

WILDWOOD COMMUNITY CHURCH ELDERS' POSITION ON MARRIAGE, FAMILY, DIVORCE, AND SEXUALITY

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Introduction

This document supports our conviction that the physical/biological family is the backbone of the Christian church and of society as a whole. Therefore, we must uphold, strengthen, and continue to build upon the biblical institutions of marriage and family.

We also understand that in the present age God has created a new spiritual family (the church), that is made up of all believing people regardless of their marital status. The existence and importance of this spiritual family is emphasized by God through the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament epistles. This spiritual family grows not by physical birth, but by spiritual birth and will continue its priority long after this life is done.

The church is the bride of Christ, and every believer (regardless of physical family status) has equal opportunity to experience the joy of producing spiritual offspring/disciples/children of God in the pattern of our Savior. With that as an introduction, we will focus the content of this paper on the physical/biological family, and the direction given to it in Scripture.

Cultural Drift from Truth

We are in the midst of a cultural revolution that is quickly eroding the historic, classic understanding of human perception and values. Relativism—the belief that what is right for one person may not be right for another—is virtually exploding. Downstream from relativism emerges another notable value: radical individualism. This value promotes thinking that says, “What an individual wills or wants is the highest good, and it is wrong to tell someone that his or her choices or beliefs are wrong or immoral. The greatest sin—in fact, the only sin—is judging someone else” (Walker, p. 23).

The core issue that society faces is what will be our basis for authority and knowledge? Who has the right to tell me what to think and do? Who has the authority to tell me how to live, or to decide what is right or wrong? Who truly knows what is best for me to think and do? Ultimately, whom can I trust?

The increasingly common response in society is: the individual, me, myself. A biblical worldview is virtually the opposite. It declares that this world has a Creator. Therefore, God himself has the right to declare what is right and wrong. As Creator, He possesses authority and knowledge. That is, He alone has the right to tell us what is right or wrong, what we should think or do. He alone possesses the knowledge necessary to determine what is best for me and for all humanity.

The strongest evidence that we can unequivocally trust him is found in the ultimate demonstration of love that He planned and accomplished on our behalf: *“For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* (John 3:16)

The first people to embrace relativism and radical individualism were Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. Satan basically claimed that they could be like God, they could be the authority, they could determine what is best to think and do. In reality, *“Adam and Eve denied God’s authority, doubted God’s knowledge, and disputed God’s loving goodness. They wanted to make the rules for themselves and remold the world to fit a new narrative, one in which they sat on the throne of their lives.”* (Walker, p. 62). Disaster, for both them and for mankind, followed soon afterward.

At Wildwood, we view the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, to be the authoritative Word of God. It is without error in all its teachings. It is the supreme authority in all matters of belief and conduct, relevant to every aspect of human life. We cannot derive truth and morality from the culture, nor from what is perceived to be the majority popular opinion.

The Bible expresses absolute truth, namely, that it is true for all times and for everyone in every place. It is the fully trustworthy account of divine revelation. Thus, our understanding of marriage, divorce, and sexuality is derived directly from God’s Word. After all, the church is to be the pillar and defender of truth (1 Timothy 3:15).

At the same time, we believe that all people matter to the Heavenly Father, and, having been created in the image of God, they should be treated with dignity and compassion. We desire for Wildwood to be a safe place for anyone to hear the life-changing gospel message of forgiveness through the glorious work of

Christ on the cross for all mankind. The Gospel is for everyone. Because God so loved the world that He gave His unique Son, our love for people compels us to welcome everyone in our community to hear the gospel message, to embrace it by faith, and to walk in obedience to the one who gave His life for us.

Jesus clearly declared that He came that we might have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10). Our desire for every human being is that they may find eternal life and forgiveness in Christ, but also that they may experience a measure of fullness in their life, a vital and authentic relationship with their Creator. This fullness can only be experienced when we align our lives with God's truth. Our aim as a church family is to emulate Jesus by being a "grace-and-truth" church (John 1:17), standing for and defending God's truth while also extending love and grace to those around us.

In recent decades, the American culture has suffered an unrelenting decline. Although scientific and technological advances have created an outer veneer of prosperity and progress, our inner moral values and convictions have rapidly crumbled. Once, most Americans based their sense of right and wrong on biblical Judeo-Christian principles, which provided them with a solid, spiritual foundation for life. Today, a growing number in our culture see morality and ethics as relative and subjective, and have developed their own version of "morality" with little regard to absolute standards.

The culture's perspective is fast becoming: what one is or how one lives is determined by what one feels. Determining reality via desire, intuition, or self-perception is a deeply dangerous practice. We must not trust our feelings simply because we feel them. Our prisons are populated with people who acted in accord with their feelings. In truth, it is a form of deception to believe that we will not be satisfied unless we indulge in what our hearts desire. Our hearts are far from pure. After all, God's assessment of the human heart is that it is more deceitful than all else and desperately sick, so that none can understand it (Jeremiah 17:9). We can rightly say that the heart is both the victim and the culprit.

The historical, biblical perspective has been: what one is or how one should live is determined by what God says in Scripture. The church is not called to coerce the culture, but to shine brightly as light, being a faithful witness to God's nature, standards, and truth while living in the midst of a crooked world

(Philippians 2:15). It must not embrace this cultural trend towards moral tolerance that has been actively eroding the foundation of the family, the church, and society.

Many Americans today have little or no concept of how to maintain a successful marriage and how to raise children to become responsible adults. In addition, a growing number of educators, politicians, judges, and members of the media are attacking and redefining the family, creating a vast amount of confusion about what a family truly is. This startling shift to moral relativism has led to a great debate about what "family values" ought to be. As the pillar and foundation of the truth, the church must point everyone to God's Word, and reject the temptation to reinterpret God's Word to accommodate cultural trends.

Abraham Lincoln once said, "The strength of a nation lies in the homes of its people." History shows that if any society wants to survive, it must uphold, strengthen, and continue to build upon the biblical institutions of marriage and family.

The Bible begins in Genesis with the marriage of a man and a woman and ends in the Book of Revelation with the marriage of Christ and His bride, the Church. In between, God provides timeless blueprints for family life, which, if followed in a spirit of humility and obedience, provide us with the only true way to maintain healthy family relationships.

Marriage

From the beginning marriage has been at center stage in God's plan for humanity. In our culture today, the reality regarding marriage is more than tragic. Although widely practiced, marriage is not held in high honor (Hebrews 13:4). Ignorance and neglect of the covenant vows of marriage is a common reality. One can simply look at the staggering marriage and remarriage rates both outside and inside the church for evidence.

