

## “Loving Our Homosexual Neighbor: What does love mean?”

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There are two main questions that face the Christian and the Christian Church with regard to homosexuality. The first is, “Is homosexual behavior contrary to the will of God?” This is the truth question. “What has God said? What does God say?” The Scriptures answer that question, to use Robert Gagnon’s words, pervasively, absolutely, strongly, and counter-culturally. The Old Testament and the New Testament speak with one united and unwavering voice in condemning same-sex intercourse.

The second question is, “What is to be the Church’s attitude toward persons struggling with same-sex fantasies, feelings, and behavior?” This is the love question. The homosexual person is my neighbor. “What does it mean to love my homosexual neighbor as myself? What kinds of places ought our churches be? What is the Lord of the Church calling us as individuals and local churches to be and do with regard to our homosexual neighbor?”

We are going to concentrate here on the second main question—the love question. “What is to be our attitude?” In this presentation, I do not just want to be academic but practical with regard to our behavior and actions. So, I want to look at five attitudes I believe the Christian and the Church are to have with regard to our homosexual neighbor.

### **First, we need an attitude of repentance.**

Maybe up to this time the Church’s starting point has been wrong. We have been saying “them” instead of “us.” As such, the attitudes of our hearts have not been right.

I am going to read a portion of the Prologue from my book *Understanding Homosexuality: Perspectives for the Local Church*.

Ronald sat down next to me for the Monday evening meal. He had just arrived at St. Deiniol’s, a residential library in northeastern Wales, from Manchester, England, having just attended *Half Way to Lambeth*, the annual conference of the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement. We immediately struck up a lively conversation.

Ronald was working on a PhD in what he considers homophobic translations of three Old Testament passages. I was spending eight weeks at the library writing on a pastoral response to gay and lesbian people. We quickly got into rich conversation over the biblical passages—the meaning of Hebrew words and matters of interpretation.

I learned that Ronald, now in his late 50s, has been openly gay since age 24. He grew up in a Danish Lutheran church but now is in the Quaker church. As I listened closely, I could hear the pain of rejection and the deep hurt that church people had caused him. I sensed the loneliness and alienation he had felt in past years. I saw the anger that swelled up from within as he spoke of homophobia in the church. Here was a deeply wounded man sitting next to me.

I was moved as I listened to his experiences with the Church. “How could God’s people have been so insensitive,” I thought. “Why could they not have befriended him rather than turned a cold shoulder? What could I do?” I am a pastor in the Body of Christ and here was one wounded deeply by the Church’s lack of love. I perhaps couldn’t do much but I could do something.

I turned to Ronald and said, “Ronald, will you forgive us? I am a part of the Church of Jesus Christ, and we as a Church have sinned against you and God by the way we have wronged you. We have not loved you as we ought. I am ashamed of the way some of us in the Body have treated you. Our attitudes and actions have been very wrong and displeasing to God. I repent of the part I have played and want to forego any pride or prejudice or homophobia there may be in me. We are sorry and ask you to forgive us.”

Ronald sat motionless for a few moments. Finally, he broke the silence. “I’m not sure I can get up and throw my arms around you right now,” he said. But he thanked me. We continued talking, but after a few minutes, he returned to a thought. He told me that he would be speaking to a gay and lesbian group the coming Saturday and that he had been planning to tell them that he thought the Christian Church was 500 years away from confessing to gays and lesbians how much it had wronged them. He then paused and said, “I’ll maybe have to change what I was going to say to them.”

In the past, society has rejected homosexual persons, and then when they have come to our churches, they have felt the same rejection and as a result have started churches of their own. I believe the way forward, the place to start, is with the Church confessing on behalf of ourselves and others our history of mistreating gay and lesbian persons, and repenting and asking them for forgiveness. For the one who says very honestly and truthfully, “But Dave, I have not mistreated gay and lesbian persons,” I would remind you that we are members of one Body, and we must speak on behalf of the whole of which we are a part. We need to confess that under the guise of righteousness, the Church has shown little of the love and compassion of Jesus Christ. We need to acknowledge that Jesus’ attitude and treatment of the woman at the well (John 4) and the woman caught in adultery (John 8) have not characterized our attitude and treatment

In his very helpful book *Homosexuality: What Should Christians Do About It?*, Richard Lovelace concludes that there is a need for a ‘double repentance’: First, a repentance by the homosexual person whom God calls to forego homosexual practices and draw on the grace and power of the Spirit of God for holy living, and second, a repentance by the ‘straight’ members of the Church to forego pride, prejudice, hostility, and homophobia. Lovelace writes:

Persons who are compulsively uneasy, fearful, or filled with hatred when relating to persons involved in sexual sins, either homosexual or heterosexual, need a releasing work of the Holy Spirit, freeing their own sexual natures, building in them a sense of security which will permit them to express Christian love while standing firm against impurity.

