

## Homosexuality & Same-Sex Union

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Review and summarized by Fr. Richard Demetrius Andrews

Genesis 1:27 <sup>27</sup>*So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*

### The Sacramental Character of Christian Marriage, p.6

Christian marriage is not a merely a civil contract, partnership for pleasure's sake, nor an economic convenience. It is not an institution that serves solely human needs and desires. It is not merely about civil liberties or their guarantee.

The Church embraces a biblical anthropology and theology of marriage that guides sexual ethics. The Epistle of the Orthodox Christian marriage service is from St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians 5:24-31.

<sup>22</sup>*Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup>For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. <sup>24</sup>Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. <sup>25</sup>Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, <sup>26</sup>that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, <sup>27</sup>that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. <sup>28</sup>So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup>For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. <sup>30</sup>For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. <sup>31</sup>“For this reason a **man** shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his **wife**, and the two shall become one flesh.” <sup>32</sup>This is a great **mystery**, but I speak concerning Christ **and the church**. <sup>33</sup>Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

According to St. Paul, marriage is about our eternal destiny. God Himself has given marriage a redemptive purpose, and established it as a sacrament of entry and participation in his everlasting kingdom. It is a visible sign of the mystery of our life in Christ.

Long before St. Paul wrote on these matters, the Hebrew prophets had described the relationship of God and Israel through the image of the conjugal union of man and woman, groom and bride (see Jer.3:6; Ezek.16:26-29; Hosea 2:14 – 3:1; 4:12-13). St. Paul extended this analogy of marriage and Israel's relationship with God to Christ and the Church.

Through marriage, God graciously encourages and enables husbands and wives to persevere in holiness toward the end of eternal life with Him. The crowning of bride and groom in the marital rite inaugurates this lifetime of mutual love, spiritual combat and sacrifice together to earn and receive the heavenly nuptial crowns. The Church interprets the story of the wedding in Cana of Galilee (John 2:1-11; also the Gospel reading of the Orthodox Christian marriage service) in the Gospel of John to signify that Christ is present at every Christian marriage and that He elevates fallen “natural” marriage to a sacrament (mystery is the Greek term) of the heavenly kingdom in the same manner as He transformed the water into wine. Likewise, the Book of Revelation describes the reception of the saints into the kingdom of heaven as a wedding banquet. God announces: “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev.19:9).

### The Two Shall Become One Flesh, p.8

Jesus echoes the Book of Genesis when He answers to His Pharisee interrogators:

<sup>4</sup>*And He answered and said to them, “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ <sup>5</sup>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)*

We read in the Book of Genesis that God said: <sup>18</sup>*And the Lord God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.” (Gen.2:18)* Eve is Adam's own self-reflection, like the image of oneself in a mirror, though in this case, not a reverse image. The woman is like the man, but not male, rather his

perfect complement, each belongs with the other and is responsible for the other so that together they grow increasingly in holiness and more perfectly human.

Without Eve, Adam was not just alone but also unaware of the fullness of his humanity as a moral and social being... The Book of Genesis is clear. Male and female (not male and male) are necessary to fulfill this human potential. Together, male and female constitute a plenitude of being that alone possesses also the power of procreation.

### **Sacrament of Re-union, p.9**

Marriage is not just a sacrament of union but also a sacrament of re-union. Marriage is re-union because the deepest, the most severe and enduring harm that the original, ancestral sin brought upon humankind is the radical alienation of male and female.

Adam blames Eve for having broken God's command not to eat of "the tree in the midst of the garden" (Gen.3:3); and Eve blames the serpent. Mutual misunderstanding and recrimination compromise and confound the relationship of man and woman.

The consequences are ruinous. God says to Eve "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Gen.3:16). This is not a command but rather a prognostic curse. But it is not Eve alone who suffers the consequences of original sin. Adam is deprived of an equal partner. Henceforth, the Woman has become an object of the Man's self-serving will rather than his "soul mate."

Sin engenders carnal attraction that diminishes the integrity of the sexes and sets male and female at cross-purposes through lust and a perpetual struggle for power over one another. Through sacred marriage, God aims to redeem the sexes and to restore the divine image in them by their re-union.