As officially stated in Wildwood's Statement of Faith, **We believe God, not man, created marriage. We believe the Bible teaches that the covenant of marriage is sacred and lifelong. The Bible makes it clear that marriage is a legally binding public declaration of commitment and a private consummation between one**

man and one woman. (Genesis 2:18-25; Malachi 2:14-16; Matthew 5:27-32, 19:3-9; Ephesians 5:22-33; Hebrews 13:4).

As the inventor of marriage, God defines the nature and purpose of it. Jesus was crystal clear when He plainly stated, *“Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’”* (Matthew 19:4-5). In the original context of Genesis, the man and woman were then exhorted by God to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth (Genesis 1:28).

From the beginning of creation God designed and endorsed marriage and sex (one flesh) solely for monogamous, heterosexual unions...one man, one woman, one flesh, for a lifetime. Indeed, our natural gendered bodies reflect that purpose: men and women intricately designed to function together, to fit each other physically in a complementary manner. The man was made for the woman and the woman was made for the man.

This perfect fit has been the foundation for every human marriage since. A man was made to function sexually with a woman, and a woman with a man, to accomplish God’s intended natural purpose—to be fruitful and multiply. This was God’s original intention for marriage and sexuality, and Jesus distinctly emphasized that it remains His intention.

The unvarnished truth is that God’s design cannot be fulfilled in same sex unions. Therefore, we clearly understand that marriage was designed by our Creator to be heterosexual.

There is no biblical precedent for any same sex relationship that might be termed “marriage.” Our biblical conviction prevents us from endorsing or performing marriage ceremonies between same sex couples. Therefore, no Wildwood leader shall perform any type of marriage or similar ceremony for persons of the same sex.

We believe God gives a wife to a husband and a husband to a wife, and they are to receive one another as God's unique and personal provision to help meet their mutual needs. In one sense marriage is unique among all relationships in that it is designed to reflect the relationship between Jesus and his bride, the church (Ephesians 5:21-33). As such it was designed to be a permanent

covenant relationship (Matthew 19:6; Malachi 2:14). God does not welcome us into His family only for as long as it is convenient for Him. Rather, He permanently binds himself to His people by covenant oath.

We believe God created marriage for a husband and wife to glorify God as one flesh, to parent godly children, and to enjoy sexual pleasure. As iron sharpens iron, we believe God uses marriage to sharpen a man and woman into the image of Jesus Christ. Just as the Trinity reflects equal worth with differing roles, we believe God created a man and a woman with equal worth but with differing roles and responsibilities in marriage. The only other biblical restriction regarding a potential marriage is that a believer and unbeliever should not marry (1 Corinthians 7:39; 2 Corinthians 6:14-15).

In summary, we declare the marriage commitment must be upheld in our culture as that sacred institution of God in which men and women can experience the truest sense of spiritual, emotional, and physical intimacy, so that the two can become one. (Genesis 2:18-25; Ephesians 5:30-32; 1 Corinthians 7:3; Matthew 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9, 12:25; Proverbs 27:17; Romans 1:26-27, 8:29; Hebrews 13:4; Matthew 22:30; Deuteronomy 24:5; Song of Solomon)

Husbands

We believe God has charged each husband to fulfill the responsibility of being the "head" (servant leader) of his wife. *The husband is the head of the wife as Christ also is the head of the church* (Ephesians 5:23). We believe God created a man incomplete, and as a husband he needs his wife as his helper, a highly-dignified term used most frequently in Scripture of God himself. We believe a husband will give account before God for how he has loved, served, and provided for his wife, even as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her (Ephesian 5:25).

We wholeheartedly reject the notion that a husband is to dominate his wife. Likewise, we reject the notion that a husband is to abdicate his responsibilities to lead his wife. Rather, we believe the Bible teaches that a husband is responsible to love his wife, nourishing and cherishing her with the same dedication with which he nourishes and cherishes his own body (Ephesians 5:28). This love is to be characterized by taking the initiative to serve her, care for her, and honor her as a special gift from God. We believe his responsibility is

to protect his wife and to actively pursue providing for her physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

We also believe a husband is to seek after and highly regard his wife's perspective, opinion and counsel, and to value her as the full equal partner she is in Christ. A husband is called to live with his wife “in an understanding way,” being sensitive and considerate, nourishing and cherishing her. This implies that he is to encourage and support her in her pursuit of maturity in the Lord, and in the recognition and exercise of her gifts.

Therefore, we are committed to exhort and implore men not to abuse their God-given responsibilities as husbands, but rather to initiate a sacrificial love for their wives, in the same way Jesus Christ initiated sacrificial love for His bride, the church, and demonstrated it fully on the cross, giving himself up for her. (Genesis 2:18-25; Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7; 1 Timothy 5:8)

Wives

We believe God has charged each wife to fulfill the responsibility of being her husband's helper, as mentioned above—a highly-dignified term used most frequently in Scripture of God himself. It clearly points to being a complement to her husband. We uphold the biblical truth that she is of full equal value with her husband before God. We believe a wife will give account to God for how she has aligned with her husband's leadership, and how she has loved, respected, and given caring support to him as the equal partner she is in Christ.

When Scripture teaches that the wife is to be subject to her husband (Ephesians 5:24), this does not imply that the wife is in any way the inferior of her husband, just as Christ's submission to the Father does not impinge on the fact that the Son is fully God and co-equal to the Father. The Father and the Son are fully God but are assigned different roles within the Trinity.

We believe that the wife's responsibility is to affirm, respect, and support her husband's leadership by embracing and excelling in her responsibility as his helper. The Bible never teaches that a wife is to simply passively defer to the fleshly dominance of her husband. (Genesis 2:18-25; Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18; Titus 2:4-5; 1 Peter 3:1-6; Proverbs 31:10-12)

Fathers

We believe God has charged a father to execute the responsibilities of a true family leader. He is accountable before God to lead his family by sacrificially loving his wife and children and by providing for their physical, spiritual, and emotional needs. We believe the greatest way a father can effectively love his children is to love their mother. We believe children gain much of their concept of God from their fathers.

We believe a father should teach his children, by instruction and example, truth from the Bible and how to apply it practically in daily life. Therefore, a father should spend a quantity of time, as well as quality time, with each child. We believe a father should demonstrate godly character revealed in humility, tenderness, and patience toward his children. We believe a father should demonstrate love by practicing consistent discipline with each child.