**Second, we need an attitude of humility.**

As I said, the Scriptures clearly and unambiguously teach that homosexual behavior is sinful. But the Scriptures do not teach that homosexual sin is the worst of sins or that same-sex persons are subhuman. There is no Hebrew or Greek word for a homosexual person. Scripture does not identify persons by their sexual orientation or by their besetting temptations or sins. Rather, all of the Bible's references are to behavior or acts.

Beyond that, every biblical reference to homosexual sin occurs in passages which include a list of other sins. These sins include sexual sins which are heterosexual in nature but also sins of idolatry, greed, disobedience to parents, pride, injustice to the poor, drunkenness, slander, self-indulgence, gossip and murder. It is scandalous when heterosexual Christians rant and rave against homosexuality as a detestable abomination while at the same time excusing things like lying, gossiping, stirring up dissension, dishonest business practices, and self-righteousness. (See Proverbs 6:16-19.)

When one watches Jesus carefully, one notices that he dealt with sins of the flesh far more leniently than he did sins of the spirit. Let us remember that we all sin and none can look down on another. We all stand under God's judgment and are in urgent need of God's grace. When we see a neighbor caught up in sin, what can we say but "There but for the grace of God go I!"

**Third, we need the attitude of acceptance.**

We are called to accept one another as God in Christ has accepted us. How has God accepted us? He has done so with all our hang-ups, dispositions, experiences, and histories. He has done so with all our warts and shortcomings and failures. He has done so with all our distortions and perverted tendencies to irrational anger, jealousy, pride, and heterosexual and homosexual tendencies. This is the heart of the gospel. The gospel doesn't tell us we have to pick ourselves up first. We are simply called to open our eyes to his love and forgiveness and then invited to come as we are. Oh, how desperately we need someone to love us and accept us just as we are! Christ loves and accepts us while not necessarily approving of our behavior.

Jesus demonstrates this attitude in his interaction with the woman of Samaria (John 4:4-26). She had been married five times. Jesus accepted her without approving of her behavior and this woman's life was dramatically changed because of his acceptance of her. Jesus shows us that there is a dramatic difference between accepting and approving. This 'acceptance' then means that he fully and freely forgives all who repent and believe. Acceptance does not mean that he condones our continuance in sin. We are to accept one another as fellow-penitents and fellow pilgrims, not as fellow-sinners who are resolved to persist in our sinning. There is no acceptance by God or church promised to us if we persistently stiffen our hearts against God's Word and will. We face only judgment.

**Fourth, we need an attitude of compassion.**

I don't believe most homosexuals choose to be homosexual. Most are caught up in a developmental reality consisting of many different factors. This developmental reality, normally starting in childhood, is the result of a varied and mixed combination of genetic

factors, gender confusion, family dysfunction, molestation, and repeatedly reinforced choices occurring at critical phases of development. These persons really struggle with their orientation and behavior. We must have compassion on them in their struggles. Someone has said homosexuals are the lepers of modern society. Who is reaching out and touching them?

I think of a woman in the congregation I serve who, before her recent death, volunteered to be with people who, in their last stages of life, were dying because of AIDS. In hospice care she went into their homes, tended to their physical and medical needs, ministered to them spiritually as opportunity presented itself, and walked with them until they died. In over 25 years of compassionate care, she walked the last weeks of life with close to 400 persons. The large majority (80-85%) of these men and women had contracted HIV through homosexual activity. She saw their needs and didn't shrink back but had compassion on them. She was different. Her love for Christ made her different. I see Christ's attitude in her as she reached out compassionately to those who others don't want to touch. We all are to have this mind which is in Christ Jesus.

**Fifth, we need an attitude of love.**

Jesus says the whole law is summed up in two great commandments: loving God and loving my neighbor. This love of neighbor involves the imaginative work of putting ourselves in the shoes of that neighbor, thinking what they are thinking, and feeling what they are feeling. It means showing hospitality to the stranger, that is, to the one who is different from us.

