

**Thinking Biblically and Pastorally about Homosexuality
at Life Pacific College**

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As the Dean of Students at LIFE Pacific College I have the responsibility of communicating and implementing our standards of conduct, and I am often called on to address student actions that fall outside of these community standards. In one year I was faced with three incidences that gave me a desire to research and design the statement that is suggested at the end of this paper. Each of the following situations involves a response to homosexuality.

First, I engaged in an ongoing coaching situation with a graduating student who felt he had homosexual orientation, though he had never acted on this impulse and wanted to live righteously in regards to these feelings. This was a student who had excelled in academics and had been very involved in local church ministry. He seriously wanted to figure out how to avoid these feelings and learn to have a “healthy attraction” to women, though he was concerned that it was not happening.

Secondly, I had to administrate sanctions to two young students who were deeply involved in lesbian experimentation. Though one had a history with this struggle, the other claimed she had never done this before, and didn’t even feel sexually oriented towards women. Though they were in Bible College, neither had a grasp of what the Bible taught regarding homosexual activity.

Lastly, I spoke to a student who claimed to be homosexual, and though there was no confession to acting out, there was also no desire to limit this inner drive. In this student’s opinion, being a Christian and pursuing homosexual activity were not mutually exclusive issues.

There is, purposefully, no resolution here to how these issues were dealt with. As we will see, our student handbook and covenant has very little explanation concerning what the college believes about homosexual behavior, why we take that particular stand, and how we address homosexual activity. However, as these situations increase in frequency we must be ready to thoughtfully give answers regarding the standards we embrace.

Students, who are committed to serving Jesus, nevertheless come to us with diverse beliefs that might be surprising to some. The post-modern culture in which our students were raised has come to embrace homosexuals as an often-persecuted minority¹ and homosexuality not as sin or brokenness but as an acceptable sexual choice². Among the historically *conservative* evangelical church there is an emerging generation that is beginning to embrace the possibility that homosexuality has been overemphasized in the church and is not as grave a sin as their elders may believe—and some are asking whether it is, in fact, truly a sin at all³. A great number of our students have friends or acquaintances that consider themselves homosexual, and some of our students would identify with same-sex orientation as well. This is *the* hot topic on campus, and students are looking for comprehensive discussion regarding this issue. That shouldn’t surprise us; this is one of *the* hottest topics in the church today, and in the words of one scholar, “it is not going away anytime soon. We need to be as informed as possible in order to cope constructively with what affects all of us.”⁴

As a college that embraces a mission of training leaders for the church, LPC must wisely address the homosexual question. In the face of a changing cultural ethic, how do we best explain our understanding of scriptural standards? How do we model the kind of grace and restoration that we hope our students, many who are future pastors, will express in their ministries? When we are called to address these issues on a more comprehensive and well-thought-through scale, what will our response—that is both Biblically based and yet thoroughly compassionate— look like? These are the kinds of questions that I hope this research will help us start to answer.

LIFE Pacific College Student Handbook & Covenant

Our student covenant is the heart of our community standard. The following is what the Covenant says regarding homosexual behavior (including the context in which it is placed—all emphasis are mine):

“Life Pacific College has chosen to set itself apart for the purpose of training and equipping Christian servant leaders. It is crucial, therefore, that all students within the LPC community carry attitudes and behaviors that reflect the character of Jesus Christ at all times. Students, by their voluntary membership in this Christian community, agree together to assume the responsibilities to abide by all the regulations of the college, and use personal discretion involving any activities, which may be morally or spiritually destructive, or reflect poorly on the campus community.

In particular, students agree to refrain from...Inappropriate sexual behavior, including any conduct of sexual harassment, *homosexuality*, or viewing pornography in any form....” (The entire Student Covenant can be found in appendix C of this paper).

After reading this covenant, a student who would want to know more about what is meant by the warning to “refrain from...homosexuality” is directed to the Student Handbook. The only reference to homosexuality in the Handbook is this:

“8.1 Inappropriate Sexual Behavior: Students who engage in unmarried sexual behavior will be subject to disciplinary action. The following are examples (but certainly not all) forms of inappropriate sexual behavior: Sexual relations outside of a heterosexual marriage, including any type of intercourse, fondling of sexual organs, sensual nakedness, or *homosexual acts or behavior....*”⁵

While the above marginally clarifies the situation, the questions of why we choose to embrace this stand and how a student with homosexual orientation is specifically dealt with remains ambiguous. In an attempt to discover how we might engage this issue in a more comprehensive way, I researched the written policies of some colleges like us— conservative Christian colleges in the Southern California area.

Eight local colleges and seminaries that would be considered theologically conservative were asked about their written policies regarding homosexuality⁶. We found that each school had a very similar

standard to ours, communicating some form of “we do not condone practices that scripture forbids such as homosexual behavior”. However, in only one case was there a specific (but very brief) statement regarding how those who practiced homosexual behavior would be dealt with.⁷ While there very well may be such a guideline regarding how a college will deal with these issues at other institutions, the point is that in most cases a student who is dealing with these matters could not readily determine why a school believes what it does, or what course of action the college might take when attending to these challenges. Because the emerging youth culture is increasingly liberal regarding how they view homosexuality, conservative colleges like ours will need to more clearly communicate their reasoning and expectations regarding homosexuality.

Cultural norms among a post-modern generation

Radically diverse cultural attitudes are being held among the generation that our student population represents. There does not seem to be a common moral center, even from among those with a common background. Though we might properly assume that LPC is mostly dealing with students who embrace a theologically conservative outlook, the explication of their views on the subject of homosexuality may confuse those who come from a traditional and modernist point of view.

