

TEACHING FORUM: SAME-SEX MARRIAGE  
Sunday, February 9, 2025; 10:30-noon

Opening scripture- Acts 17:11

**Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.**

Opening prayer- from John Stott:

Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence.  
May your Word be our rule, your Spirit our teacher, and your glory our supreme concern.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I Background:

A Fifty years ago:

1 In 1969 Canada decriminalized homosexual practice.

2 In turn Synod 1970 appointed a study committee to articulate a biblical position on same-sex attraction and practice.

3 Synod 1973 affirmed the committee report that being same-sex attracted was not sinful, but that homosexual practice is incompatible with God's will as revealed in Holy Scripture.

B Recently:

1 Same sex marriage was legalized in Canada in 2005 and in the United States in 2015.

2 Synod 2016 appointed a study committee to provide *clear ethical guidance for what constitutes a holy and healthy Christian sexual life.*

3 By a roughly 75% vote Synod 2022 affirmed the stance of the Human Sexuality Report, which upheld the 1973 stance that same-sex marriage is outside of God's will.

4 Synod 2022 made this stance a confessional matter, citing Heidelberg Catechism Q+ A 108:  
*Q. What is God's will for us in the seventh commandment?*

*A. God condemns all unchastity...*

Having confessional status means one must affirm this to serve as a minister, elder or deacon.

II The Historic Stance of the Christian Reformed Church affirmed in the Human Sexuality Report:

There are six key scriptural passages or pairs of passages that address the issue of same-sex activity: three in the Old Testament and three in the New Testament.

A The Three Key Old Testament Passages/Pairings:

1 Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24:

**So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.** Genesis 1:27

**That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.** Genesis 2:24

Genesis 2:24 is also quoted by Jesus in Matthew 19:4-5:

**“Haven’t you read that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female, and said ‘For this reasons a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two of them will become one flesh?’”**

Taken together, these two passages from Genesis indicate that God’s original design was for marriage between one man and one woman.

2 Genesis 19:1-19 and Judges 19:1-29:

The Genesis 19 passage recounts the utter depravity of men in the city of Sodom who sought to forcibly take two guests (angels in the form of men) to have sex with them.

The Judges 19 passage recounts a similar case of utter depravity, where men in Gibeah demanded that a fellow citizen bring out an overnight guest so they could have sex with him.

3 Leviticus 18:22 and Leviticus 20:13:

**Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable.**  
-Leviticus 18:22

**If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death.** Leviticus 20:13.

Old Testament laws which we find in Genesis-Deuteronomy have long been regarded as reflecting three categories: ceremonial, civil, and moral. Ceremonial laws point to Jesus, especially his death in our place. Civil laws maintained holiness/purity among the Israelites, including when they were wandering in the desert. In Leviticus 20, the penalty of death for sex between men is considered a civil law: appropriate for God’s people then, but not applied to societies in the New Testament era. However, moral laws, like the Ten Commandments, apply in all times and places. The prohibitions against same-sex sexual activity seem to be moral laws, which apply today.

B The Three Key New Testament Passages:

1 Romans 1:24-27:

**(24) Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. (25) They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator- who is forever praised. Amen.**

**(26) Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. (27) In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.**

In Romans 1 the Apostle Paul asserts that even people who have not received God's revelation in scripture should know basic truths about God and worship him. In verse 20 Paul notes: **For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities- his eternal power and divine nature- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.** Instead these pagan people suppressed the truth by their wickedness.

The 1973 report concedes that Christians today who are same-sex attracted don't fit the pagan situation Paul is describing. Christians today have the full revelation of God in Christ; they have not exchanged the truth about God for a lie; they have not served created things rather than the Creator; they have not exchanged relations with the opposite sex for same-sex activity, because they never were drawn to the opposite sex to begin with.

Still Romans 1:26-27 refers to unnatural relations and shameful acts with other men. This indicates that homosexual activity is wrong, because it violates one's created nature.