Loving the neighbor means associating with sexually immoral non-Christians. On one occasion (I Cor. 5:9-10), Paul rebukes the Corinthian Christians for refusing to associate with sexually immoral persons outside the church. Paul says we are not meant to withdraw from the world or the people in the world but rather to be salt and light in that world. It shows itself in the way we talk about people. Gay bashing and jokes are cruel and sinful and should not be practiced among us. The Epistle of James states that one cannot praise God and with the same tongue curse the neighbor.

Bell Hooks is a black feminist, social thinker, memoirist and teacher. She is pro-lesbian. In one of her writings, she talks about a black woman pastor:

In the past year, I talked with a black woman Baptist minister who, although concerned about feminist issues, expressed very negative attitudes about homosexuality because, she explained, the Bible teaches that it is wrong. Yet, in her daily life, she is tremendously supporting and caring of gay friends. When I asked her to explain this contradiction, she argued that it was not a contradiction, that the Bible also teaches her to identify with those who are exploited and oppressed and to demand that they be treated justly. To her way of thinking, committing a sin did not mean that one should be exploited or oppressed.

This black woman Baptist pastor strikes me as one who is really trying to make a healthy separation—loving the sinner and hating the sin; loving people without condoning sin—something Christians always talk about but have a harder time doing. Bell Hooks goes on and condemns this woman for her homophobia because her approach and practice isn't good enough. Hooks won't clear her of the accusation of homophobia until she can embrace homosexuality as right and say that lesbianism is fine.

But here is a good example of what the Christian needs to be striving for. God loves sinners but hates their sin. We are called to do the same. We are to love the sinner while hating the sin, first in ourselves and then in others; for Jesus commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves. We are to love the neighbor even though, in spite of so, doing we still will be accused by some of being homophobic and bigoted.

But loving my homosexual neighbor means something more. It is a redemptive love. We need to probe deeper into Jesus and the two love commandments. We need to do this because there are those in our day who use this *love your neighbor as yourself* commandment as a screen by which to eliminate a prohibition of homosexual practice and almost any sexual offense. Is that in fact what the *love your neighbor* command does?

The first problem with that view is that it essentially equates love with tolerance. But the problem with that is that some tolerant actions turn out to be unloving. There is the much used example of young children touching a hot stove. If the parent tolerates a child playing with a hot stove, it turns out to be parental negligence. State social services take your child away from you, and you are incarcerated. That is an instance of tolerance not being loving. That is why tolerance is not lifted up in Scripture as the supreme virtue. In fact, when tolerance is lifted up as the supreme value it winds up being exceedingly intolerant because someone's brand of tolerance is lifted up and if you disagree, if you do not fit their mode of tolerance, you are labeled intolerant.

It is this view that we are facing in the ELCA's recently released proposed social statement, "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust." The proposed statement holds a preconceived notion of what love is, and in the end it will not hear anything different. But in deciding what love is, the statement completely skirts the truth question. Once you have severed love from truth, what does love mean? With regard to sexuality issues, if you start with the premise that what we do sexually doesn't in the end really matter to God, then you will have one interpretation of what love means.

In Carl Braaten's critique of the proposed social statement he says, "It depicts a God without wrath and without judgment. God's only response to sin is 'love'. God loves and cares for everybody; it doesn't matter what they do. God is a prisoner of his own love. He can't do anything else." This is the wishy-washy God of liberal Protestantism. The truth is that God is also a God of wrath and judgment in relation to everything that opposes his will.

If, however, you start with the Scriptural premise that resides everywhere in both the Old and New Testaments, that our sexual actions are so important to God that what we do sexually could get us thrown into hell and disqualify us from getting into the kingdom of God, then you have a totally different perception of what love is because what you want to do is get people to a place where they will live eternally with God. So, it all depends on the truth question.

The second problem with this sordid view of *love your neighbor* is that it suppresses the first great commandment. It suppresses the Shema: "*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might*" (Deut. 6:4-5). And Jesus picks up on the second utterance, "*You shall love the Lord your God with everything within you.*" And once we recognize that, we realize that things are not decided on a merely horizontal or social level, that is, they are not decided just on the basis of how I may feel about something. We must raise questions on the vertical level: "What does God think? What does God say? What does God want for our lives in terms of sexual purity?"