The post-modern world in which this generation grew up values acceptance of diverse views, and in some ways this value has come to be understood as the only thing close to a universal truth. As Stanley Grenz teaches in *A Primer on Postmodernism*, there is no clear focus on or foundation for truth in a postmodern society;

“There are no longer any common standards to which people can appeal in their efforts to measure, judge, or value ideas, opinions, or lifestyle choices. Gone as well are old allegiances to a common source of authority... In fact, the postmodern ethos arises from the assumption that there is no unified whole that we can call “reality”. Postmodern thinkers have given up the search for universal, ultimate truth because they are convinced that there is nothing more to find than a host of conflicting interpretations...”⁸

These conflicting interpretations come into play when moral issues such as homosexuality are considered. Take a student who was raised to believe that any sexual relationship between a man and a woman, outside of marriage, is always wrong. In a modern world, when such a student had to stand against a hostile culture, they would likely face ridicule and their view would probably be dismissed as irrelevant and old-fashioned. A subtle shift has happened; now this same student may not necessarily be ridiculed as a person, but their views would simply be marginalized. “Your moral stand is great for you, but it doesn’t work for me” is what they may hear from classmates and friends. And it would not seem strange, in the current culture, for a Christian teenager who has taken a pledge of abstinence to have a best friend who is sexually active. Though both students have taken radically different stands, they are

able to respect one another for taking their own path, as they do “not share a common standard by which to judge or value ideas, opinions or lifestyle choices.”⁹

The above example illustrates a challenge in addressing moral issues on our campus. Even though it has been historically assumed that most of those coming to LPC and signing the covenant all had a similar basis by which to judge such lifestyles, it would be naïve to continue to assume that that is the case. There *are* conflicting interpretations of certain scripture passages; there *are* students who come to school with all kinds of brokenness, and who are dealing with questions that they don’t feel have been seriously addressed. Furthermore, within this emerging generation there seems to be a “platinum standard” of *live and let live* that tells them to let their friends work out their questions about personal morality with God, and not get in their way as they are working it out.

Although there is little question that LPC will deal with many more straight than gay students, this is an issue that will affect the whole student body since this is a generation that has been culturally conditioned to accept many lifestyles and has been taught to not pass judgment on diverse opinions. Though a particular student may not identify as homosexual, we can project that he or she might have a friend who has homosexual orientation or we can assume there may real questions in their mind regarding whether the scriptural standards that the school holds to are rightly interpreted for today.

The Question of Biblical Interpretation

The following section is a review of three primary Biblical interpretations regarding homosexual morality; within these three views can be found multiple shades of nuance. For the purposes here—as an introductory primer for the larger Biblical argument—only these primary views will be addressed, and rather briefly at that (for a more comprehensive understanding of each of these perspectives and more on sexual ethics please see the annotated bibliography in appendix B that points out some of the big voices consulted for this research). Note that the three views addressed here only represent perspectives which claim the Bible is the Word of a living God in some sense—there is no explanation here of any kind of outlook which outright denies the existence of God or that believes the Bible is simply literature or myth.

1. A Broad Interpretation: First, there are those who claim to take the Bible seriously and authoritatively, but who, in fact, feel no need to take the Bible literally in any sense. They believe that the true understanding of the larger Bible story may supersede any particular Biblical passage. Dan O. Via is a respected New Testament Scholar at Duke who articulately represents this view of scripture—and who is actively working to see practicing homosexuals fully integrated into the life of the church. While he states that the Bible should be the “highest authority for Christians in theological and ethical matters”¹⁰ he goes on to say that, “authority does not mean perfection, or inerrancy, or complete consistency”¹¹, and that, “some texts are simply disqualified by the whole meaning of the gospel.”¹² Via also articulates this interpretive philosophy by stating that we must examine the “unambiguous condemnation of homosexual

acts” in the Bible in light of our own cultural context including discoveries in social science and the experience of Christian gays and lesbians.¹³

But he is, at least, honest about what the Bible actually says about homosexuality. Though he would argue that the larger interpretation of the *message* of the Bible cancels many of the individual passages out, he admits that the specific Old Testament texts prohibiting homosexuality “present an unambiguous and unconditional condemnation of homosexuality”¹⁴ and he goes on to declare that, for those seeking scriptural support for homosexual practice, “the few biblical texts that deal explicitly with the subject offer no such support.”¹⁵ Nevertheless, Via believes that the Bible permits a continual revision and new revelation of God’s words to humankind. He agrees with those who say that “they have a revelation or knowledge that is superior to the New Testament...(and) in the light of contemporary knowledge and experience...can justifiably override the unconditional biblical condemnations of homosexual practice.”¹⁶

Others, such as Dale Martin, a gay New Testament Scholar and Mel White, a gay Christian activist, strongly base their appeal to a broad and loose interpretation of the Bible on emotions. Martin writes that, “Any interpretation that hurts people, oppresses people or destroys people cannot be the right interpretation, no matter how traditional, historical, or exegetically respectable” (37). Depending on how one defines hurt, this could disallow many traditional interpretations of scripture, including any literal understanding of Hell.

Mel White has become a famous (or infamous depending on one’s point of view) figure on Christian college campus across the country. His *Soulforce* organization, which stands against “religious and political oppression (against) lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people”¹⁷ has sponsored “Equality Rides”, at which *Soulforce* volunteers and staff show up uninvited and unexpected at Christian Colleges that have traditionally taken a stand against homosexual behavior, and they publicly bring an opposing view. In his booklet, *What the Bible Says—and doesn’t say—about Homosexuality*, White equates traditional Biblical understanding regarding homosexuality with the conditions that brought about the Holocaust, the condemnation of interracial marriage, and the support of the Ku Klux Klan. He uses stories of horrible actions undertaken by Bible-quoting homophobes in an attempt to prove that a traditional interpretation of scripture must be wrong.¹⁸

White states that, “the Bible is a book about God, not about human sexuality”¹⁹ and then goes on to give seemingly inconsistent accounts of Biblical passages on sexuality, claiming “some verses are no longer viewed as appropriate, wise, or just.”²⁰ He continues through his pamphlet to use emotional stories, coupled with out-of-context scriptures that are not about homosexuality, to build his case that any scripture condemning homosexuality has to be misinterpreted or out of date. He ends the work with an appeal to love, believing that loving a homosexual and taking a stand against a view that allows homosexuality full expression in the church is incompatible.²¹ White, Martin, and Via are representative of those who espouse the idea that, simply stated, the sense of the Bible’s whole message is greater than and supersedes any of the individual parts of that message, regardless of how many passages a “whole