Therefore, we are committed to turning the hearts of fathers back to their children by emphasizing the importance of their role as "father." We are committed to exhorting every father to model a love for God and His Word, to model love for his wife, and to actively love his children. (Malachi 4:6; Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:20-21; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 1 Timothy 3:4-5, 5:8)

Mothers

We believe God has uniquely designed women to be mothers. We believe the greatest way a mother can effectively love her children is to love their father. We also believe God has created a woman with a truly innate and special ability to nurture and care for her children.

Therefore, we believe mothers are the primary people who execute the vital everyday responsibilities of loving, nurturing, and mentoring children. We believe these responsibilities should be a priority for a mother as it is a very high calling. We believe our culture has clearly devalued the role of a mother by placing a greater value on activities outside the home than on those inside the home.

This does not mean that we teach that a mother cannot work outside of the home. The "excellent woman" of Proverbs 31 had activities and responsibilities outside of the home, but she saw as her first priority her ministry to her husband and her children.

We are committed to elevating motherhood by rightly assessing its exalted value in God's economy of the family. We are committed to exhorting mothers to model love for God and His Word, to model love for her husband, and to love her children. (Titus 2:4-5; 1 Timothy 5:14; 1 Thessalonians 2:7; Proverbs 14:1, 31:1-31; Deuteronomy 6:6, 11:19; Ezekiel 16:44-45)

Children

We believe children are gifts of God and should be humbly received and treated as such. We believe a child's life begins at conception. We believe children have a special responsibility to God in obeying and honoring their parents. We believe children's identities and spiritual growth are either helped or hindered by their parents' devotion to God, to one another, and to them. Parents should see themselves as God's ambassadors, working to build strong character in the lives of their children through consistent godly living, nurturing, discipline, and teaching them right from wrong. We are committed to God's plan for passing His love down through the ages by encouraging parents to love their children "so the generations to come might know" the love and forgiveness of Christ. (Ephesians 6:1-3; Colossians 3:20; Psalms 78:5-8, 127:3-5, 139:13-16; Proverbs 4:1, 6:20)

Childless Couples

We believe God has allowed some couples to be without biological children in the mystery of His sovereign plan for their lives. We believe couples without children are of no less value before God than those with children. We are committed to encouraging childless couples to pass on a Godly legacy through involvement with children and others in their immediate families, our church, our community, and possibly through adoption. (Luke 1:6-7; Romans 8:28-29)

Grandparents

We believe grandparents are to be honored as valued family members. We believe their wisdom in living should be sought and passed on to their children and their children's children. We also believe that grandparents have the responsibility of teaching and modeling to their grandchildren how to know Jesus Christ and grow in a relationship with Him, as well as passing along biblical principles for godly living. The Old Testament is filled with examples of grandfathers and grandmothers who excelled in their roles of grandparenting.

Therefore, we are committed to giving honor to grandparents by encouraging their children and grandchildren to listen to their voices of wisdom. We are also committed to exhorting grandparents to pray for and become actively involved with children and grandchildren whenever it is possible. (1 Timothy 5:4; Genesis 18:18-19; Proverbs 17:6; Psalm 78)

Singles

While singles may not have their own marriage and family, we view them as valuable members of the church family. Being single is not a second-rate lifestyle. Some singles have never married while others are divorcees, widows or widowers. Some who have never married, or who have been widowed or divorced, desire to marry. Others are content to serve God as a single person.

Paul makes clear in 1 Corinthians 7:25-35 that being single is the most advantageous situation from which to serve the Savior. Marriage makes life more complicated. One who is single can have focused preoccupation with the Lord's affairs without having to be concerned with the relational needs of a spouse and children. Singleness can be a time of undivided devotion to Christ and undistracted ministry to others. Even when a single person desires to be married one day, the prudent choice is to make the most of the benefits of singleness while in that state.

Singleness should not mean isolation. Although Paul was never married he still did ministry regularly in partnership with others. This is why we exist together as a church family. It is essential both for singles to remember that your family is the whole church, and for married members to view singles as extended members of their family.

Single Parents

We believe that, ideally, a child needs the influence of both a father and mother for healthy development in life and relationships. At the same time, we recognize that God's grace is fully sufficient and that He is a father to the fatherless and a husband to the husbandless. We also believe He is a guardian to children without a mother, and a friend to a husband who has lost his wife.

We believe God, by His grace, can use the void left from a missing parent to accomplish His eternal purposes of building Christ-like character in single parents and their children. We believe a single parent and his or her children are a family and that the Bible contains principles for them to grow as a family. We believe the local church should be a home for single parents, providing their children with godly people who serve as role models in place of the missing parent.

Therefore, we are committed to exhorting Christians within the local church to creatively help to meet the needs associated with single-parent homes. (Psalm 68:5-6; 1 Corinthians 7:32; James 1:27; 1 Timothy 5:3-16; Romans 8:28-29; Luke 18:3-5)

Broken and Blended Families

We believe God has allowed men and women, either by circumstance or by choice, to endure difficult and painful consequences in their marriages and family relationships. We also believe God gives abundant grace to broken, blended, and single-parent families.

Therefore, we believe that God can and does bless those who choose to pursue His will in remarried relationships and blended families, enabling them to employ His principles for healthy family life. We are committed to comforting, encouraging, and teaching these families God's principles of marriage and family life. We are also committed to exhorting our church to help with the burden of the broken family. (James 1:27; 1 Timothy 5:16; Philippians 4:13)

Divorce

We believe God's plan for marriage is a lifelong commitment and covenant between one man and one woman. Divorce was never a part of God's original intention for humanity. Divorce is never commanded in Scripture, but it does acknowledge it as part of the landscape of fallen humanity due to sin and the hardening of hearts. Faithfulness to the marriage covenant is always the highest aim, and, therefore, reconciliation of a broken covenant should be exhaustively pursued before any action toward divorce be contemplated.

The Bible teaches that God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). He hates it because it involves unfaithfulness to the solemn covenant of marriage, and because it brings painful, harmful consequences to every person involved. Tensions over custody, visitation, and financial support can deepen those wounds over time.

In truth, at times divorce can be more emotionally wrenching than the death of a spouse. God's hatred of divorce should not be interpreted as condemning those who themselves are not at fault, who ultimately have been victimized by the ungodly actions of others.

All followers of Jesus Christ should hate divorce as God does, and only enter it when there is no other recourse. In the church, reconciliation of a marriage should be strongly encouraged and divorce discouraged. After all, Jesus is in the transformation and restoration business. Those experiencing a broken marriage relationship often feel that things are beyond repair, that divorce is inevitable. We should remember His grace and power can restore even the most pain filled marriages.

The gospel must transform our understanding of what is possible. The gospel enables forgiveness, even in situations of grievous sin. The gospel allows even the most hard-hearted people to repent and change. Too often we are quick to adopt the mindset of the culture, demanding our rights in a difficult marriage relationship. The gospel reminds us that Jesus laid down his rights and took on the form of a servant with a view to sacrificially serve others.