St. Basil the Great (330-79), commenting on the Book of Genesis, identifies this reparative, redemptive and unitive meaning of marriage in a simple prayer: "May the bond of nature, may the yoke imposed by the blessing make as one those who were divided." The highest good of Christian marriage is not the pleasure of coitus, not even the blessing of children. Rather it is a spiritual love and union in Christ that restores "the relic (the ruined image)" that was humankind's at creation and damaged by the "original disobedience."

### **The Ethics of Homosexuality, p.12**

First, we need to recognize that homosexuality and same-sex union are two discrete religious and moral issues. So-called gay marriage is a subset of same-sex union.

Speaking from the Christian vision, there simply is no such thing as same-sex marriage. Christianly speaking, same-sex marriage is a non sequitur, a contradiction in terms.

### **Homosexual Behavior and Homosexual Orientation are not the same, p.13**

We must be careful to observe that in ancient times the issue at hand was homosexual behavior and not what today we call "homosexual orientation." The Bible and the Church Fathers condemn the commission of homosexual acts, whether the person who behaves that way identifies themselves as gay or not.

The ancient world did not possess a concept of fixed sexual orientation. In other words, the ancients did not speak of the alternatives of heterosexuality and homosexuality. This form of speech emerged fully only in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. In early Christian thought, the temptation to engage in homosexual acts was simply taken to be a part of the sinful human condition. It was assumed that all men and women are in jeopardy of falling to that temptation.

Today we are aware that some people have an underlying condition of erotic attraction (a predisposition) toward persons of their own sex. And while this is by no means an exact science, we know that the sources and causes of this condition are complex and multifactorial: a combination of genetic makeup, intrauterine and postnatal influences, parental and sibling relationships, and personal choices.

Some homosexual behavior is wholly voluntary and some is quite involuntary; much is somewhere in-between these two poles.

### **Blameworthiness and Badness, p.15**

Some homosexual acts are the manifestation of uncontrollable urges and may even be in conflict with the deepest desires of the person who performs them. When homosexual behavior is largely out of a person's control (involuntary), we can judge that while the person's actions are bad (sinful), the person should not be held blameworthy. We will condemn the sin but not the person.

However, how is the Church to respond to persons who insist that their homosexual behavior is fundamentally who they are, that "God made me how I am" or that "nature made me this way"? These are subjective claims. Scientifically speaking, there is no such a thing as a distinctively gay identity.

### **Gay Identity, p.16**

Choice may not be the determining factor in “homosexual orientation”. However, gay identity is chosen. Gay identity, “being” gay, is to a large degree, what sociologists call a social construct. In our cultural context, if a person says that he is gay, to one extent or another, that person is choosing an identity. Even if it is determined that this person’s homosexuality is uncontrollable, we might still justifiably hold him/her blameworthy for deliberately adhering to an identity that behavioral characteristics of which are immoral.

### **What is “Natural” may not be “Normal”, p.17**

Person are not gay in the same objective way that they are male or female, right handed or left handed. It might well be that in some persons a sexual attraction to persons of the same gender is more nearly analogous to alcoholism or other addictive pathologies. From the Christian perspective, what is “natural” is not necessarily what is the will of God or what belongs to His original creation before the Fall. What nature produces may be disordered by original sin.

It is science’s work to record, describe and as best it can, account for what occurs in nature, making no distinction between original creation and fallen nature. Yet medicine calls something a disease when it judges that a condition or behavior is abnormal. Modern medicine is not merely a physical science; it also is an art. Medicine regularly borrows criteria for discriminating between normality and abnormality, wellness and illness, from the culture, from religion, from philosophy and current opinion.

For instance, in modern times, psychiatry has shifted from a description and treatment of homosexuality as a serious personality disorder to the less severe classification as a mental disorder that is of medical concern only when a patient is distressed by a persistent need or impulse to change sexual orientation. The phenomena have not changed, nor the basic means of identifying them, but the values that medicine has assimilated from the culture and with which it makes evaluative judgments have changed.

