

## Homosexuality—Can We Talk About It?

humility, as fellow sinners? If we reject them and refuse to allow them to fellowship with us, are we denying God's Holy Spirit an opportunity to work in our hearts and theirs?

Should we support gay civil rights?

Adventist convictions regarding the separation of church and state *should* inspire us to support the civil rights of gays and lesbians to protection from hate crimes and discrimination in jobs and housing.

Positions of Professional Organizations

The American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses in 1973.

The American Law Institute continually updates its *Model Penal Code*, which is a group of laws that they suggest be implemented at the state level. They recommend to legislators: "*that private sexual behavior between consenting adults should be removed from the list of crimes and thereby legalized.*"

The American Bar Association in 1974 expressed its approval of the Model Penal Code, including its decriminalization of consensual adult homosexual acts.

The World Health Organization removed homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses in 1981.

The American Psychological Association passed a resolution in 1997 that "*raises ethical concerns about attempts to change sexual orientation, reaffirms psychology's opposition to homophobia and client's rights to unbiased treatment.*"

The American Medical Association (AMA) released a report in 1994 which calls for "*nonjudgmental recognition of sexual orientation by physicians.*"

The Academy of Pediatrics and Council on Child and Adolescent Health have stated that homosexuality is not a choice and cannot be changed.

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# HOMOSEXUALITY

## Can We Talk About It?

### An Appeal to Heterosexual Adventists

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## What is homosexuality?

*Homosexuality* is a scientific term developed in the late 19th century to describe the new recognition of a particular group of people who have an inborn physical and emotional attraction to peers of their own gender instead of the opposite gender. The term *heterosexuality*, describing people attracted to the opposite gender, originated at the same time. Human sexuality is a complex issue and involves much more than just to whom one is attracted; it is an integral part of one's personality and way of seeing and relating to life and other human beings.

## What homosexuality is not

Just as some people confuse SDA (Adventists) and LDS (Mormons), straight people often confuse homosexuality with other terms. Homosexuality is *not*: *pedophilia* (those who have sex with children—a criminal act—either as a result of power issues or of arrested social development because of having been abused themselves as children) *transsexuality* (those who self-identify as one sex but have the sexual organs of the other) *intersexuality* (those with ambiguous genitalia or genitalia of both sexes)

## Do you know someone who is a homosexual?

Probably, but you may not be aware of their orientation. Some researchers believe that approximately 10% of the population has a homosexual orientation, but many homosexuals hide “in the closet” for fear of being rejected and persecuted. A confidential survey conducted several years ago by the General Conference Department of Family Ministries revealed that approximately 10% of Adventists around the world are dealing with homosexuality. With our current world membership nearing 15 million, this means that there could be as many as 1.5 million homosexual members. Sadly, many of them eventually flee the church because they feel rejected and condemned.

## Is homosexuality a choice?

Asked in a different way, do *you* remember when you actively chose to become *heterosexual*? Feelings of

experience emotional distress, as well as sexually transmitted diseases. Paul calls celibacy a gift, and says it is better to marry than burn. How does this advice apply to homosexuals? Research shows great health benefits, satisfaction and happiness are found in intimate relationships, resulting in longer and happier lives. As Christians, do we have the right to relegate homosexuals in our community to shorter, more stressful lives? If we deny them significant, loving relationships are we depriving them of the opportunity to better understand God's love for them?

Committed Relationship. Most Adventist homosexuals long for the kind of close, loving family they grew up in. They want a lifetime partner with whom they can build a stable, mutually satisfying life. Sexuality is a small, though important, part of their lives. Like their heterosexual counterparts, they feel a responsibility to maintain chastity until commitment, while shunning pornography, promiscuity and adultery. Many Christians, and a growing number of Adventists have come to support this answer. because love is the basis of the Kingdom of Heaven.