Bible” philosophy may invalidate, provided the interpreter feels that there are valid larger reasons to override those passages.²²

2. A Revisionist Hermeneutic: Second, there is a school of thought that does regard the Bible’s words as literally important for today, but only as they point the way to the true Word of God, Jesus Christ. This *Neo-Orthodox* view does not see the Bible as “a collection of inerrant facts, but as a very human document that reliably recorded a very real encounter of real people with a real God”.²³ This revisionist perspective does not accept that the traditional conservative Biblical interpretation regarding homosexuality has done the issue justice. They would argue that just as the Bible was errantly used to justify slavery and the subjugation of women based on the “plain meaning” of the texts, homosexuality as we know it today is under a false condemnation for the same reasons. In many treatises on this subject, a few key sections of scripture that explicitly discuss homosexuality is explained in light of historical, contextual or linguistic understandings and questions. To take the question of Biblical homosexual morality seriously, a serious engagement with this perspective is necessary.

Presbyterian moderator and seminary professor Jack Rogers is a strong voice for this interpretive ethic. In his book *Jesus, the Bible and Homosexuality—Explode the Myths, Heal the Church*, Rogers examines and re-interprets eight texts that he believes are commonly “pulled out of their Biblical context to justify oppression”²⁴ and that he claims are mistakenly used to show that homosexuality does not meet Biblical standards. Because these texts are so important to this discussion, they will be listed here with a short explanation of the revisionist view that Rogers represents (though this argument can be found in many writings with such a perspective in mind). The traditional explanation of these texts will be briefly considered in the next section.

Genesis 19:1-29/ Judges 19:1-30: In what Rogers considers parallel passages (Sodom and Gomorrah and the rape of the Levite concubine), a host offers hospitality to travelers, and the wicked men of the city come to sexually abuse them. These accounts are not taken to be an example against sexual sin (in fact, any homosexual implications are denied as there is not an explicit prohibition against homosexuality listed here), but Ezekiel 16:49 is used to point out that Sodom’s sin was actually inhospitality, rape, violence and greed, and the Judges passage is taken as an example of the culture’s radical unconcern for and subjugation of women.^{25 26}

Leviticus 18 & 20: These Old Testament laws prohibiting homosexuality are seen as part of a “holiness code” that kept the Israelites set apart from the other nations. Rogers declares that the Israelites “developed a Holiness Code to define their religious, civic, and cultural identity”²⁷, and he suggests that they then generalized the prohibition against adopting the practices of other cultures with any kind of mixing, including gender mixing. This is explained as important for both ritualistic purity (which he says Jesus abolished), and for promoting male dominance—for a man to take the “penetrated” position of a woman would have been considered an abomination because of the role reversal, not because of the sex act.²⁸

1 Corinthians 6:9 & 1 Timothy 1:10: The so-called “New Testament Vice Lists” include words traditionally associated with homosexuality, but that Rogers and many others claim are difficult to translate. In most treatments on this subject one will find the discussion—ad infinitum—regarding these two words: *arsenokoites* and *malakos*. The revisionist argument is that there is too much obscurity surrounding these words to make a positive identification of their meanings. The *arsenokoitai* are interpreted as those who perpetrate some sort of a sexual-economic oppression (like pimping or prostitution), or perhaps refers to pedophilia, and *malokos* would, in this view, reflect some lack of self-control or other moral failure.²⁹

Jude 7: Though this book is almost dismissed as unimportant³⁰; it has been used to defend the traditional biblical view of homosexuality. Rogers addresses any such defense as out of line, however, and interprets the passage not as a support for the idea that the men of Sodom were homosexually charged, but that their sin was the desire to have sex with Angels.³¹

Romans 1: In this passage that he admits seems to clearly talk about idolatry *and* homosexuality, Rogers and others believe that “a close and careful look at the text, using the best methods of Biblical interpretation will reveal that Paul is making a statement (only) about idolatry, not sexuality per se, and that Paul’s writings also reflect many of the cultural assumptions of his time.”³² This is a difficult passage for revisionists to address, and in the end, Paul’s point “that we are all sinners” seems to not apply also to homosexual activity, which would not be viewed as a sinful act. Instead there are some exegetical gymnastics to re-communicate the statement that seems to reference homosexual desires as a warning against passion and excess of any kind.³³

3. The Traditional Approach: There is, finally, the traditional, theologically conservative view of interpreting scripture. This approach believes that the Bible is not simply an inspired human book about God, but that the Bible is the Word of God, which the Holy Spirit inspired humans to write; it is not only authoritative, but is infallible, inerrant, and reliable in its original form. Some of the primary scholars who hold this view who also write on the subject of homosexuality are Pittsburg Theological Seminary Professor Robert A. J. Gannon, Theologian John Stott, and Wheaton Provost Stanton L. Jones. The traditional response to the eight scriptures that Rogers (and White) interpreted are voiced here through Jones³⁴ and Gangle³⁵:

Genesis 19:1-29/ Judges 19:1-30: While liberal scholarship limits the sin of Sodom to issues such as economic injustice and inhospitality, there is no reason to choose between the sin of homosexuality and the other sins that may have been committed.³⁶ Ezekiel 16:49-50 states that Sodom was responsible for a host of sins, and that in the end they were haughty and (NIV) “did detestable things before Me”. The phrase “Detestable things” is translated in other versions as committing abomination before the Lord (or very loosely, as in the Message “living obscene lives”). In context, God was chastising Israel for idolatry, sexual perversion, and violence, and

was saying that Sodom, who was removed because of her similar abomination before the Lord, had not even stooped to the level to which Israel had fallen. The sense here is that though the sin of Sodom started out with pride, gluttony, and sloth, it had progressed into a gross unconcern with the needy and ended in haughtiness before God that manifested in the commitment of a sexual abomination before Him.