We do believe that God allows for divorce in certain situations, not because He wills it, but because of the hardness of people's hearts. These concessions are always to be a last resort.

First, we believe the Bible teaches that God allows for divorce in the case of adultery and sexual sin by a partner (see Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9). The term sexual immorality [*porneia*] in Matthew 19:9 is a broad term that includes adultery, homosexuality, bisexuality, incest and other distorted forms of sexual practice.

This does not mean that divorce must occur, or even that it should occur, it is not dictated nor mandatory. Reconciliation is always the highest aim. Such a decision should be approached prayerfully, discerning the true repentance of the offending party and potentially allowing for mutual reconciliation.

Second, we believe the bible teaches that God allows for divorce when an unbelieving spouse has chosen to abandon the commitment of marriage (see 1 Corinthians 7:15...Note in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 the NASB words “*leave*” and “*depart*” are technical divorce terms in Greek).

Paul emphasizes in the above section that divorce should be avoided, if at all possible, in light of the fact that the believing partner is a conduit of God’s grace in the marriage. As is the case with sexual immorality, one should exhaust every resource and every possible avenue for restoration of a troubled marriage in seeking to maintain the covenant commitment before God.

When an unbeliever makes the decision to end the relationship, trying to keep him or her in the marriage may only create greater tension and conflict. Also, if the unbeliever leaves the marital relationship permanently but is not willing to file for divorce (due to lifestyle, irresponsibility, or to avoid financial obligations), then the believing partner is in an impossible situation of legal and financial obligations they cannot fulfill. Because the “*brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace,*” the believer has freedom to file for divorce without fearing the displeasure of God.

However, overall, we believe that it is God's priority for marital oneness to be restored, and that, through the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ, forgiveness and reconciliation can be experienced. We believe that in the unfortunate cases of abuse and abandonment, God has provided protection for an abused spouse and provision for child support through civil law, Godly counselors, the church, prayer, and other practical measures.

Special sensitivity needs to be practiced towards those caught in difficult martial circumstances not specifically addressed in Scripture such as physical and emotional abuse, along with chemical addictions, where serious dangers exist to personal health and safety. Those enmeshed in such circumstances are to be carefully counseled through the application of biblical principles and prayer as they seek to reach decisions consistent with Scripture.

We recognize that there will be members of the Wildwood family who are already divorced who struggle with guilt and condemnation from earlier marital failure. It is imperative that the church demonstrates to them Christ’s love. They have great potential for serving and honoring the Lord and must not be

viewed as “second class saints” forever tainted. We believe God can restore broken people and broken marriages by His grace, by the power of His Spirit, and by His practical truths found in the Bible. (Malachi 2:16; Matthew 5:31-32, 19:3-9; Mark 10:6-12; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:1-3; Romans 13:1-5; 1 Corinthians 7:12-16)

FAQs Related to Divorce

Q: Can two believers divorce?

A: Maybe. The only allowable concession for divorce between two believers is sexual immorality.

Q: Can a believer divorce an unbeliever simply because they are an unbeliever?

A: No. Assuming the unbelieving partner is willing to stay in the marriage, the believing partner has no grounds for divorce (apart from the biblical allowance mentioned above). Further, the believing partner should remember that they are a conduit for God’s grace to their unbelieving partner. (Note also comments above regarding issues of abuse and abandonment.)

Q: Can an unbeliever divorce a believer?

A: We would hope otherwise, but, yes, If the unbeliever initiates the divorce or leaves. The believing spouse is no longer bound by the marriage covenant.

Q: What should two believers do if they have divorced without biblical grounds?

A: They should repent and make every effort to reconcile, assuming neither have remarried.

Q: What should a believer do if he has divorced an unbeliever without biblical grounds?

A: He should repent and seek reconciliation of the marriage.

Q: What should a believer do if they are already divorced and remarried?

A: Confess and repent of any sinful contribution to the prior divorce and be fully committed to the current marriage.

Remarriage

Whenever remarriage is under consideration, several issues must be examined closely:

- 1) Grounds. Was the prior divorce on biblical grounds or not?
- 2) Responsibility. Are we dealing with the guilty party or an innocent one?
- 3) Effort. Has this person made a faithful effort to pursue the reconciliation of the previous relationship?
- 4) Aftermath. Is the previous spouse remarried or still single?

Since death breaks the marriage bond, remarriage is fully permissible for a believing widow or widower when they marry another believer (1 Corinthians 7:39).

In the case of divorce, remarriage should be permitted only when a divorce falls within biblical grounds. This is why Paul teaches that a believing woman (same would be true for a man) who wrongfully divorces should remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband (1 Corinthians 7:10—11, 39). The only time such an individual should remarry another is if the former spouse remarries or dies, since at that point reconciliation would no longer be possible.

Remarriage establishes a new marriage covenant. While scripture makes clear that spouses who wrongfully break their marriage covenant commit adultery,

the Bible never places such guilt on the partner being divorced. It seems clear that the faithful partner is free to remarry, but only in the Lord. Those who might label an innocent believer as committing adultery by entering into a new marriage, in our opinion, err greatly.

In truth, with the darkness of the human heart the potential scenarios for remarriage questions and rationalizations can go well beyond what is stated above. It is virtually impossible to address every possible remarriage scenario that might be proposed in a position paper. When such obscure and complicated situations arise, those who counsel an individual should employ biblical principles and wisdom to make the best possible determination.

While the above sections on divorce and remarriage represent Wildwood's official church position, no one on staff or in leadership at Wildwood will be asked to act against his conscience if his biblical convictions are *more restrictive* regarding divorce and remarriage. Each pastor or elder is free to defer from officiating in marrying a couple if it would violate their own conscience.

FAQs Related to Remarriage

Q: After divorce on the grounds of sexual immorality, can either spouse remarry?

A: The offended spouse is free to remarry in good conscience, but only to a fellow believer.

Q: After divorce due to abandonment by an unbelieving spouse, is the believer free to remarry?

A: Yes, they are no longer under bondage to the marriage covenant (1 Corinthians 7:15). They should, however, only marry another believer.

Q: What if someone becomes convicted of his or her unbiblical divorce and/or remarriage after remarriage has already occurred?

A: Having confessed such an error to God, they should count their new marriage relationship as God's will for them and fully seek to honor God in their current marriage.

