

Position Paper on Human Sexuality and Gender

As of November 11, 2015

This paper articulates a biblically informed theological position on human sexuality and gender and presents a whole person perspective on this subject. From it, policies and procedures may be developed at Oral Roberts University (ORU) to fulfill its institutional mission to “build Spirit-empowered leaders through whole person education to impact the world with God’s healing.” This document describes ORU’s sincerely held religious beliefs and doctrinal positions on this important subject.

There are certain segments of Christianity that dismiss as irrelevant any interpretations of biblical passages that disapprove of certain sexual relationships and activities. Instead, they promote other interpretations that endorse these relationships and activities.² As Spirit-filled Christians who accept the Bible as our rule of faith and conduct and who are engaged in whole person education, we cannot reject hermeneutically sound interpretations of scripture on the subject of human sexuality or accept other interpretations that emphasize personal experience over biblical authority. Nor can we accept changing public opinion as the standard of our convictions regarding human sexuality. We believe we can and must be true to the scripture while offering love, hospitality, and wholeness to all persons.

Biblical Witness

Several passages in the Bible inform our understanding of human sexuality and provide divine guidance on sexual practices. The major passages are Genesis 1:27; 2:23-24; 19:5 (4-11); Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Matthew 19: 1-12; Romans 1:26, 27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; and 1 Timothy 1:10. We approach these texts with the understanding that “all scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). As we review these passages, informed by biblical scholarship, we acknowledge that Christians have wrongly used certain biblical passages in the past—for example, to condemn Galileo for his scientific discovery, and to support and defend the evil of slavery. We interpret the passages above, therefore, not only with

²See Shelby Spong, *The Sins of Scripture: Exposing the Bible’s Texts of Hate to Reveal the God of Love* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009).

humility, but also with what is called a “Pentecostal hermeneutic,” which seeks not only the historic meaning of the biblical texts, but also asks the reflective question, What is the Holy Spirit saying through these texts to us now?³

Genesis 1:27 and 2:23-24

The first chapter of the Bible establishes the uniqueness of human creation: “So God created man (‘*adam*) in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male (*ish*) and female (*ishah*) He created them” (Gen 1:27). God declares that while creation is good, man being alone is not good (Gen 2:18). God creates a female to remedy the male’s loneliness, and Adam receives her with the words, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man” (Gen 2:23). Genesis then states, “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Gen 2:24). Genesis testifies to an order of sexuality and form of sexual expression in which male and female, both made in the image of God, join together to become one flesh. In God’s good creation, gender is specific and sex is distinct. Human gender as male and female, determined by God’s creative intent at conception and made manifest at birth, is an enduring and stable biological characteristic.

In Genesis, Eve complements Adam, but is not identical to him. Male and female complement each other, cooperate with each other, and are capable of becoming one flesh. The model of marriage in Genesis is male and female becoming one flesh, complementing one another, cooperating with each other, and fulfilling God’s purpose. In his discourse on marriage and divorce, Jesus affirms this understanding of marriage between one man and one woman for life (Matt 19:4-6).

Genesis 19:4-11, 24-25

The story of two angels perceived as men visiting Abraham’s nephew Lot in Sodom is given in Genesis 19. Lot welcomed them, inviting them to his house to spend the night, and offered them hospitality. Before his guests went to bed, however, the men of Sodom surrounded his house, demanding that he release his guests so that they could know (*yada*) them.

³Jacqueline Grey, *Three’s a Crowd: Pentecostalism, Hermeneutics, and the Old Testament* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 11-12.

The word *yada* is used for sexual intercourse on the part of both men and women in the well-known euphemism “Adam knew Eve his wife,” and its parallels (Gen 4:1; 19:8; Num 31:17, 35; Jud 11:39; 21:11; 1 Sam 1:19; 1 Kgs 1:4;). It is used as well to describe sexual perversions such as sodomy (Gen 19:5; Jud 19:22) and rape (Jud 19:25).⁴ Lot refused to offer up his guests and tried to discourage the men of Sodom from doing this “wicked thing,” but they became angry and attempted to break down the door. The angels struck them with blindness and thwarted the attack. They advised Lot to flee the city, and as Lot and his family left, God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone. Ever since, Sodom stands as a symbol of God’s judgment against homosexuality. Concerning the egregious sin of Sodom noted in this passage, Claus Westermann writes: “The gravity of the sin of Sodom (Gen 18:20-21) is explicated in 19:4-11 in such a way that the narrative combines two crimes, each of which is serious in itself: unnatural lust (Lev 18:22) and the violation of the right of guests to protection.”⁵

There are thirteen references to Sodom in the Old Testament following Genesis 19 and eight in the New Testament. Liberal interpreters point out that Sodom’s sin was not homosexuality, but poor hospitality, attempted gang rape, aggression, dominance, and lack of concern for the poor.⁶ Although these are also Sodom’s sins, 2 Peter 2:7 and Jude 7 explicitly point out their pervasive sexual sin. Scripture points out that God wants His people to avoid excessive lust and the practice of homosexuality. According to Leviticus 18, they are to live in holiness according to His code of ethics.