Now undoubtedly you have realized that sex is incredibly pleasurable. And because it is, it is given to an incredible amount of self-justification. There are greedy people in the church, but you don't see a greedy people's liberation movement rise up in the church—at least not by that name. Why? Because we know greed is wrong. But you get a lot of sexual liberation movements in the church which are much more abhorrent to God. Why? Because sex is pleasurable and private in nature, and our society has come to the conclusion that people pretty much get to decide for themselves what to do. And who are you to say otherwise? But when you say that, you suppress the first great commandment which has to do with asking what God would have us do.

A third problem with that distorted view of love is that it overlooks a context. When Jesus gives us the second great commandment, he quotes from Leviticus 19:18b, "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" But what is the context of Leviticus 19:18b? Well, it's Leviticus 19:17-18a immediately before it. "*You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin: you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people; but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.*" In other words, if your neighbor does wrong, you shall reprove your neighbor lest you incur guilt for failing to warn him. That is almost never picked up when people lift up the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself.

Very, very frequently in the case of homosexual practice and many other forms of immoral sexual behavior the argument is, "Well, two people just love each other, and that should be enough." Love there basically means tolerance and approval of what people do sexually. But in the midst of this commandment in Leviticus 19 is this statement that if your neighbor does wrong, you shall reprove him lest you incur guilt for not warning him. So, here in a list of loving things to do toward one's neighbor (not hating, not taking revenge, not holding a grudge) is another loving thing: that is, it is loving to reprove your

neighbor when your neighbor does wrong. It is a good thing. This is part of a full-orbed understanding of what love is.

And do you know what? Every parent knows that! Every parent knows that if they never disciplined their children for wrong doing, they would not be known as particularly loving parents. We just forget that sort of thing in the church and in our relationship with each other.

The non-biblical view that sees *love your neighbor* as a rationale for immoral behavior also sees an antithesis between outreach and intensified ethics. There is a very great difference between Jesus and the Pharisees. But that difference is not over the intensity of God's ethical demands. In fact, Jesus held a more rigorous view of God's ethical demands than did the Pharisees.

Do you remember in Matthew 5 Jesus saying, "*Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven?*" One would have thought that Jesus would have said, "Unless you are more loving than the Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." But no, he had a much more full-orbed understanding of our righteous conduct before God. Jesus then goes on and gives these six antitheses. Six times he says, "*You have heard it said....but I say to you....*" In each of these six cases, he closes the remaining loopholes in the Mosaic Law—two of which have to do with sexual conduct—making the law more internally self-consistent and rigorous.

We have developed this portrait of Jesus in the church as a great candy man in the sky who gives us basically everything we want. But in reality Jesus had a more rigorous understanding of ethics than existed even among the Pharisees. So why is it that we don't think of Jesus as a Pharisee if his ethical teaching is actually more rigorous than the Pharisees? The reason, it would seem, is because he combines it with love. Jesus reaches out aggressively in love to the biggest violators of the command.

We have the tendency to think that in order to love someone—let's say someone committing a sexual offense—we can't think that what they are doing is really that bad. Because if I think that what they are doing is really bad, it's really tough for me to love them. That is getting it all backwards! Jesus reaches out aggressively in love precisely because the bad things people do put them at great risk of not inheriting God's kingdom which he is proclaiming,

When do you think people most need the life preserver? When they are on land or when they are in the ocean drowning? They need it when they are in the ocean drowning, right? These who are violating the rigorous ethic he is preaching are at greatest risk. He sees their need and reaches out to them. That's why he said, "*I've come to bring wholeness, to save the lost, to heal the sick because the spiritually sick and lost need to be recovered.*"

We think of the parable of leaving the 99 sheep and going and searching for the one lost one. The one lost sheep the shepherd is going out to rescue is really in danger. We are tempted to think, "What a stupid shepherd. You've basically got to chalk that straying

sheep up to a loss. When a sheep goes off into wolf territory you are not going to leave 99 at risk while you go get one! If I had a shepherd like that I'd fire him." But that is the way God works, apparently. God deeply desires to rescue those who are genuinely at highest risk.

So we see here how outreach to the lost and an intensified ethic actually go hand in hand. But the church often goes in one direction or the other. It either says, "You are all going to hell, and we are not going to do anything about it," or "Everyone is saved and don't worry about God's ethical demand because we are all under grace." Both get it equally wrong. Both are in effect consigning them to hell. That is the problem. Jesus weds both.