Sexuality

Sex Outside of Marriage

Our culture today promotes a self-centered, pleasure seeking perspective on the topic of sexuality. Feelings are exalted as the ultimate authority in our lives, and the existence of objective absolutes are commonly viewed as intolerably prohibitive. The effect is to render God's Word impotent.

We believe the Bible clearly states that sexual expression between humans is reserved for a life-long marriage commitment between one man and one woman, and that sexual purity is highly valued by God.

By His design, the six sexual activities prohibited in Scripture—fornication, adultery, homosexuality, rape, incest, and bestiality—each involve sex with someone other than one's spouse. The Scriptural reality is that God gives sexual freedom only to husbands and wives, not sex with friends or casual dates, nor with long term unmarried relationships, nor with same sex partners. All prohibited sex in the Bible has one common characteristic: sex beyond that between a husband and a wife.

We believe contemporary culture is pressing single people to engage prematurely in acts that are intended only for the context of marriage. Sexual immorality (sex outside of marriage) is clearly declared to be improper, sinful, and against His revealed will (see especially, 1 Corinthians 6:18-20; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7; Hebrews 13:4). In fact, believers are counseled to “flee” from it (this is a strong directive since in English our word fugitive is derived from this Greek term “flee”), note 1 Corinthians 6:18; 2 Timothy 2:22. Paul's exhortation in Ephesians 5:3 underscores just how careful a follower of Jesus is to be in this arena: *“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual*

immorality, or any kind of impurity...because these are improper for God's holy people (NIV)."

All too frequently the relevant question among many is, do I love him/her? Do I want to be with him/her sexually? Rather than, am I married to him/her? It is vitally important to remember that God created sex, and He has sovereignly chosen to restrict it to marriage. In no way does this make God a cosmic killjoy since He gives full freedom for sexual enjoyment when it is inside of a marriage relationship.

Our culture has rejected God's plan for intimacy by promoting sexual promiscuity of various kinds, and, consequently, has brought upon itself a myriad of relational dysfunctions and even sexual diseases.

Therefore, we are committed to training parents to teach their children at an early age to respect their sexuality and to preserve their virginity and purity until marriage. We are committed to communicating to teenagers, single adults, and to married couples the message that sexual intimacy was designed by God to be available only in the context of marriage. (Genesis 2:24-25; Romans 1:24-27; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8)

Living Together Outside of Marriage

As stated above, the Scripture is clearly unambiguous in declaring that all sex outside of marriage is sinful behavior and rebellious before Him. Generally, living together as a couple is designed to experience the benefits of sexuality without the commitment that is inherent to a marriage relationship.

At times a couple may rationalize: we feel like we are married in God's eyes. It is imperative to note that the Scripture clearly states that as a believer one is to submit to the governing authorities in all things (Romans 13:1f). If the government directs that one must do _____ to be legally married, a follower of Jesus is obligated to submit and obey.

In addition, it is equally important to remember that we as followers of Jesus are called to be lights in the midst of a crooked generation. We are to display the gospel to the culture through our upright behavior (Philippians 2:15). Such a commission from the Lord of the universe compels us to follow the expected

and required marriage laws of the land. To fail to do so is to undermine the very sanctity of marriage. Indeed, every follower of Jesus is called to present his body to God as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2).

Granted it is humanly possible to live together with a member of the opposite sex without sexual involvement. We acknowledge that at times people may choose to do so for financial reasons. However, only the most naïve might deny that living with someone of the opposite sex while involved romantically would not present obvious, significant temptations to sin.

On the other hand, in being part of a church family there are always other options available rather than risking the temptation to sin and risking the testimony of Christ to the community.

Same Sex Relationships

As stated previously, it is our conviction that heterosexuality is God's design and revealed will for humankind. God created humanity in male and female forms, created for one another and to complement one another. The Creator's design is most conspicuously observed in the way He designed us to reproduce. Our bodies are not arbitrary; they are intentional. We realize this is not a politically correct perspective in a sex-saturated culture that increasingly declares that any sexual expression is right for whoever chooses it.

The issue of same sex behavior is a very emotional one for most of us because we have family members and dear friends, people that we love and care for deeply, who struggle in this arena. Our desire for them, as for all of us, is to embrace the gospel and to live in a manner that honors the Savior who bled and died in our place. No one delights in sharing truth that is both hard and may be misconstrued as rejecting people without truly loving them. Our commitment is to honor God by speaking the truth in love.

Same sex attraction and homosexual behavior are two distinct issues. We believe that same sex attraction is ultimately a consequence of the fall of humanity, and that homosexual behavior is clearly characterized by God as sin and prohibited (Genesis 19; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; 1

Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:10. For detailed interpretation of these passages see the appendix).

Whatever causal or biological roots of same sex attraction might be discovered or documented in the future, it would still not sanction or excuse homosexual behavior. Taking a clear stand that certain behavior is not equivalent to utter contempt for those who struggle with that behavior (this is true in a myriad of life situations). In interacting with the Samaritan woman in John 4, Jesus openly identified her sin (and exhorted her to cease her behavior), yet he never expresses nor had disgust for her. He was compassionate, yet without compromise.

As stated previously, at Wildwood we desire to be a “grace-and-truth” church family. We have a deep sense of compassion and empathy for our friends who struggle with same sex attraction issues. We believe that God’s grace is sufficient for every situation, even extremely difficult ones, and that there is hope and power available to any who struggle in such an arena. These are the same God-provided resources needed in dealing with heterosexual temptations as well.

Our desire and prayer for those who struggle in this manner is that they will experience his/her true identity in Christ, find victory over sinful behavior, embrace a God honoring moral lifestyle, and re-discover non-erotic friendships with people of the same sex. We believe this freedom comes through faith in Christ, experiencing the reality of the Christian’s rebirth/regeneration by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We readily acknowledge that full freedom from such struggles may not come in this life, but indeed will be reality in the age to come when we all possess a new body free from every sinful impulse.

As a church, we openly condemn any person who would express hateful harassment toward those who struggle with homosexuality. As the Body of Christ, we believe that the Wildwood family should reach out in love, truth, and compassion to effectively minister to folks who are wrestling with same sex issues. Our desire is to patiently assist them in their battle rather than to condemn or ostracize them in any way. With God, all things are possible.

Transsexualism

A rising issue in our culture relates to transsexualism, also commonly known as Gender Identity Disorder (GID) or gender dysphoria. These terms describe an individual who comes to feel that their biological gender does not match his or her self-perception of what they feel on the inside.

As is the case with same sex attraction, even if a biological cause were to be documented in such cases, it does not logically follow that embracing and pursuing such an identity is the right thing to do before God.