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

The Book of Leviticus provides a blueprint for holy living. When the laws against homosexual practices in Leviticus, particularly in chapter 18, are taken in the context of God’s call of His people to holiness (18:1-5; 18:13), it becomes clear that there are two categories of laws in this book: 1) those locally applicable to Israel, and 2) those globally

⁴R. Laird Harris, Gleason J. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, “*yada*,” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 366.

⁵Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1981), 301.

⁶Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian* (New York: Convergent Books, 2014), 65-72.

binding on all people. The record of God's judgment of the Canaanites for committing sexual sins (Lev 18:24-25) confirms the universality of the sexual codes in Leviticus. It should be noticed that Jesus' teaching on marriage, divorce, and sexual sins also affirms the universality of Levitical laws regarding sexuality.

Kevin DeYoung discusses the sexual sins in Leviticus 18. He notes that "all the sexual sins in Leviticus 18 are lumped together under the term 'abominations,' but only male-with-male sex is singled out by itself as an abomination." He further states, "In fact, it is the only forbidden act given this label in the entire Holiness code. The death penalty for both parties also speaks to the seriousness of the offense in God's eyes."⁷

Matthew 19:1-12

It is true that Jesus never specifically denounced homosexual behavior, but his statements about marriage and divorce express his understanding of human sexuality and its proper expression. Jesus affirmed the Genesis account of the creation of human beings as male and female and God's design that they become one flesh. He added the injunction regarding marriage, "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matt 19:6). This text does not support the idea that Jesus had homosexuality in mind when he made this declaration. Jesus viewed marriage as heterosexual only and divorce as restricted. Additionally, his comments about three types of eunuchs—by birth, by intervention, and by choice—highlight celibacy as an acceptable option for those with a higher calling for the sake of the kingdom of God, but in no way affirm homosexual practices (Matt 19:12).

Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 11

In dealing with issues of *porneia* (best translated as "sexual immorality"), Paul defines as immoral *any* sexual intercourse apart from marriage. In his day, all Jews and almost all Gentiles would assume marriage to be heterosexual only. As a result, in the sexual ethical sections of his writings, Paul spends a majority of his efforts criticizing heterosexual immorality rather than homosexual immorality. Romans 1 is a theological

⁷Kevin DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2015), Kindle Edition, n.p.

history of the world and paganism and its relationship with the Creator.⁸ The problem with pagans, according to Paul, is that they have rejected their Creator. He uses the illustration of homosexuality as an example of a society where idolatry reigns (i.e., a society where the image of God is rejected). Paul considers homosexual expressions “dishonorable” and “against nature,” an outcome of exchanging “the truth about God for a lie,” and worshipping and serving “the creature rather than the Creator” (Rom 1:25).

In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Paul is writing about "wrongdoers" and states that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God. He then goes on to list types of wrongdoing that will keep one from the kingdom. Among this list of wrongdoing, Paul repeats offenses that he has already set forth in 5:11 as requiring exclusion from the community (fornicators, idolaters, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers) and adds four new categories. Two of these (adulterers and thieves) merely recite the Decalogue. The other two terms discussed below deal with homosexual conduct.

The first term, *malakoi*, is widely attested in literature; it literally means "soft" and may refer to men and boys in a sexual relationship.⁹ This term has also been translated as "effeminate," and refers to male prostitution, and is used “pejoratively for men who had an effeminate nature and took a passive role in a sexual relationship.”¹⁰ This term is likely to be connected to the second term, *arsenokoitai*, that follows it in Paul's list in 1 Corinthians 6:9, which may be translated as a pederast, a male prostitute, or “a man who engages in sexual activity with a person of his own sex.”¹¹ It seems to be a general term for men who engage in same-sex intercourse and most likely refers to men or boys who take the female role in sexual intercourse.

The Greek term *arsenokoitai* is exclusive to Paul. In both passages using this term, 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1:10, Paul's message is clear: It is a prohibition similar to Leviticus 18:22. Liberal theologians' argument that this term refers only to male prostitution, not homosexuality, does not cancel the prohibition nor limit it to the context of

⁸ N. T. Wright, *Romans*, The New Interpreter's Bible, vol. 10 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 430-435; Michael L. Brown, *Can You Be Gay and Christian: Responding with Love and truth to Questions about Homosexuality* (Lake Mary: Frontline, 2014), 171-185.