The Pharisees could not get their theological imaginations around the notion that both elements—love on the one hand and an intensified ethical demand on the other—should be wedded together. If the church pleads on its behalf that it is too hard to do that, then the church should quit being the church and become the Rotary Club (not that there is anything wrong with the Rotary Club, which does great social work.) But, the Rotary Club is what it is and the church is what it is, and the church is in the business of rescuing souls eternally in the ways that Jesus modeled.

The faithful church then acknowledges the theme of judgment in Jesus' teaching. It teaches that willful, serial, unrepentant sin of an egregious sort can put a person at risk of not inheriting the kingdom of God. It is interesting that roughly one third of Jesus' teaching contains a strong note of judgment and warning. We have to take very seriously what Jesus said.

We think of Jesus' interaction with the woman caught in adultery. In John 8:3-11, the scribes and Pharisees bring to Jesus this woman who has been caught in adultery. The crowds want to stone the woman because that is what the Law of Moses commanded. But Jesus tells them not to do so. Why? Not because he believes adultery is a minor offense, but because he wants to reclaim her for the kingdom of God and dead people can't repent.

Jesus tells the woman, "*Go and no longer be sinning.*" Now that exact phrase appears earlier in John 5 where Jesus heals the man who was crippled from birth at the pool of Bethzatha. He says to this man the exact same thing, "*no longer be sinning*" but then immediately adds this warning: "*Lest something worse happen to you*" (John 5:14). The implication is that there is something worse than being stoned to death and losing your physical life. What is worse than being stoned to death? What is worse is being excluded from God's eternal presence, loss of eternal life through an unrepentant life. Jesus' love warns against eternal consequences of sinning. Jesus' love is a redemptive love.

As a close follower of Jesus, the Apostle Paul's understanding of love is the same as is Jesus' understanding. In I Corinthians 5 there is this situation in the church where a man is living in an incestuous relationship with his step-mother. The church of Corinth is priding themselves for their ability to tolerate what this man is doing. Paul says to them that they should rather be mourning. Why? Because this individual's eternal life is at

stake and they are doing nothing to rescue him. By today's standards, it is the people who were tolerant of his behavior who were the loving ones. But we know looking back that the only one who really loved this man was Paul because he was willing to do what needed to be done to recover him for the kingdom.

Paul tells the Corinthians not to associate with such offenders because they will not inherit the kingdom of God. This is clear as he goes on in I Corinthians 6 and reiterates the same vices of people who will not inherit the kingdom of God and ends by saying that some of them were such but are no longer. Paul believes this incestuous man, who is a professed Christian, and the community that is approving of what he is doing, are deceiving themselves. They deceive themselves in believing that this man could do this action in a serial, unrepentant way and still inherit the kingdom of God. Tolerance is not always loving. Paul's love is a love that warns that serial and unrepentant sinning puts a person at risk for inheriting the kingdom of God. Paul's love is a love that calls for repentance and a life of holy living. Paul's love is a redemptive love.

In the very next chapter, in I Corinthians 6, Paul again talks about not being deceived. In verse 9 Paul says, "*Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?*" He is talking about the incestuous man in Corinth who claims to be a believer. He is saying, "*Do you not realize that if you live an unrighteous life, you won't inherit the kingdom of God?*" Verse 9b says, "*Do not be deceived!*" What is the deception? The deception comes in thinking that I can get by, that I'll be okay. In verse 9-10 Paul says, "*Do you not realize that if you live an unrighteous life, you won't inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, (10) thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers – none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.*" Do you realize that such persons will not inherit the kingdom of God? In verse 11 he continues, "*And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.*" Your lives were characterized by such behavior but now they no longer are so characterized. There has been repentance and justification and washing and sanctification.

While we are in I Corinthians 6, let's also look at verse 18a, "*Shun fornication!*" Shun *porneia*—sexual immorality. The Old Testament echo here is Joseph fleeing Potiphar's wife, leaving even his garments behind in order to get away. Joseph could have stayed and gone through the temptation and succumbed to the temptation, but he didn't; he fled. Verses 18-20 say, "*Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. (19) Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? (20) For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.*" That is all in the context of having to do with sex. Glorify God in your body.

Robert Gagnon, Professor of New Testament and Sexual Ethics at Pittsburg Seminary, who has done the best scholarly work on homosexuality and the Bible, tells of a debate he had with a Yale-trained New Testament Lutheran scholar who teaches at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. This Luther Seminary professor's argument was that

you can't possibly glorify God by your sexual behavior. Gagnon simply turned to I Corinthians 6:20. He said it hit the whole room like a ton of bricks. The Luther Seminary professor apparently didn't even realize the verse was there. Rather amazing!