The revisionist view does have a point that these stories (especially in the Judges passage) bring to light a radical subjugation of women. However, this passage was not intended to justify the actions of any of the men in the story, but to point out the depravity into which all of Israel had fallen by this time. Reading narrative passages as indications that the Bible is giving instructions (prescriptive), instead of understanding them simply as communication of what was (descriptive), is a dangerous interpretive technique.

Leviticus 18 & 20: Considered by Rogers and White a “Holiness Code” that applied only to the Israelites for a specific place and time^{37 38}, these passages do not easily lend to such an interpretation. The context of both chapters indicates that the code is a list of practices detestable to the Lord and that caused Him to drive out the former inhabitants of the land that the Jews were now occupying. Included in this list of sins (which homosexual action finds itself in the middle) are: Child sacrifice to demon idols, incest, adultery and bestiality. In fact, the only action in these texts that could be reasonably argued as only a purity law that would not apply to today would be the prohibition against having sex with a woman who is on her menstrual cycle. Breaking this law, however, did not carry with it the penalty of death as is required in the case of the “detestable act” of homosexual union (Lev 20:13), but a lesser penalty of “being cut off from their people”, a phrase that, if coordinated with Leviticus 15:19-24, can carry the possible meaning of a temporary separation from the community until the time of purification. Though we no longer embrace the strict civil penalties for such lawlessness, the punishment here seems to at least give an indication regarding the seriousness of the crime. (Leviticus 18 has no penalties, only prohibitions).

1 Corinthians 6:9 & 1 Timothy 1:10: According to traditional Biblical interpretation, *arsenokoites* and *malakos* are not difficult words to translate, as the revisionists claim, but can be discovered in both the linguistic/cultural context of Paul’s day as well as by interpreting the Bible by itself. In Leviticus 18 and 20, the Greek translation (The Septuagint) that Paul most likely used “condemns a man (arseno) lying with (koitai) another man (arseno)...Paul joins these two words together into a neologism, a new word...and thus he condemns in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy what was condemned in Leviticus”.³⁹ Malakos can directly be translated “soft ones” and the common interpretive view of this word is that it refers to the passive homosexual partner⁴⁰, not an exploited young boy. Though pederasty did exist in Paul’s culture, “it was well within the conceptual framework of Paul’s time to distinguish between exploitative homosexual relations and

caring ones.”⁴¹ Sexual brokenness of all kinds—including all forms of homosexuality—was common in Paul’s day. In fact in the prevailing Greek culture, there was no moral distinction made between homosexual and heterosexual activity.⁴² The argument that Paul would not have been aware of a non-exploitive homosexual relationship when he wrote his prohibitions against homosexual actions both ignores the reality of the time in which he lived and denies God’s role in inspiring Paul’s writing on the subject.

Jude 7: It is unlikely that the sin of the men of Sodom was the pursuit of sexual relationships with Angels, since according to the narrative they did not know these visitors were angelic. It is more in keeping with the context of Jude that these men were sexually deviant, linked with “licentiousness” (vs. 4), “gross immorality” (vs. 7) and of following after their own ungodly lusts (vs. 16 & 18). Furthermore, this passage has been historically interpreted to say that the men of Sodom were pursuing sex with what they thought were human men⁴³ and the burden of proof, that seems yet to have been met, would be on those offering an alternative explanation of the passage.

Romans 1: Paul is using homosexual passion as an obvious example of human purpose gone wrong. When people stopped worshipping God, they were handed over to their own lusts. In Romans 1 homosexual lust (both gay and lesbian) is seen as a picture of the sexual brokenness that can happen when people turn away from God, but there is also a list of other sins in the same context. Paul says humanity that stops worshipping God may also turn to become greedy, evil, envious, murderous, full of strife, deceitful, malicious, gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, disobedient to parents, untrustworthy, unloving, and unmerciful (to name a few). The point of the passage is that everyone has turned away from God at some level and all deserve death. He is building a case for the necessity of Christ. On looking at that list, anyone can easily find a place to stand with the homosexual offender as one who has turned away from God. Paul is not saying in Romans 1 that homosexuality is worse than any other sin listed here, but is using it as an example of unnatural, broken affection that his readers would understand.⁴⁴

Finally, we need a brief look at the argument so often heard that Jesus might have approved of homosexual activity since He did not say anything against it. This argument from silence ignores the fact that Jesus consistently raised, not lowered, the bar regarding the Old Testament sexual ethics. Suffice it to say that to be consistent with this reasoning, one would have to assume that Jesus had no problem with “rape, incest or sex with animals” either.⁴⁵

Through looking at the key passages that both sides of the discussion use to prove their point, there comes recognition that there are relatively few passages that explicitly condemn homosexual action. However, there is an overwhelming positive witness of scripture that sexual union was created to be reserved for the covenant of Marriage. When exploring the various Biblical interpretive views of

homosexuality, one must remain aware of the larger Biblical social ethic. There are numerous stories about sex in the Bible, and the stories often give us negative examples of sexual ethics (rape, polygamy, subjugation) that serve as a description of fallen humanity, and not as a prescription for a way to behave. There are also quite a few “rules” that guide sexual behavior. These “rules” consistently point to God’s intention for “sexual union for a purpose—the uniting of husband and wife into one flesh in marriage.”⁴⁶ Any sexual intimacy that falls outside of that express design does not line up with the clear Biblical standard.

Notice that each of the three Biblical views presented on homosexual activity are only secondarily about homosexuality, and primarily about a view of scripture and a way of interpreting it. In the research for this paper over 30 books and articles from various authors were reviewed. None of the authors consulted who held to the traditional interpretation of scripture also advocated homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle choice for Christians. Some of the more liberal scholars, like Dan O. Via and Elizabeth Stewart even admitted that a solid exegetical reading of the texts would lead one to understand homosexual action as wrong, and in order to come up with a different conclusion (which they are advocating), a person has to read current understanding about homosexuality into the text and discount the literal words of scripture in more than a few places.⁴⁷ ⁴⁸ Gangle goes so far as to claim that for homosexual activity to be accepted by the church, a radical devaluation of the place of scripture and of scripture’s moral imperative (holiness, obedience and repentance) must take place.⁴⁹ Indeed, Jones states that, “There are only two ways one can neutralize the biblical witness against homosexual behavior: by gross misinterpretation or by moving away from a high view of scripture.”⁵⁰ For a Bible College with such a high view of scripture, this is an important observation.