⁹ Frederick Danker, “*malakoi*,” *The Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 613.

¹⁰ Danker, 135.; Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, eds., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. and upd. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 309.

¹¹ Maurice A. Robinson and Mark A. House, eds., “*arsenokoitai*,” *Analytical Lexicon of New Testament Greek*, rev. and upd. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2012), 50; Danker, 135.

prostitution. Paul pronounces a grave warning here to those who practice homosexuality: They cannot inherit the kingdom of God. We must reckon with Paul's sobering warning; however, it does not have to lead to despair. He reminds his readers that, "(And) such were some of you, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11). For these believers, homosexual activity was a part of their past, not their present. Paul goes on to invite them to live as "the temple of the Holy Spirit," honoring God with their bodies (1 Cor 6:19-20).

Theological Conclusions

The biblical witness in these passages leads to several theological conclusions. God's creation has continuity, unity, diversity, intent and purpose, uniqueness, and complementarity. Both the relational and functional understandings of the concept of "image of God" require accountability, responsibility, and intentionality from men and women. God's desire from the very beginning was humanity's well-being, wholeness, and fruitfulness, but willful disobedience produced a drastically different outcome.

The fall was devastating to the whole creation as it brought sin and death into the world. Instead of well-being and wholeness, brokenness and suffering became the tale of humankind, each person living in broken relationships with God, others, and self. This brokenness began to express itself in all dimensions of life, including sexuality. All sexual sins are expressions of this brokenness. Indeed, "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23), and redemption is available only in Jesus Christ.

God's plan to redeem His creation began as He revealed himself to Adam, Abraham, and Moses, and called for Himself a people (Israel). He called them to holiness, requiring them to obey His laws designed for their own well-being. Leviticus gave specific laws regarding relations and functions. Specific laws prohibited certain sexual behaviors. God required that His children stand out from other nations in this regard.

Israel failed God by not keeping His laws. Seeing their failure, God sent His Son into the world to fulfill the Law. It appears that in fulfilling the Law, Jesus made some Old Testament laws more demanding and others less binding. Adultery can happen in thought now (Matt 5:28), but one may disregard ceremonial washing or traditional Sabbath restrictions (Matt 12:1-12). He affirmed, without intensifying or relaxing, the Genesis account of the creation of human beings as male and female and their design and potential

to become one flesh (Matt 19:6). While he did not abolish divorce in all situations, he required that man should not separate those whom God joined together (Matt 19:6-9). He valued celibacy as a positive choice for those with a special calling (Matt 19:12). While Jesus never spoke against homosexual acts, most likely because the Judaism of his day already prohibited it, he expressly affirmed male-female union in the Genesis way and endorsed heterosexual union with an anti-divorce bias.

The human body is designed to be the dwelling place of God's Spirit. Human beings are called to be good stewards of their bodies. All sexual sins distort this stewardship. True redemption is not claiming freedom by normalizing distortions or rejecting a God-given body by calling it oppressive. True freedom is living in harmony with God, others, and self. It is giving one's brokenness over to God and living by grace each day, depending on the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome temptations. Jesus Christ heals our brokenness, including our desires and actions that contradict our true nature and enslave us. God through His Son will heal the brokenness of all of creation.

All believers are called to glorify God in body and spirit (1 Cor 6:19), leaving the "works of the flesh" behind, including all sexual sins—heterosexual and homosexual—to follow after righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17). They are instructed to be filled with the Spirit, flowing in the gifts of the Spirit, and developing the fruit of the Spirit, which includes self-control (Gal 5:22).

Christians are called to live by faith and walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16; 2 Cor 5:7). The followers of Jesus are called to live crucified lives in this world, living by faith "in the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself for us" (Gal 2:20). It is impossible to please the Lord without faith (Heb 11:6), and to see the Lord without holiness (Heb 12:14). A sanctified life is required of all disciples of Jesus Christ (Lev 20:7; 1 Pet 1:15-16). All are accountable to God (Rom 14:12). No one is exempted from the responsibility to flee from fornication (1 Cor 6:18), idolatry (1 Cor 10:14), and youthful lusts (2 Tim 2:22). All are called to count the cost (Luke 14:28), take up the cross (Matt 16:24), and follow Christ. We are to bear one another's burdens in this journey of faith (Gal 6:2).