The Bible clearly states that God created two (and only two) genders: “male and female He created them.” (Genesis 1:27). This truth is emphasized repeatedly through both the Old and New Testaments. The modern speculation about multiple genders or gender fluidity is totally foreign to the Word of God.

The new prevailing winds of culture imply that feelings should trump facts. One will say, but I don't *feel* like a female or I don't *feel* like a male. The reigning assumption in today's culture is: if feelings are deeply ingrained, then they must be God approved and can readily be embraced as truth. As stated above, God's assessment of the human heart is that it is more deceitful than all else and desperately sick, so that none can understand it (Jeremiah 17:9).

There is no evidence that God routinely creates individuals who possess the physical genitals of a male and the heart or soul of a female (or the reverse). Maleness and femaleness are God's choice determined at conception. Biology is biology. Males have XY chromosomes and females have XX chromosomes. These chromosomes direct hormonal, physical and reproductive differences. Our maleness or femaleness can be clearly traced down to the cellular level. Despite efforts to attempt to re-direct one's gender, our chromosomes cannot be re-engineered or scrubbed from the software of our bodies.

We do recognize that on rare occurrences, as a result of the fall of mankind, the existence of chromosomal aberrancy, genetic mosaicism, embryologic developmental abnormality, and/or metabolic deficiency may result in ambiguous genitalia in a newborn. We stand graciously and prayerfully with parents in such situations as they may be called upon to make difficult decisions regarding their children who are clearly still image bearers of God. We do

maintain a distinction between conditions resulting in atypical ambiguous genitalia at birth and perceived issues of GID or gender dysphoria.

The process that produces gender dysphoria can be complicated. Growing into and embracing one's masculinity or femininity can be affected by multiple factors in early childhood that might contribute to or hinder the affirmation and validation of one's personhood.

However, it is God's intent for every male to grow into masculinity and for every female to grow into femininity. A girl may possess preferences or personality traits commonly associated in society with males, but she is still very much a female. A boy may possess preferences or personality traits commonly associated in society with females, but he is still very much a male. The Bible clearly states that men are to act and appear as men, and women are to act and appear as women (Deuteronomy 22:5). We will function this way as a church family. Those who are female at birth will be related to as female. Those who are male at birth will be related to as male.

As was stated above, being the Body of Christ we believe that the Wildwood family should reach out in love, truth, and compassion to effectively minister to folks who are wrestling with gender identity issues. Their struggle is real, including feelings of confusion, isolation, and desperation.

Our desire is to patiently assist them in their battle rather than to condemn or ostracize them in any way. The prevailing cultural viewpoint is that loving someone means giving them permission to pursue whatever they perceive will give them happiness or fulfillment. Our calling from God, for each other and with everyone, is to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

“Love does not mean looking someone in the eyes and affirming every desire they experience. Love means looking someone in the eyes and communicating the truth of Scripture. If I affirm transgenderism, I am actually doing an unloving thing. I am withholding truth. If we really care about someone, we must tell them the truth. We have to love truth so much that we care about truth more than we care about how the world thinks of us. We have to love people so much that we care about their souls more than we care about their approval.” (Walker, p. 98-99).

With God, all things are possible! We deeply believe there is hope for everyone in Christ—those with gender identity issues included—because of God’s forgiveness, grace that is available through the person of Jesus Christ, and the empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The Deceiver and Culture

The Bible teaches that there is a living Devil who is God's enemy and whose nature and objective is to lie, deceive, distort, and destroy. He constantly attacks the truth and the full reliability of God’s Word, seeking to cast doubt on its adequacy. We believe Satan has attacked God's plan for the family and sexuality from the beginning of man until now, and that he uses these issues to assault our confidence in Scripture.

When we engage in complicated arguments on hot button cultural issues that compromise the clear teaching of Scripture, we fail in our responsibility to defend God’s truth. We believe Satan uses the various aspects of the culture to promote personal independence, distort the differences between men and women, confuse their roles, and elevate personal rights over marital responsibilities.

In the end, we believe the Devil seeks to persuade people to doubt God’s Word and to move away from God's plan for intimacy and oneness and toward isolation, confusion, and divorce. (John 8:44; Genesis 3; Isaiah 14:12-14; Ezekiel 28:12-18; 1 Peter 5:8; Ephesians 6:12; 1 John 2:15)

Appendix

[A look at key Bible passages that are related to the same sex controversy]

In recent days, there have arisen new attempts to alter and rationalize the classic understanding of key Bible passages that address same sex issues. These emerging interpretations aim to abandon the historical, classic, normal understanding of God's Word by employing questionable hermeneutical techniques.

The result is that the church is left with a more culturally friendly conclusion, thus legitimizing and viewing most same-sex behavior as morally permissible. Such interpretations are the cornerstone of what is often called the "gay Christian" movement.

In truth, if one twists the Scriptures hard enough you can make them appear to say anything one pleases. Paul clearly warned that a time would come when people would not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their desires they would accumulate around themselves teachers to tell them what their ears desire to hear. The deadly result is that people turn away from the truth and embrace myths. (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

A central tenet of the Christian revisionists is that the same sex behavior condemned in the Bible is different from what modern-day LGBT Christians practice. They claim that ancient same sex behavior was abusive, exploitive, and promiscuous, quite unlike the caring, committed same sex unions of today. Claims are even made that such relationships were unknown when the Scriptures were written.

History tells us otherwise. Indeed, in the ancient near east long-term, consensual same sex relationships did exist (for example, see Kevin DeYoung's book What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality, p. 83). Not only that, but the Bible never recognizes distinctions between different types of same sex behavior. It is an unprovable assumption that Scripture condemns exploitive forms of same sex behavior while approving more consensual forms.

The piercing and pivotal question that must be asked of those who seek to promote revisionary interpretations is this: Am I trying to interpret Scripture in light of my proclivity, or should I interpret my proclivity in light of Scripture? God is the one who will judge each of our motives, but it is imperative for any expositor—and church leaders especially—to accurately handle the Word of Truth.

It is important to note that many of the passages that directly address same sex issues are passages where homosexual behavior is included in a list of behaviors which God deems as outside of His will. God doesn't attack homosexuality in some unique way. Merely, it is included by Him in a list of behaviors that are unacceptable in His eyes.

1. Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

The Classic Understanding

Homosexual behavior is addressed amidst a list of behaviors that God deems as unacceptable before Him. Taken in a straightforward manner these verses clearly indicate that God does not approve of a male who would engage another male sexually (as a male would with a female). The clear implication is that the reverse (female with a female) would also be true. Such same sex acts are classified here by God as forbidden, both detestable in His eyes and an abomination, a violation of the relational boundaries He established from the beginning. Such sinful behavior is clearly to be avoided by the believing community.

