthy list of wrongdoing that God's law condemns.

In his letter to the Christians in Rome, Pastor Paul described the world of the 1st century of the Christian era. Romans 1:18-32. It was a time sometimes called morally bankrupt. We see our world much like it. First of all Paul refers to the sexual perversions and they draw God's wrath. Is there forgiveness? Yes, Paul details this in chapter 3. What about life change? In chapter 6 Paul argues that the baptized person is set out on a new life in Christ. "Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace." That is, under law one stands condemned. Under grace one has hope of living a God-pleasing life with a new life orientation that fits God's design for his human creatures. This applies to our maleness and femaleness with which we were created.

On holiness and the degenerate state and behavior. Man-centered disposition and rejecting God's will results in idolatry of self, of things, or things imagined.

"Homosexuality is a failure to recognize the difference of the sexes, and with it the basic way of arriving at a fruitful life through the overcoming of self-love.

"The Old Testament is perfectly frank about the varied disorders and threats to man in his status as created being, and to the love relationship founded on that status. It describes these disturbances as clearly as it describes the rapture of the whole union of love. It is always a disturbance in the relationship to God which shows itself – in different ways – in the disturbances within the common life of man and woman. In the exclusiveness of the love that is required of them, nothing less is at stake than the wholeness of the love conferred on them at their creation." H. W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*. 176.

SUMMARY

The subject we are dealing with at this time evokes strong emotions. Same-sex "marriage" and the homosexual experience and the range of gender diffusion brings out strong reactions when this is opened to public discussion. We in the church will first ask, What does God say about this? What is God's design for us human beings? We need to know what God's will is for

us whom he has graced with the knowledge of Jesus as our Savior. We have come to know ourselves to be children of the heavenly Father. Jesus promised that he would send the Holy Spirit to lead us to all truth (John 14:15-27), and to enable us to grow toward the image and model of our Lord Jesus himself (Ephesians 4:11-16). We were made in the image of God. In Jesus that image, broken with sin in our nature, is being restored. (Colossians 1.)

“We have not stopped praying for you,” wrote the great Pastor Paul to the Colossian Christians, “and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way; bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Colossians 1:9-14.

God has said clearly that homosexual behavior does not belong in the fellowship of saints. In Leviticus 18:22 God forbids this behavior and calls it “to’ebah.” That means abomination, immoral, revolting, corrupted. It does not fit the lifestyle of God’s people who have been given the grace of forgiveness and are set on a path of sanctification. “You must be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.” It is the task then of a caring church to help those who are inclined to sinful ways to turn to wholesome and godly ways of living.

God our Maker has given each of us the wonderful gift of male or female nature by design. We are to receive what God has made of us with joy, gratitude and praise to our Maker. Homosexual behavior has always and everywhere been viewed as outside of normal human behavior. This reaction is intuitive. Should it surprise us that we, who are made in the image of God, should react so? For God hates it. Yet the LGBTQ movement dubs this “homophobia”, fear of the thing, in order to disable common sense and conscience. In the world of psychology and rehabilitation this was recognized as a disorder that can be treated. Since the Aids epidemic, an organized, vigorous and well-funded movement has opposed that view. The psychiatric association was persuaded to take homosexuality off the list of disorders on grounds that it gave the impression that such behaviors may be immoral. In the years since then this dedicated movement has moved public opinion and achieved the goal of getting the Supreme Court to take away the standard that marriage is to be done by two, a man and a woman. The same court has made same-sex “marriage” the law of the land. Yet God calls this an abomination. The document put out by the CTCR of the LCMS traces this development.

We will rather listen to our Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. We will love the sinner, and we will extend pastoral care and foster a caring fellowship of faith. “All that matters is faith expressing itself through love.” Galatians 5:6. We will commit to ministry that helps Christ’s people with sexual disorder to find the life that pleases God.

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Some resources to use...

Gender Identity Disorder or Gender Dysphoria in Christian Perspective. Adopted Saturday, May 17, 2014, by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod.

Anthropology of the Old Testament, Hans Walter Wolff 1973; English SCM Press and Fortress Press 1974. "Man and Woman", pages 166-176.

Human Sexuality: A Theological Perspective. A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod as prepared by its Social Concerns Committee, September 1981.

What Is God's Will Concerning Homosexuality? Help for Church Leaders and Others to Speak the Truth in Love. Dr. Edward Seely, 2015. Available at <fromacorntoak12.com>

How is the church today ministering to homosexuals? Al Schroeder, July 2015.