2 I Corinthians 6:9-10:

**(9) Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? (10) Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.**

Here men having sex with men is listed as a wrongdoing. If there is no repentance, but rather persistence in this lifestyle, then such a person will not inherit the kingdom of God.

In this text the two Greek words *malakos* and *arsenokoitai* are paired. The NIV 2011 offers this textual note: “The words for men who have sex with men translate two Greek words that refer to the passive and active participants in homosexual acts.” This text indicates that any same-sex sexual activity is wrong.

3 I Timothy 1:8-11:

**(8) We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. (9) We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers and mothers, for murderers, (10) for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers- and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine (11) that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.**

Here Paul lists sexual immorality and specifically cites homosexuality as breaking the law- an act of rebellion against God. Like I Corinthians 6:9, he uses the term *arsenokoitai*. This passage adds nothing new; it again lists homosexual practice as against God’s law.

The Human Sexuality Report summarizes its conclusions this way:  
*Scripture teaches in a clear, consistent, and compelling way that homosexual acts of any kind are sinful and not in agreement with the God’s will.*

VI Three reasons to listen to the case made for permitting same-sex marriage.

1 The principle of love:

Courses in biblical ethics highlight Jesus summary of the law in Matthew 22:37-39: **Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first + greatest commandment. And the second: Love your neighbor as yourself.** Love for others is a central principle in discerning whether some is good and right- or not. We love our neighbor when we truly promote their well-being.

In the second table of the Ten Commandments, it is clear why God forbids some things. For example, committing adultery violates the love and trust of a marriage. However, it is not readily apparent why forbidding same-sex marriage is an expression of love.

2 In the past the church has not always gotten things right at first.

In the early church it took decades and lengthy church councils to arrive at a shared understanding of three persons divine persons. Just two hundred years ago, some ministers were making a biblical case to support slavery. Seventy years ago some leaders in the Christian Reformed Church made a case against women voting in congregational meetings. So we should always be willing to examine our positions in light of God's Word.

3 A number of people in the church have concluded same-sex marriage is permissible. They include sincere Christians with keen minds and deep biblical/theological insight. At Synod 2022 about 25% of the delegates reflected this conviction. Listening to fellow Christians and their convictions is a basic posture for God's people.

VII: Points made by those open to same-sex marriage:

1 The Bible passages related to same-sex activity are all found in the context of idolatry, adultery, prostitution or exploitation- not loving, committed same-sex marriage. None of these passages have in view a loving, faithful, same-sex marriage. So it can be inferred that such relationships are not what God's Word is forbidding.

2 The creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 are generally descriptive, not prescriptive. In other words, they describe the creation rather than establish a moral code about sexuality. Scientists today estimate that 3-5% of people experience same-sex attraction. Genesis 2 is simply describing that generally a man is united to a woman in marriage. That is not the same as setting a moral principle- forbidding same-sex marriage.

3 Genesis 2:24 notes that a husband and wife **become one flesh**. Some scholars point out that the word *flesh*, which translates the Hebrew *basar*, often indicates a kinship relationship. Kinship is marked by mutual commitment to one another, like Boaz to Naomi, and doesn't necessarily mean the sexual consummation of a heterosexual relationship.

4 In Romans 1:24-27 Paul clearly doesn't have loving, faithful, same-sex marriage in view. In his day same-sex activity was exploitative, like the Genesis 19 and Judges 19 accounts. Paul was not referring to people born with a same-sex attraction, but rather to depraved men who abandoned their heterosexual orientation and were inflamed with lust for other men.

This position could be summarized by a note I once received:  
*I believe accepting same-sex marriage is the right thing to do and is consistent with Jesus' message of love and inclusion. The science is that homosexuality is not a choice. The Paul passages can be read to condemn exploitative relationships, not loving, committed, monogamous relationships. If I'm wrong, I'd rather be wrong on the side of welcoming into the church those who shouldn't be there than on the side of pushing away people who belong.*