Common Revisionist Approaches

The prohibitions of Leviticus do not apply to believers today. No follower of Jesus follows all the Levitical laws. If touching the skin of a dead pig makes one unclean (Leviticus 11:8), how could any believer toss a football around? Another prohibition prohibits wearing garments of mixed fibers (19:19). We'd have to toss out most of our wardrobes!

Besides that, the same sex activity addressed in Leviticus was same sex activity related only to idolatry. Same sex activity apart from idolatry would not be prohibited, but would be permissible.

Also, some say, these restrictions refer to forcing same sex activity upon another. Consensual sex would not be prohibited.

A Biblical Response

Some parts of the Law related to dietary and ceremonial purity were intended to keep Israel distinct as a nation from the pagans around them. We are no longer under obligation as followers of Jesus to observe such regulations (Colossians 2:16-17). All foods are clean (Acts 10-11). Holy days are optional (Romans 14:5-6). The sacrificial system has been superseded (Hebrews 9:1-10:18).

Other portions of the Law addressed God's moral perspective for His people. These moral standards are transcendent and often re-surface in the New Testament. Remember, Jesus had affection for God's Law. He said, "*I did not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it*" (Matthew 5:17). Paul describes the Law as holy, righteous, and good (Romans 7:12).

While the New Testament teaches that some portions of the Mosaic Covenant, such as dietary restrictions, do not apply to followers of Christ, it also reaffirms many moral aspects of the Law, identifying such things as murder, bearing false witness, and adultery as sins.

The passages in Leviticus occur in a section where God delineates adverse moral behavior that is to be avoided. Other behavior in the same context to be avoided includes adultery, incest, human sacrifice, along with having sex with animals. God's moral law is consistent. There are several New Testament passages that also address same sex behavior.

There is no explicit statement that these behaviors were prohibited solely when they occurred in an idolatry context. In fact, think of the reverse. Would anyone want to say that incest, having sex with animals or sacrificing humans

would be acceptable behavior before God when outside of any idolatry connection?

As for regarding these verses as applying only to forced same sex behavior, that is not the clear thrust of the passage. It is vital to note that there are NO qualifying phrases or contingencies (something like: it is permissible if between consenting adults). Indeed, there are no indications at all that Moses is addressing some narrow type of homosexual behavior.

One should bear in mind that in a forced same sex situation only the aggressive party's behavior would be deemed "detestable." However, Leviticus 20:13 clearly indicates that BOTH parties would be guilty of detestable behavior, thus ruling out the concept of limiting the directive to only unwanted behavior.

2. Romans 1:26-27

The Classic Understanding

As was true in the Leviticus passages, here again same sex behavior is addressed amidst a list of rebellious and unacceptable behavior before God (see vss. 21-32). Certainly, any follower of Jesus would readily admit they themselves are guilty of one or more of the behaviors that Paul lists in this section. Paul's main point is that all humanity is deemed as sinful and lost until redeemed by Christ.

Taken in a straightforward manner these verses clearly indicate that God does not approve of a female abandoning the natural sexual relationship with a male for a sexual relationship with another female. Likewise, there is disapproval of a male abandoning the natural sexual relationship with a female for a sexual relationship with another male.

Such same sex acts (including other behaviors listed) are classified here by God as rebellious, dishonoring, and indecent, a violation of the moral boundaries He established from the beginning. Such sinful behavior is clearly to be avoided by the believing community.

Common Revisionist Approach #1

The term “natural” refers not to creation’s design, but to inner drive and sexual orientation. Here Paul is addressing heterosexually oriented people who were involved in homosexual activity (“unnatural” to them). No statement is being made about same sex behavior between those for whom it is “natural.”

A Biblical Response

Frankly, this is a highly-convoluted interpretation. Contextually, “natural” refers not to desires or how one feels, but to God’s creative design. Note that in verse 20 Paul tracks this all back to “*since creation.*” It was all “*understood through what has been made*”; it was “*evident*” (verse 19) from the beginning. In fact, in vss. 26-27 the normal words for men and women are not used, but rather the terms for males and females, emphasizing physiology and gender. This is a further allusion back to the creation account (He made them male and female).

The part of creation that applies to verses 26-27 is God’s design for marriage and male-female relationships. As Jesus said, “*Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female. For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?*” (Matthew 19:4-5).

Paul points out that to engage sexually with a same sex partner is to “*abandon*” the natural [God designed] function, or to “*exchange*” the natural [God designed] function for an unnatural [outside of God’s design] function. The term “*unnatural*” in the NASB means contrary to nature, and was used by Plato, Philo, Josephus, and others to describe homosexual practice (see Kevin DeYoung, p. 54.) Paul is stating that homosexual behavior is unnatural biologically.

Some have claimed that in the secular culture of Paul’s day the understanding “natural” and “unnatural” only pertained to aggressiveness or passivity in sex. Thus, it was natural for men to be aggressive and natural for women to be passive (and the reverse of either would be unnatural). They then postulate that such a secular understanding should be superimposed onto Paul’s statements in Romans 1.

Such a tactic is fraught with issues and indicates one is fishing for explanations to justify their position. We cannot interpret Scripture by superimposing secular ideas onto the text. As stated above, Paul clearly and repeatedly connects what is natural/unnatural back to creation and God's design.

The thrust in this section addressing human sinfulness is a repeated rebellious exchange of what is different for sameness: the Creator for created things; God for self; women for other women, men for other men. The exchange goes from man under God to man usurping God. From man over nature to man worshipping nature. From male and female connection to same sex unions. All of this is a violation of God's original design for humanity.

Common Revisionist Approach #2

In a similar manner as Leviticus 18, 20, this passage only prohibits homosexual behavior that grows out of idolatry and its practices. After all, idolatry is mentioned in verses 23 and 25.

A Biblical Response

As in the situation in Leviticus, there is no explicit statement that these behaviors were prohibited solely when they occurred in an idolatry context. One must remember that homosexuality is but one of a list of rebellious behaviors in the overall section. It would be absurd to claim that behaviors like wickedness, greed, murder, inventing of evil, and disobedience to parents would be prohibited only when connected with idolatry.

Common Revisionist Approach #3

Romans 1:26-27 only restricts exploitive, coercive same sex behavior (like in the situation of prostitution or slavery), or lust driven same sex relationships. Long term, committed same sex relationships were permissible. In fact, some would say, Paul was unaware of loving, long term same sex relationships in his day.