## How should the church respond?

Since there is much we still do not understand about homosexuality, it behooves us to remember that the Bible says, “It is not good for humans to be alone,” “Judge not, that you be not judged,” “Bear one another's burdens,” and “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

A willingness to listen to the experiences of those who are homosexual (or other-gendered) is the first step in seeing them as real human beings with real feelings. They are very much like those of us who are heterosexual, in all but one respect. They are people with the same needs and the same goals and aspirations as other Christians; we share a common humanity and Creator.

Our Savior, who often chose to “hang out” with the marginalized and outcasts of society, was described as not being willing to break a bruised reed or snuff out a smoldering wick. As His followers, when a homosexual man, woman or couple shows up at our church on Sabbath, does not His gospel of grace and love compel us to reach out to them with

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It occurs three times in the gospels as a modifier of *clothing*, implying a certain effeminate voluptuousness in the lifestyle of the Roman oppressors. If there are sexual overtones, it may refer to male prostitutes who painted their faces and wore silken clothes to attract both male and female clients. *Arsenokoitai* is a combination of the words for *male* and *coitus*. This is its only use in the Bible. Found in later secular literature, usually in similar lists of vices and adjacent to words of an exploitative economic nature, such as thieves (1 Corinthians 6:10) and slave traders (1 Timothy 1:10), it may refer to a pimp or to men who used male prostitutes. When these words have been translated as referring to homosexuality, a modern cultural overlay is present.

The biblical verses discussed here can be seen as referring to homosexual rape, idolatrous same-gender rites, cultic impurity, or coercive sexual practices: behaviors that can be changed. They say nothing about sexual orientation, which cannot be changed.

## What are the options for a Christian homosexual?

Heterosexual Marriage. The advice often given by pastors and teachers is, “Just find a nice girl and get married.” Would you really want *your* daughter or son to marry someone who is homosexual and cannot genuinely be attracted to or fully appreciate the beauty of someone of the opposite sex? Heterosexual spouses in mixed-orientation marriages usually think something is wrong with themselves—that they are not attractive or desirable enough, while the homosexual spouses find the stress of pretending to be something they are not eventually becomes unsustainable. This kind of marriage seldom lasts more than a decade.

Celibacy. Some church leaders advocate lifelong celibacy for homosexual members, yet, like most Protestants, we consider the requirement of lifelong celibacy for Catholic priests, even in a spiritually supportive community, to be an unnatural lifestyle. Those who attempt to maintain celibacy still struggle with feelings of guilt because of their innate desires and attractions. Vulnerable to temptation in an unguarded moment, they may

human attraction are not a choice. People with a homosexual orientation experience a gradually dawning awareness, usually as they enter adolescence, that their attractions are different from most people around them. As many homosexuals say, “Why would anyone *choose* to be rejected, hated and alienated from their friends and families?” Furthermore, sexual behavior may or may not be the same as sexual orientation. For instance, some heterosexuals may *choose* to periodically engage in same-gender behavior, and some homosexuals may *choose* to marry heterosexually, trying to conform to societal expectations, but this does not indicate their *sexual orientation*.

## What causes homosexuality?

Research over the past three decades points to brain development before birth and human genetics as the most likely determinants of male homosexuality. The concentration of male hormones in the womb may impact the development of the “mating center” of the brain. In addition, genetic studies of identical and non-identical twins strongly suggest that human genetics plays an important role. Less research has been done regarding female homosexuality; however there is also evidence of genetically-linked biological differences. Furthermore, some experts believe that environmental factors may strengthen or accentuate these biological differences. Such biological determinants are neither comparable to a *genetic tendency* to alcoholism or addiction, nor a *temptation* to deceive or be promiscuous. Many researchers believe sexual orientation is a natural variant like eye or hair color and right or left handedness, since it is seen in nearly all species.