Willful sin can prevent our future entry into the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9). We must heed this warning, but it should not cause us to despair because fallen humanity has hope in Jesus Christ (Col 1:27). Christians are people of hope. We are an eschatological

people who bear witness to the saving, healing, and sanctifying power of the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:10), the redemptive value of His blood (Heb 13:12), and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 6:11). Oral Roberts was right when he taught that healing can be instant, gradual, and ultimate.¹²

A Whole Person Perspective

How shall we embody this understanding of brokenness, holiness, and hope at a university called to be the premier institution of higher learning within the Spirit-empowered movement? ORU is an institution involved in whole person education. This university seeks students who are on a quest for wholeness.¹³ Education at ORU is a journey toward wholeness. ORU is a place of learning and development in body, mind, and spirit. The Holy Spirit empowers this community in its learning/healing work. The ORU Catalog states, “Since the key distinctive of Oral Roberts University is healing...all of the university courses seek to educate students toward healing and restoration in every facet of society.”¹⁴ In the founder’s words to the first class on September 7, 1965, “Wholeness is a way of life here. It’s something you can get; it’s something you can become. You can leave as the whole person God intended you to be....while we are innovators in educational techniques, we are definitely old-fashioned when it comes to Christian morals and character....Along with your academic progress and your physical fitness, we expect you to be open to the creative activity of the Holy Spirit in your inner man, indeed in your whole person. The focus is to assist students to develop a Christian worldview...”¹⁵

ORU is a community of faith and formation committed to natural and supernatural truth¹⁶ and covenant living based on an Honor Code that has been in place for fifty years. Rooted in the Holiness-Pentecostal tradition and built from the fires of 20th century healing evangelism, ORU endeavors to exemplify the highest ideals of a Spirit-filled Christian community. ORU is a distinctively Christian Spirit-empowered institution. It is an

¹²Thomson K. Mathew, and Kimberly Ervin Alexander, “The Future of Healing Ministries,” in *Spirit-Empowered Christianity in the 21st Century*, ed. Vinson Synan (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2011), 23.

¹³*Oral Roberts University Catalog 2014-2015*, vol. 33, no. 1, ed. Linda Gray (Tulsa, OK: Oral Roberts University, 2014), 13.

¹⁴*Oral Roberts University Catalog 2014-2015*, 12.

¹⁵*Oral Roberts University Catalog 2014-2015*, 13.

¹⁶*Oral Roberts University Catalog 2014-2015*, 12.

interdenominational global university which believes that “self-discipline and learning should go hand-in-hand to build character...”¹⁷

The Christian worldview fostered at ORU compels the entire community to conform to a whole person lifestyle. This includes acceptance of the Honor Code, and biblical standards of Christian living, marriage, and sexual practices. Involvement in homosexual practices and same-sex marriage are considered inconsistent with the word of God. Yet that same worldview also demands that we love individuals dealing with same-sex attraction, same-sex orientation, and transgender issues as our neighbors, even though we cannot approve homosexual practices or same-sex marriages. Jesus’ concept of neighbor and the biblical idea of hospitality guide us in this approach. All individuals are persons of value, made in the image of God, and deserve redemptive hospitality from all who call themselves disciples of Jesus Christ.

Institutional Commitments

ORU affirms the following:

- 1) Embracing the whole person philosophy that views the entire person—body, mind and spirit—as belonging to God and valuable to Him, the university considers human sexuality a gift of God, with sexual intercourse properly expressed only within a marriage between a man and a woman.
- 2) Affirming the value of all persons (Gen 1:20) does not entail condoning any conduct or lifestyle inconsistent with the word of God. Heterosexual sins and homosexual practices are not consistent with a Spirit-filled life and whole person lifestyle.
- 3) It is never our intent to shame persons who struggle with sexual issues. Instead, we wish to offer them supportive assistance in Christian love to live the godly lifestyle envisioned in the ORU Honor Code.
- 4) While recognizing that some persons experience homosexual attraction, we deny that this force eradicates the capacity of free will and the choice to desist or to seek the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome temptation.

¹⁷*Oral Roberts University Catalog 2014-2015*, 12.

- 5) Our relationship to God and commitment to His claim on our lives as members of the kingdom of God give us our identity as Christians. Sexual orientation and other individual characteristics are secondary to this primary identity.
- 6) We believe that God is the author of gender. Congruence between created design (male and female) and an individual's experience of personhood was intended from the beginning. Inconsistency in this matter reveals that our world is broken physically, psychologically, and spiritually.
- 7) Human beings should seek peace and healing from any conflicts or incongruence between their sex and gender identification in a manner consistent with God's design and creative order.
- 8) As an interdenominational and global Spirit-empowered institution of higher learning, ORU believes strongly in addressing human sexuality and gender issues with pastoral concern and redemptive hospitality. Our overarching goal is always healing and wellness of the whole person and the fulfilling of God's ultimate purposes for humanity.

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