Or, in II Corinthians 12:21 we read: *"I fear that when I come again, my God may humble me before you, and that I may have to mourn over many who previously sinned and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and licentiousness that they have practiced."* Why does Paul fear he may have to mourn over them when he comes to them? Because they are continuing to sin! They are not repenting in the areas of sexual immorality. Why would he have to mourn? They are losing their lives. In what setting do you find a lot of mourning? One mourns at a funeral because someone has died. Paul is afraid he will come to them and have to mourn because they are dying and they are doing nothing about it. It is really the same setting as with the incestuous man in Corinth.

In Galatians 5:19-21 we find another vice list by Paul. The first three sets of vices are sexual offenses. When Paul finishes the list he says, *"Those who engage in this behavior won't inherit the kingdom of God—stop deceiving yourselves."* Again the deception is the belief that such persons who engage in such behavior can do so repeatedly and get away with it.

So what is love? What does it mean to love my neighbor as myself? Let me try to summarize what I have been saying.

- We don't stone people (in the case of the woman caught in adultery) because everything is at stake and love is about recovering people for the kingdom of God, not consigning them to hell.
- The irony is that it is those who are tolerating the serial, unrepentant sexual immorality (as in the case of the incestuous man) that are consigning the individual to hell, and no matter what they feel affectionately in themselves, functionally it turns out to be hate.
- If parents have a child who wants to touch a hot stove and the parents say, "Go ahead, honey, and explore all you want," those parents are not considered loving. Social services put such parents in prison.
- With regard to homosexual practice, the first issue that has to be faced is the truth question: "Are homosexual persons (as with other sexual offenders) genuinely at risk in their relationship with God through serial, unrepentant behavior?" If the answer is "yes," then what does love mean in that context? Clearly, once the truth claim question is asked, love cannot mean perpetuating the behavior in question with the fewest negative side effects. Love must mean ending the cycle of behavior lest the individual not inherit God's kingdom.
- The Pharisees could not comprehend the notion that Jesus could both actively strengthen God's ethical sexual demands in our lives and at the same time reach out aggressively in love to the biggest violators of that intensified ethic.
- Jesus aggressively reaches out in love to sinners and tax collectors, fraternizing with them, inviting himself into their homes, eating with them, preaching the kingdom of God, focusing his ministry mostly on them for the express purpose of

recovering them for the kingdom. While others didn't care that they were being destroyed, Jesus cared and reached out to them in love. This is our calling.

By way of demonstrating a congregation as a community of grace and truth, and the change that can take place within such a community, there was a very interesting paper published some years ago in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* by two Christian psychiatrists, E. Mansell Pattison and Myrna Lloyd Pattison. In the article, the authors describe the change that occurred in 11 white, exclusively homosexual males. For all these men, before coming into contact with the church, the average rating on the Kinsey scale was six. That is the highest number on the Kinsey scale. The average age of the men was 23, with ages running between 17 and 35. They all had strong homosexual orientations since they were about age 11.

These men joined a Pentecostal church. The members of this church accepted them, loved them, and as a result they all became Christians. They were given loving acceptance in the context of small fellowship groups of prayer and Bible study. They were taught the Scriptures and were helped to repent and to forgive others and themselves, to deal with their pasts and to go on dealing from day to day with their homosexual orientation. Most of them came to find out that they were psychologically immature in relationships, which is something they hadn't realized before. They had thought they were quite normal. But within the context of the non-erotic relationships with men and women in the group, they were able to change.

At the time the article was written, seven of the eleven were happily married and had already been so for four years. The other four wanted to be married. On the Kinsey scale rating, five of them were now at zero. The other six varied on the scale between one and three. Not only did their overt behavior change, but their fantasy and dream life changed remarkably also.

There is a place to stand which is faithful to Christ and his love for people. Our churches need to be communities of grace and truth. They need to be safe places where same-sex oriented persons are loved and accepted. They need to be places of truth where sin is taken seriously and where love is redemptive. With God's help we can be such places. We can build bridges to help sexual strugglers who are reaching out for understanding and grace and release from the grip of their sexual confusion. At the same time we can draw definite lines in the sand and take a stand for truth.