Even if a “gay” gene were found (not something likely, since no behavioral is simply genetically caused), this would not refute the moral prohibition against homosexual acts. Fact is not the same as value. Value transcends fact. In the unlikely event that science were to find a gene that predisposes persons to commit theft, would we then be obliged to excuse these person when they commit larcenous acts or describe larceny as something other than a social evil?

Whatever may be the causes of homosexuality, homosexual acts contradict what the Christian faith has believed and taught about God and His purposes in creation, and specifically in making human beings male and female.

### **Sin and Idolatry, p.18**

*<sup>24</sup>Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, <sup>25</sup>who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. <sup>26</sup>For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. <sup>27</sup>Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. (Romans 1:24-27)*

In common with other human sins that dishonor the body, such as adultery and fornication, homosexual acts deny the creaturely boundaries God has set for human sexuality. Like these other sins, homosexual acts blind those who participate in them to the truth about their existence, in particular the fundamental unitive and procreative purposes of human sex. Like these other sins, homosexual behavior may introduce false values of sensuality into human life that idolatrously assert human autonomy over and against the will of God. In this sense, we who are sinful human beings “exchange the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man” (Rom.1:23).

There is no reason to believe that St. Paul regarded homosexual behavior as necessarily worse than other sins among which he listed it in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (fornication, adultery, greed and drunkenness).

The Church, which Christ calls to attend the afflicted, is under obligation to give compassionate and spiritually healing care to those homosexual persons who come seeking such care. Persons who engage in homosexual sex may well be seeking to fulfill the fundamentally human desire for love, intimacy, communion and ecstatic union. From their perspective, it is understandable that they might even argue that Christians ought to judge their actions by the very same norms by which they morally evaluate heterosexual love. They might argue that homosexual love, while liable, as is heterosexual love, to go awry and descend into degrading or abusive sensuality, is nevertheless in its own right within the human norm.

However, it simply cannot be truthfully claimed that two people of the same sex can attain that union in “one flesh” for which God has made male and female.

### **Contemporary Arguments for Gay Marriage and Same-Sex Union, p.20**

Some religious people who favor gay marriage (from both the Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions) frequently share modern convictions about personal autonomy, human rights, and civil liberties. Religious and secular advocates of gay marriage and same-sex union often start with the premise that homosexual acts are not morally bad or harmful provided that they are engaged in responsibly. They may argue that gay and lesbian persons are just as “good” as heterosexual persons, and that labeling their sexual behavior as sinful is mean spirited and unfair. This, however, is tantamount to saying that God makes no judgments and forgives without holding us accountable for our misdeeds.

In the Protestant churches, marriage is not viewed as a sacrament, but rather as a solemnized contract or simple blessing that the church confers upon a couple that consent and promise to live together as spouses under law.

### **The Orthodox Position on Same-Sex Union and Gay Marriage, p.24**

Gay sex is not true marital union not because it cannot issue offspring, though this is no small matter. Gay sex is not marital in character because the spiritual union of man and woman, which is an image of the union of the Church and Christ (Eph.5:32) is not present.

With theological eyes we see that by some profound mystery marriage is procreative because it is a way God has made it possible for human beings to participate in and reflect God’s own triune life and loving act of creation.

Homosexual sex, no matter how much it may express a genuine love between two people, is misplaced and cannot symbolize the unity of God or the union of Christ with His Church. Homosexual “union” is a pathetic parody, at best, of the conjugal union of man and woman. For God brought Eve to Adam in the Garden of Eden in order that the two, in their likeness as human beings and difference as male and female, might love one another and by their sexual union bring others of their kind, male and female, into the world. Even outside Eden’s gates, God the Father joins together man and woman so that in shared love they might achieve the full measure of their humanity and by the grace of the Holy Spirit be also united to His beloved Son in whom alone their salvation lies.

### **Conclusion: Some Pastoral Thoughts, p.25**

The Bible teaches us that we are all sinners. “For...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom.3:23). Likewise, Jesus says that every sin will be forgiven except the sin against the Holy Spirit (Matt.12:31), that is, so long as we heed Jesus’ admonition at the start of his ministry to repent and believe (Mark 1:15).

We must help and heal all who sin, rejecting none who are penitent.