

# Adventists and Homosexuality: The Central Issue in the Debate

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In its commitment and loyalty to the will of the Risen Lord as revealed in the Scriptures, the Adventist church has rejected homosexual behavior as a proper expression of human sexuality. This position is universally held by the church. A shift has occurred among some Adventists who argue that although homosexual behavior is generally to be rejected it is acceptable under a specific situation. The core issue in the discussion is not whether homosexual behavior is good or bad, but whether loving same-sex relationships within a permanent commitment to one partner should be accepted by the church. They argue that in such cases the church must support and accept homosexual behavior. In what follows I will summarize in broad strokes and comment on the reasoning behind that proposal.

**1. Emotional Impact.** Testimonies are collected and shared describing the deep emotional impact that some Adventists go through when realizing that they are homosexuals. Listening to them or reading about their experience is indeed emotionally painful. We also read about the traumatic experience their Adventist parents go through. They all love the Lord and yet they find themselves in a situation that they never anticipated. They look for the support of the “caring church,” but they only find rejection. As a result they have created their own support system at the margin of the church and have found spokespersons for this within Adventism.

We should not underestimate the deep emotional disturbance they experience. Church members, pastors, and leaders should lovingly minister to them. The caring church must stand by them. The church has done so by clearly distinguishing between homosexual orientation and homosexual behavior. The church would betray the will of the Lord by allowing sentimental sympathy and loving understanding to become sentimental permissiveness. We all need divine wisdom to minister to such individuals and families without negotiating away biblical teachings, norms, and principles.

**2. Scientific Evidence.** In order to validate the case for a particular type of homosexuality, those supporting it use the results of studies made in the fields of biology, psychiatry, and sociology. The evidence is used to demonstrate that homosexuality is a natural type of sexual orientation within the human population; that it is *normal* to have between 5% to 10% of homosexuals in any society. Homosexual orientation is considered by the medical and scientific communities to be a normal human variant. It is then argued that it is incorrect to refer to homoeroticism as a perversion or as a sin.

The development of sexual identity is a complex issue. But it is scientifically unsound to argue that homosexuality is simply genetically determined. Many other elements should be taken into consideration. Certainly some individuals have a homosexual orientation, but the factors that bring it about are far from clear. The church has recognized the statistical details (the orientation), but has not used them to determine its understanding of human sexuality or to legitimize a homoerotic lifestyle. Adventism is so firmly grounded in the Scriptures that it does not allow biology, psychiatry or sociology to define biblical doctrines.

**3. Reinterpretation of Biblical Texts.** Under the influence of sentimental permissiveness and the scientific communities, some Adventist theologians argue that the biblical texts addressing homosexuality need to be brought to the table for further analysis. Under the influence of postmodernism, they argue that the way we read the biblical text reflects our own perspective and not necessarily what the text says. The text itself does not have a final meaning. Therefore we need to recognize the insights of other believers as legitimate readings of the text. Based on these postulates they offer their own reading of the relevant texts. They argue that the OT passages deal with homosexual ceremonial impurity associated with the practice of homosexual acts in pagan

religions. The NT, they add, opens a way for the church to welcome homosexuality as a lifestyle because Jesus eliminated ceremonial uncleanness.

The biblical passages have been discussed elsewhere in this issue and in other resources from BRI. I will only make some general remarks. The approach used by the theologians supporting a homosexual lifestyle violates the principle of sola scriptura. It considers the texts to be culturally determined, that they do not address the issues that we face today. Besides this, their approach has allowed non-biblical sources to determine their reading and interpretation of the Bible. By violating the clear contextual, linguistic, and grammatical meaning of the text they provide a false sense of security to those practicing homosexuality.

**4. Theological Arguments.** In order to limit the practice of homosexual behavior to its expression in the context of a loving same-sex relationship in Christ, they attempt to transfer the biblical theology of human sexuality from a heterosexual understanding to a homosexual one. They are forced methodologically to argue in generalities about the legitimacy of same-sex love. The goodness of sex instituted by God, they say, is opened up to such intimacy. In the setting of love, primacy is given to relationships and not to the sexual deed. It is not a matter of whether the deed is right or wrong, but whether the relationship is good or bad. Love as affection, loyalty, and mutual respect can be expressed in the intimacy of homoeroticism.

Allow me two comments. First, the transfer of the sanctity of the biblical marriage to same-sex marriage is like transferring the sanctity of the seventh-day Sabbath to Sunday. What God has not explicitly sanctified cannot be sanctified by theologians in opposition to His will. Second, the idea that relationships are more important than deeds is an ethical statement that needs careful justification. It is offered as a fact when in reality it is a simple opinion. It is practically impossible to separate relationship from deeds. When love is defined outside the context of God's specific will for us it is corrupted. In spite of the efforts made by these theologians to justify homosexual behavior of a particular type, it remains biblically unjustifiable.

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