Both the Foursquare Denomination and LIFE Pacific College do hold to a high view of scripture as the “inspired Word of God: true, immutable, steadfast, and unchangeable”⁵¹ and the “final authority in all matters of faith and practice.”⁵² The denomination and the College have historically viewed the issue of homosexuality in light of traditional biblical interpretation. The Foursquare Church’s statement on homosexuality reads,

“The Biblical record shows that sexual union was established exclusively within the context of male-female relationship and formalized in the ordinance of marriage. In the New Testament, the oneness of male and female in marriage pictures the relationship between Christ and His Church. . . . The Scriptures identify the practice of homosexuality as a sin that, if persisted in, brings grave consequences in this life and excludes one from the Kingdom of God.”⁵³

Therefore, in our understanding the plain sense of scripture that explicitly deals with homosexuality—including both the immediate context that surrounds those scriptures and the larger picture of sexual ethic in the Bible—leads us to the conclusion that it is something God did not intend for humans. While there are some difficult passages to interpret and questions regarding specific contexts, it seems that

interpreting scripture to embrace homosexuality as a God-designed inclination for humans is irreconcilable to honest traditional biblical scholarship.

A way forward: Grace and truth, and a life of discipleship

During the 1960's and 70's a hippy evangelist named Lonnie Frisbee was a significant personality in the foundational years of Calvary Chapel, and he later went on to help shape the infancy of the Vineyard Movement of churches. According to his biographer, these church groups wrote him out of their histories when it was discovered that he struggled with homosexuality.⁵⁴ In a highly sexualized culture in which students have been raised to believe that homosexuality is a viable alternative, and when more young people than ever—including serious Christians—are questioning their sexual orientation, how will LPC respond to those who identify with this drive?

It should come as no surprise that LPC embraces the traditional Biblical interpretation regarding this subject. However, possessing solid Biblical scholarship on a matter does not guarantee that it will be handled correctly. We can get the prohibitions against homosexual action right and miss the larger (but not contradictory) message of scripture to love others deeply. Unspeakable acts of violence and hatred have been propagated against homosexuals with the “backing” of the Bible. Those who experience homosexual orientation have been driven underground and made to think that theirs is a unique sin that cannot be discussed. We have to learn not only “how to handle the Word of God correctly” (2 Tim 2:15) in our exegesis, but in our ministry with people as well; how we deal with some students in light of the Word of God will be what we model to other students in their current and future ministry situations.

When we address students regarding this issue, it is quite possible to embrace a traditional view of scripture regarding homosexual activity and continue to have real questions regarding sexual orientation. There is a difference between homosexual acts, which we teach the Bible condemns, and a homosexual attraction or orientation, which is, biblically speaking, much more ambiguous. Just as there are diverse views about what the Bible says about homosexuality, there are various schools of thought regarding why people have homosexual attraction. Whether sexual orientation is based on nature (some genetic or pre-natal hormonal influences) or nurture (social and linguistic factors),⁵⁵ it is widely accepted that in most cases homosexually oriented people do not have a conscious thought towards choosing their attraction; for many, it just seems they have always felt that way. Even ultra-conservative talk show host and Seminary President Albert Mohler concedes that, “we must not sin against our homosexual neighbors by describing their pattern of sin as something they have arbitrarily chosen in terms of desire.”⁵⁶

Not that healing of un-chosen sinful desires is out of the question. After the apostle Paul mentions homosexuality—along with many other forms of sin against God—in 1 Corinthians 6, he ends the thought by saying “that’s what some of you were”. There can be the hope for healing of hungers that do not honor God; there can be freedom from bondages that God does not intend for the lives of His children. Though

the idea of being able to change sexual orientation is controversial (for instance, the American Psychological Association states that it is not possible⁵⁷), the recently published, most rigorous study ever completed on change in sexual orientation concludes that change is possible, that there is good evidence that attempting change is not inherently harmful, and that, for those with personal values who have a reason to seek to change, seeking help may be a positive step towards personal integration.⁵⁸ Every believer looks for and receives various levels of wholeness on earth; no believer, whether homosexual or heterosexual, experiences absolute healing here, but are all given confidence that wholeness and total transformation will take place in eternity.

At LPC we need to handle these issues with a sensitive and gracious response. Though we hold to a traditional perspective regarding God's view of homosexual activity, we should never give students who are struggling with this orientation the impression that it is not something with which Christians struggle. In light of all of this, how do we begin to respond?

First, love and compassion must be primary. Grace is insistent that we do more than speak the truth; we must also walk in love. True compassion is more than feeling for someone, it is identifying with the person and doing something about her or his plight. Real discipleship includes helping others discover why they are attracted to certain temptations, and helping them to find freedom from falling into actions that pull them away from God. Welcoming homosexually oriented believers absolutely requires that they are embraced into full relationship, since all believers were born with a sinful nature that pulls them away from God's design. It is noteworthy that in every place where scripture directly speaks against homosexual action (Leviticus 18, 20; Romans 1; 1 Corinthians 6; 1 Timothy 1), the surrounding context includes a list of other sins against which many believers still struggle. Part of a family relationship in Christ is identifying that all are sinners and everyone struggles at some point with disordered desires. Mohler makes this point when he says, "There is no man who will be able to stand before God on the day of Judgment and say, 'I was only interested and aroused by righteous and holy desire...(by) the wife that I was given'."⁵⁹ No Christian is able to say that she or he is only driven to do things that honor God. We must stand in solidarity, as sinful humans who need deliverance from our sin, with our homosexually oriented brothers and sisters.