A Biblical Response

A common tendency of every generation is to think arrogantly about their generation being the most enlightened generation. That Paul and his

contemporaries were supposedly unaware of long term same sex relationships is patently untrue. In Paul's day, there were a number of publicly known, long running same sex relationships. There were even some situations (men-men, women-women) that were viewed by some as "semi-official" marriages.

The Jewish historian Josephus was a contemporary of Paul. In his writings, he summarized the understanding of the day this way, "The law [of Moses] recognized only sexual intercourse that is according to nature, that which is with a woman...it abhors the intercourse of males with males" (Against Apion 2.199).

Again, the claim arises that it is exploitive relationships that are being prohibited in Romans 1. As with Leviticus, it is vital to note that there are NO qualifying phrases (something like: it is prohibited in exploitive, coercive relationships, but permissible if between consenting adults). Indeed, there are no indications at all that Paul is addressing some narrow type of homosexual behavior. Verse 27 indicates that BOTH parties to the behavior are "burning in their desire toward one another."

To claim that same sex behavior is acceptable when the partners have a caring and loving relationship, but not so when it is casual and lust based is virtually untenable and nonsensical. It would be like saying fornication (sex outside of marriage) Girls Gone Wild/spring break style is wrong, but it is acceptable when there is a caring and loving relationship.

3. 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10

The Classic Understanding

Again, in these passages we see homosexual behavior not isolated, but occurring in a list of behaviors that are identified as unrighteous and contrary to sound teaching. Paul is pointing out that the personal conduct of followers of Jesus should be in sharp contrast to the unbelieving world. God does not single out homosexual behavior per se, nor describe it in detail here, but sees it as an example of behavior outside of His will.

Paul utilizes two terms to describe homosexual behavior: *malakos* (NASB “effeminate” in I Corinthians 6:9) and *arsenokoites* (NASB “homosexual” in 1 Corinthians 6:9, 1 Timothy 1:10). Paul appears to have coined the latter term by taking two words (male and bed) from the Greek Septuagint translation of Leviticus 20:13 and combining them into a new word. This clearly points to these passages being a continued thread of truth from the Old Testament to Paul’s day. The former term, *malakos*, refers to the passive partner in a same sex relationship or a male who exhibits feminine orientation and disposition. The ESV combines both terms and translates them with the phrase, “*men who practice homosexuality.*”

Common Revisionist Approach

Some say these terms refer merely to prostitution and the buying and selling of sex, thus not applying to loving homosexual relationships. Others contend that both terms are used in the centuries after Paul with meanings that go beyond homosexual implications. Their claim is that Paul was using the terms in the same broad manner.

A Biblical Response

The continuity of teaching connected back to Leviticus is hard to deny. The Hebrew in Leviticus 20:13 uses the terms *zakar* (male) plus *mishkab* (bed), and the Greek Septuagint translation follows the same pattern, *arsen* (male) plus *koite* (bed), speaking of a male who beds a male like one might bed a female. Paul picks up on this as he coins the term *arsenokoites* (Paul coined some 179 terms in his writings), continuing the picture of a male who beds another male.

There is nothing in this term that implies the buying and selling of sex, nor gives any hint of prostitution. In other external Greek occurrences of the term it is never restricted to prostitution. Neither is there anything is what Paul states that would limit the addressed behavior to exploitive sexual acts.

The most respected Greek lexicon ([A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3rd Edition, W. Bauer \(Author\) and F.W. Danker \(Editor\), University of Chicago Press, 2001](#), commonly known as BAGD) gives the following definition to these terms: *arsenokoites* = a male who

engages in sexual activity with a person of his own sex (p. 135), *malakos* = pertaining to being passive in a same-sex relationship (p. 613). *Malakos* carries the idea of soft and it is used that way in the New Testament.

While it is true that in the centuries following Paul's writing both terms began to be used in a broader sense, we still see the strong connection to Leviticus and we must not allow the evolution of word meaning to retroactively apply back to Paul. It should be noted that both these key terms follow two other terms that refer to sexual intercourse (fornicators and adulterers). For deeper study on the meaning of these two terms see The Bible and Homosexual Practice, Gagnon, p. 303-339; and Unchanging Witness, Fortson and Grams, p.277-301.

It is imperative to reiterate that while the Bible is not fixated on homosexual behavior, when it is addressed the Bible is quite clear. At the same time, we must all be reminded that homosexual behavior is but one arena of sexual brokenness. In truth, the heterosexual community has done far more to distort God's design for marriage through the pursuit of lust, abuse, unfaithfulness and divorce. Those with heterosexual orientation should not view themselves as morally superior. Everyone who practices behavior outside of God's design has an imperative call to repent.

Joe Dallas speaks eloquently when he reminds each of us:

"Paul describes an internal war we as believers experience on a regular basis: a relentless conflict between the desires of our flesh, which are invariably ungodly, and those of our new spiritual nature, which tend toward life and righteousness (Romans 7:15-25; Galatians 5:16-25). Nowhere does he suggest this struggle will end in this life. On the contrary, he virtually promises it will continue, sometimes ferociously, sometimes mildly.

"Because of this, he encourages us to put to death desires that seem natural to us (Romans 6:12-14) and yield our bodies daily to God's will and service (Romans 12:1). If, in the process of doing this, we find our carnal desires diminishing, so much the better. But it's obedience, not absence of temptation, that God requires.

”In light of this we can sympathize with the deeply ingrained nature of homosexuality, no matter what its origins, as we realize our own deeply ingrained sinful desires. And since no human being chooses the inherited Adamic nature, we can concur that homosexuals, by and large, have not chosen their orientation. But we can and must declare that if they claim to belong to Christ, then they, like us, are required to put aside what seems natural, deeply ingrained, and even unchangeable within, and submit themselves as living sacrifices to God, yielding to His purposes instead of those passions. Only then can they, or any of us, find true peace.” (Dallas, p.213)

There is always hope for victory in Christ. Paul celebrates in 1 Corinthians 6:11, *Such were some of you, but you were washed, you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.*

Recommended resources for more detail on same sex issues and Bible passages:

[What Does the Bible Teach about Homosexuality?](#) by Kevin DeYoung

[The Gay Gospel](#) by Joe Dallas

[God and the Transgender Debate](#) by Andrew Walker

[The Bible and Homosexual Practice](#) (detailed interpretation) by Robert Gagnon

[Unchanging Witness](#) (detailed history of interpretation) by Fortson and Grams

Also see this web link for further resources, including testimonies of those who have experienced victory in dealing with same sex attraction:

<http://wildwoodchurch.org/current-resources/>

Some portions of this position paper include phrases from other position statements from a variety of sources. We are grateful for the labor of others in helping to bring biblical clarity to these important issues.