## Can homosexuality be cured?

Authentic, independent medically peer-reviewed research shows virtually no evidence of lasting change. Many who profess their testimony of overcoming homosexuality make this claim in faith that God will make it happen. They may marry a heterosexual and have children, but research shows that most of these people eventually realize that there has been no genuine change in their homosexual orientation. Many homosexuals raised in Adventist homes have spent years pleading with God to change them. They

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try counseling, “change” programs, aversion therapy and even exorcisms, to no avail. It is cruel to tell them they could change if they just had enough faith or prayed more. This attitude is reminiscent of Christian condemnation in past centuries of left-handed people as being “of the devil” and insistence that they could become right-handed if they had enough faith. People who are told they lack faith often come to believe that God has rejected them. In despair, some harm themselves or commit suicide.

## What does the Bible say about homosexuality?

The Bible does not specifically address the issue of in-born homosexual orientation in the context of committed, monogamous relationships. Homosexuality is neither mentioned in the Ten Commandments nor by Jesus and the prophets. Still, many Christians cite six biblical passages that condemn specific kinds of same-gender behavior, just as specific kinds of heterosexual behavior are also condemned. A significant number of thoughtful, respected Adventist leaders have given serious, prayerful consideration to this subject, in an effort to understand it in as accurate and redemptive a way as possible. When the lens of prejudice is removed, advances in science, psychology and medicine now give the church new tools to view and understand this complex issue as *present truth*. The following discussion is by no means exhaustive, nor is it intended to be a scholarly argument, but an invitation to further study. (For an in-depth study, see the chapter by John R. Jones in *Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives*.)

Genesis 19:4-9. It is not likely that every man, young and old, from every part of Sodom, was a homosexual. These were probably heterosexual men who intended to gang-rape the strangers who had entered their city. In that culture, given the fact that Lot, also an outsider, had pressed his hospitality on the angels, the inhabitants of Sodom may well have suspected them of being spies. Homosexual rape, or treating someone “like a woman” was the customary way of humiliating enemies in that culture. When later biblical writers describe the sins of Sodom, they do not refer to homosexuality, but to arrogance, inhospitality, and lack of concern for the poor and needy. See Ezekiel 16:49, Luke 10:12

Leviticus 18:22, 20:13. Laws found in Leviticus 17-26 concern ritual purity in the daily life of Hebrew society. These laws have been recognized as a discrete entity and designated a “Holiness Code.” Moses prefaced chapter 18 with an injunction to refrain from following the practices of the idolatrous nations of Canaan and Egypt. The intent of laws that forbid mixing two kinds of crops in a field, wearing garments woven of two kinds of fabric, cross-breeding two kinds of animals, or trimming hair and beards in the fashion of heathen nations, seems to be, either symbolically or in actual practice, separation from the practices of heathen peoples. (See Lev. 20:26) Penetrative sex of a man, a Canaanite idolatrous practice, was seen as using a man like a woman, a blurring of the distinction between sexes, and thus to be avoided in maintaining ritual purity. In the New Testament, Paul says that in Christ distinctions between Jew and gentile are done away with. Like circumcision, such ritual laws are no longer required of Christ’s followers. We don’t have authority to choose which laws are still binding.

Romans 1:24-31. Paul’s point in the first three chapters of Romans is that *everyone*, both gentile and Jew, is a sinner in need of God’s grace. Writing from Corinth, the worship center of Aphroditite, a goddess that represented both sexes, Paul describes gentiles with the illustration of same-gender temple orgies that he knows his Jewish audience will associate negatively with idolatry. Then he turns the tables on them and points out that they, too, are sinners. Assuming everyone naturally had opposite-gender attractions, Paul says men and women *left* what was natural for them and burned with *lust* for their own sex. As a result, they became filled with envy, murder, malice, slander, insolence, hatred of God, etc. Today we realize that what is natural for heterosexuals is *not* natural for homosexuals. Nor are lust and the other sins mentioned necessarily part of a Christian homosexual’s life. It is difficult to apply Paul’s words to committed Christian homosexuals.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:8-10. In these lists of vices, Paul uses two Greek words whose meaning is unclear. *Malakos* literally mean *soft*.