Second, we must speak the truth in love and hang onto our convictions that obedience to God in sexual expression includes only faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman, or celibacy in singleness. To those who say this is too high a price for discipleship, theologian John Stott answers, "Sexual experience is not essential to human fulfillment. To be sure, it is a good gift of God. But it is not given to all, and it is not indispensable to humanness".⁶⁰ This is a great opportunity to encourage deep study of the issue and encourage students to discover the truth presented in the Word of God. As most of our students are single, and all will minister to single people, they should be challenged to consider the call to righteousness in sexuality.

But the call to sexual purity is only one piece in a complete picture of discipleship. For instance, while we hold strongly that the Bible has something specific to say about homosexuality, we know it is not a major theme of scripture. Regarding this, Jack Rogers quotes Duke University New Testament scholar Richard Hays: "The Bible hardly every discusses homosexual behavior. There are perhaps half a dozen references to it in all of scripture. In terms of emphasis, it is a minor concern, in contrast, for example, to economic injustice."⁶¹ Sexual ethics are important in the Bible, but a life of discipleship both includes as well as transcends sexuality. Surely humans are sexual beings, but the culture's belief that a person's desire is their identity and destiny is a distortion of the truth that is found in Christ. As Richard Hays writes in his own book *A Moral Vision of the New Testament*, "The Bible undercuts our cultural obsession with sexual fulfillment. Scripture (along with many subsequent generations of faithful Christians) bears witness that lives of freedom, joy, and service are possible without sexual relations."⁶² Students must be reminded that, "the narrative of the New Testament contains no suggestion that Jesus could not fully affirm and live out what it is to be human without experiencing sexual intimacy. It is nowhere suggested that celibacy hinders truly mature human development in the case of Jesus."⁶³ If it is a believer's chief goal as a disciple to become like Jesus, there are some who will be called to embrace abstinence as He did; some by choice and others because the conditions of their life chose it for them (Matt 19:12). These conditions are not just physiological but may include a person who is a heterosexual believer that has never found a spouse or a homosexual believer who, because of her or his call to holiness, chooses to remain chaste for life. The point is that never being sexually fulfilled, as difficult as that may be in our sexually charged culture, has been one valued road of discipleship for believers since the founding of the Church (Matthew 19:10-12; 1 Corinthians 7).

How we deal with homosexual students must reflect this speaking the truth in love. When we deal with those who have a same-sex orientation, but are not acting on it, we must love them and offer them discipleship. Urges that pull people away from an obedient life, that are not acted upon, are not sin, but transparent accountability can help keep temptation from turning into sin. In order to offer this level of discipleship we cannot be surprised or shocked that good Christians deal with all manner of desires, but should offer friendship and companionship in their particular journey.

When we deal with those who have fallen into homosexual action, regret it and repent, we must love them and provide a path of discipline as well as discipleship. The truth applied in the context of LPC is that anyone who falls sexually is required to enter a restoration process, which includes judicially mandated accountability. The person who falls in this manner should be treated no differently than one who sins heterosexually.

When we deal with those who have sinned in blatant disregard of the standards of scripture and our school, with no accompanying repentance, we must love them and dismiss them. LPC is made of a voluntary community of those who have declared that they will do their best to follow the mandates of

scripture. Members who have no real desire to live under those conditions are indicating a disregard for our primary purpose to make obedient disciples of Jesus Christ.

Finally, the message that we have for those who have either identified themselves or are struggling with homosexual orientation is the message we have for all who struggle with any kind of sin; and that is the life of discipleship. The message of the gospel does not major on sexuality; but it does embrace obedience and holiness in response to God's awesome grace, and through the power of the risen Lord. The conservative American church at times has been accused of focusing exclusively on issues surrounding sexuality (homosexuality, abortion, etc...). Though these issues should not be neglected, discipleship is a much more comprehensive calling. In fact, some of the most deeply committed disciples can be found in the "Ex-Gay" movement. In an article recently published about this community, it was said that, "this may be the only group in America that realized all the way to the bottom that when you decide to follow Jesus, you don't always get to do what you want to do."⁶⁴

For many struggling with a drive towards a particular sin, self-justification is an easier road than surrender. A.W. Tozer, who spoke and wrote extensively on discipleship declared that, "Much of the difficulty as seeking Christians stems from our unwillingness to take God as He is and adjust our lives accordingly."⁶⁵ This paper does not speak to homosexuals who are not Christians. There is no expectation that those outside of Christ will have any desire to submit their wills to Him. Our response to unbelieving homosexuals is to love them fully as humans loved by God. Our response to believers who are driven towards homosexuality is to love them fully as brothers and sisters redeemed by God; including supporting and encouraging them into a life of taking God as He is and adjusting their lives accordingly by surrendering to His ways—and embracing transparency as we surrender to His ways in difficult areas in our own lives, too.

At the end of the day, no disciple, whether homosexual or heterosexual, is defined by his or her desire. "Rather," Tim Stafford writes, "we are defined by our Creator and Savior. Our attractions, always disordered to some extent, must be submitted to Christ, who alone can redeem us."⁶⁶

Appendix A: Proposed Life Pacific College Statement on Homosexuality

LIFE Pacific College is a voluntary community of disciples—students, staff and faculty—who have chosen to follow Jesus Christ by walking in obedience to the Word of God. Discipleship is a life of self-sacrifice and discipline; a Christian disciple is not one who does what he or she wants, but is a person who is learning to follow Jesus Christ as absolute Lord.

We hold to a high view of the Bible as our God-inspired, trustworthy and accurate guide for life. We believe that scripture is clear about God's original intention for human sexuality: Sex is to be reserved for one man and one woman who have been committed to covenant union through marriage. Any condition outside of this arrangement is to be met with chastity. The Bible is not ambiguous regarding sex outside of marriage, including premarital, extramarital and homosexual forms of sexual conduct, and therefore we believe all sexual activity outside of marriage is inconsistent with the teachings of scripture. It is expected that all members of the LPC community will refrain from any sexual action—including homosexual activity—that does not meet this Biblical standard.

In every case that homosexual activity is referenced in scripture, it is strongly condemned. The linguistic and contextual evidence consistently points to the interpretation that the people of God (both Jew and Christian) have embraced throughout history; that homosexual activity is sin and contrary to God's design. There are those who do not accept the plain sense of scripture regarding this issue and while we recognize the right for others to interpret scripture differently than we do, we respectfully but strongly disagree that this is a Biblically debatable issue.

All humans are born oriented away from God, and these inclinations often take on different forms. While the Bible does address sexual sin, it is not exclusively interested in only these kinds of sins. Every person who is a part of our voluntary community will be dealing with some attraction towards an action that God, through scripture, has communicated as rebellious to him and destructive towards humanity. Our response to all of those who struggle with various sin orientations, including towards homosexuality, will be one of love, grace, and help towards a life of discipleship. We expect all who are dealing with sin and bondage to be honest and accountable with their leaders so that healing and freedom can start to take place.

Our ultimate hope for those who are struggling with this issue is for healing and wholeness. The school will address homosexual sin the same way it would address other sins of a sexual nature; that is to say, a pathway towards restoration will be offered along with loving but firm pastoral accountability. The loss of sexual fulfillment is a real issue, and while some experience that loss as they wait in hope for marriage, others will walk an age-old path of discipleship that includes a lifetime of chastity. We offer the homosexually oriented person the same hope that we offer everyone; Jesus is Lord, and that following Him into a life of obedient discipleship is a pathway to abundant life that surpasses any other loss that may take place.

Appendix B: Annotated Bibliography for Key Resources

During the course of research, I discovered the following resources. Some were referenced in the paper and some were simply supplementary foundational reading for the subject. These materials are a good place to start in the study of Christian sexuality and the call to a disciplined life, as well as discovering biblically conservative, moderate, and liberal views and responses to homosexuality. All resources used for this paper (including complete citations for the following books) can be found in the endnotes.

Bell, Rob. *Sex God; Exploring the endless connections between sexuality and spirituality*. (Zondervan: 2007). Pastor Rob Bell examines scripture and culture to develop a view of sexuality that speaks to the emerging generation. His main focus is explaining God's intention regarding the Biblical sexual ethic to a culture who has no understanding of that ethic.

Bradshaw, Timothy (editor). *The Way Forward? Christian Voices On Homosexuality and the Church*. (Eerdmans: 2004). A collection of 13 essays (including Stewart, referenced in this paper) from mostly Anglican theologians who respond to the St. Andrews Day Statement, which is an attempt to define the issues surrounding homosexuality for the Church of England. While the statement itself represents a moderate stance, the responses range from slightly conservative to decidedly liberal. This is a good book to read in order to understand a wide range of the discussion at hand.

Jones, Stanton L. & Yarhouse, Mark A. *Ex-Gays? A Longitudinal Study of Religiously Mediated Change in Sexual Orientation*. (IVP: 2007). There are multiple references to Jones (and Yarhouse) in this paper; these two scholars have done serious work at the core of this debate. This book is the most comprehensively researched study on religiously mediated change in sexual orientation that has ever been done. Along with the research on change, they dive into reasons for orientation, and Biblical social and political factors in homosexuality. This book gives great context to the scientific part of the debate.

Jones, Stanton L. "The loving opposition: Speaking the truth in a climate of hate." (pg 18-25). Christianity Today, July, 1993. Though much has been researched since this date, the article continues to be considered a key point to an understanding of a proper conservative, traditional Christian response to the question of homosexuality in the Church. It is a very accurate and concise representation of the questions surrounding the Christian Gay debate, and highly recommended as a starting point.

Jones, Stanton L. *A Study Guide and Response to Mel White's What The Bible Says—and Doesn't Say—About Homosexuality*. Wheaton College: 2006). In response to the Equality Ride that Mel White's organization Soulforce brought to Wheaton, Provost Jones wrote a paper responding to White's study of the issue. One really has to read both White's pamphlet (referenced in this bibliography) and Jones' response to get the most out of it.

Piper, John & Taylor, Justin (editors). *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ*. (Crossway Books: 2005). A collection of 11 essays (including Mohler, referenced in this paper) regarding sexuality from a Calvinist perspective, the chapter entitled, "Homosexual Marriage as a Challenge to the Church; Biblical and Cultural Reflections" written by Southern Baptist Seminary President Albert Mohler, Jr. communicates a very conservative, yet (in my opinion) balanced and loving treatment on the subject of Homosexual marriage and how we are to address both the homosexual and the idea of homosexual marriage from a Biblical perspective.

Rogers, Jack. *Jesus, The Bible, and Homosexuality; Explode the Myths; heal the Church*. (Westminster John Knox Press: 2006). Rogers who is the moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) has been researching this issue for his denomination for some years. He describes his transition from a conservative traditionalist to embracing the idea that homosexuals should have their full place within the life of the church. It is a prime example of the logical conclusions a neo-orthodox perspective of scripture can lead to, and an articulate example of the revisionist point of view.

Sabatino, David, Di. *Frisbee; the life and death of a hippie preacher*. (Jester Media DVD: 2006). This DVD tells the story of Lonnie Frisbee, an influential young man (and closet homosexual) in the foundation of the Calvary Chapel and Vineyard Church movements. It provides a sobering, though somewhat slanted, look at how homosexuals are treated by the church.

Stafford, Tim. *An Older, Wiser Ex-Gay Movement* (pg 48-51) & *The Best Research Yet* (pg 52-54). Christianity Today, October 2007. This is a review of a study referenced in this bibliography—*Ex-Gays?* If one does not have time to digest the comprehensive work that Jones and Yarhouse published, the CT article is a good starting point for the conclusions that they find.

Stott, John. *Same-Sex Partnerships?: A Christian Perspective* (Revell/Baker, 1998) This very understandable booklet gives a concise argument against same-sex union (marriage/partnership) ceremonies. Using scripture, church history, pastoral care and cultural analysis, Stott outlines the arguments for and against homosexual expression—specifically in long-term committed relationships—in the church.

Via, Dan O. & Gagnon, Robert A.J. *Homosexuality and the Bible; Two Views*. (Fortress Press, 2003). This brief book takes the arguments of two opposed and respected scholars in the Christian homosexuality debate and allows them to address one another's writings. For those who want to read a truly liberal and truly conservative (yet solidly researched) treatment on the subject, this was the best such reflection I found.

White, Mel. *What the Bible Says—And Doesn't Say—About Homosexuality*. (Soulforce). Mel White at one point was a conservative pastor, professor, and author who had “struggled” against homosexuality most of his life. Eventually, after realizing that it was not going to change, he and his wife divorced, and he developed a long-term (still existing) partnership with a man. White and his partner lead a gay rights organization called Soulforce. He is a key figure in the Christian/Gay debate. This pamphlet, which can be found online at soulforce.org, concisely communicates the debate from a Christian homosexual perspective.

Winner, Laura. *Real Sex; the naked truth about chastity*. (Brazos Press: 2005). Frank talk, aimed at the twentysomething, about the reality and difficulty of the call to chastity in singleness. While this book does not address homosexuality, it digs deep into a disciplined life that both straight and gay people can embrace.

Appendix C: LIFE Pacific College Student Covenant

Life Pacific College Student Covenant

Life Pacific College has chosen to set itself apart for the purpose of training and equipping Christian servant leaders. It is crucial, therefore, that all students within the LPC community carry attitudes and behaviors that reflect the character of Jesus Christ at all times. Students, by their voluntary membership in this Christian community, agree together to assume the responsibilities to:

1. abide by all the regulations of the college, and
2. use personal discretion involving any activities which may be morally or spiritually destructive or reflect poorly on the campus community.

In particular, students agree to refrain from:

1. Possession, distribution, or use of intoxicants or illegal drugs, or tobacco products;
2. Inappropriate sexual behavior, including any conduct of sexual harassment, homosexuality, or viewing of pornography in any form;
3. Inappropriate dress;
4. Inappropriate entertainment;
5. Cheating;
6. Fighting, violence, hazing or self-inflicted harm;
7. Profanity and obscenity; and
8. Gambling.

For more detailed descriptions and expectations, please refer to the Student Standards of Conduct.

All students represent Christ and Life Pacific College wherever they are, and are expected to exhibit a distinctive Christian lifestyle in their activities, both on and off campus. Community standards and codes of conduct are in place for the express purpose of moving students towards Christian maturity and service and creating an environment that is conducive to academic learning and personal growth and development.

Agreement:

I have read the above standards of the community of Life Pacific College, and I will accept them and observe the specific standards of conduct stated here and explained further in the most recent Life Pacific College Student Handbook while I am a part of the Life Pacific College community.

I also affirm by my signature that I am a Christian and acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the Lord of my life.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

End Notes

- ¹ Veith, 153
- ² Veith, 57, 181
- ³ The Barna Group, Ltd, 2007, Ventura, California. Barna.org “A New Generation Expresses its Skepticism and Frustration with Christianity” September 24, 2007.
- ⁴ Rogers, 14
- ⁵ LPC Student Handbook, 2007-2008
- ⁶ The 8 schools contacted were: Biola Univeristy, Vanguard University of Southern California, Azusa Pacific University, Fuller Seminary, Hope International, Masters College, Kings College and Seminary, and California Baptist.
- ⁷ Fuller Seminary Guide: Fuller Seminary Sexual Standards: contact the Office of the Dean of Students, 130 N. Oakland Avenue, Pasadena CA 91182
- ⁸ Gretz, 19, 163
- ⁹ Gretz, 19
- ¹⁰ Two Views, 2
- ¹¹ ibid (two views, 2)
- ¹² Two Views, 3
- ¹³ Ibid (two views 3)
- ¹⁴ Two Views 4
- ¹⁵ Two Views 29
- ¹⁶ Two Views, 38
- ¹⁷ Soulforce.org
- ¹⁸ White, 5
- ¹⁹ White, 8
- ²⁰ White, 9
- ²¹ White, 21
- ²² Two Views, 94
- ²³ Rogers 39
- ²⁴ Rogers 70
- ²⁵ Rogers, 71
- ²⁶ Two Views, 8
- ²⁷ Rogers 71
- ²⁸ Rogers, 72
- ²⁹ Rogers 74
- ³⁰ Rogers 75
- ³¹ Ibid (rogers 75)
- ³² Rogers 76
- ³³ Rogers 78-79
- ³⁴ Jones (response to White) 22-28
- ³⁵ Two Views, 56-92
- ³⁶ Jones Response, 23
- ³⁷ Rogers, 71
- ³⁸ White, 12
- ³⁹ Jones Response 24
- ⁴⁰ Jones Response, 26
- ⁴¹ Two Views, 81
- ⁴² (Bilizekian 2).
- ⁴³ Two Views, 58
- ⁴⁴ Two Views 76
- ⁴⁵ Jones, Ex Gay, 57
- ⁴⁶ Jones, Loving Opposition, 21
- ⁴⁷ Two Views, 38
- ⁴⁸ Way Forward, 80
- ⁴⁹ Two Views, 41

⁵⁰ Loving Oppostion, 20

⁵¹ Declaration of Faith, McPherson, 1

⁵² Foursquare Licensing Process Guide (page?)

⁵³ www.foursqaure.org

⁵⁴ Sabatino, David, Di. *Frisbee; the life and death of a hippie preacher*. (Jester Media & KQED, San Fransisco: 2006). This DVD tells the story of Lonnie Frisbee

⁵⁵ Ex Gay, 29

⁵⁶ Piper, 122

⁵⁷ ExGay 16

⁵⁸ Stafford, CT 54

⁵⁹ Piper, 122

⁶⁰ Stott, 70

⁶¹ Rogers, 69

⁶² Moral Vision, 390 (The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation; A contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics. 1996 Richard B Hays. Harper Collins Publishers NY, NY.

⁶³ Forward, 149

⁶⁴ Stafford, Christianity Today, 51

⁶⁵ Tozer, 101

⁶⁶ Christianity Today, 51