

do our best to see through a glass darkly as we work out our salvation in fear and trembling.

To the question at hand, then. Since the Bible seems to condemn same-sex relations, how can some Christians on the basis of Scripture argue that the church should endorse same-sex relations of any kind, whether by celebrating gay marriage or by ordaining openly gay clergy?

There are basically two responses to this question, both grounded in Scripture. First, we must be clear about what Scripture condemns and why. We must be aware that the notion of “homosexual orientation” is a modern notion (as is sexual orientation in general), and that the term “homosexual” is never found in Scripture – even though some translations anachronistically and misleadingly render the

original Hebrew and Greek words from Scripture as

“homosexual.” Such translations read our modern

understandings back into Scripture and fail to understand

Scripture on its own terms. For example, in Paul’s letters, the passing references that condemn same-sex relations (Rom 1; 1

Cor 6) are addressed to the context of Paul’s day, where same-sex

relations were typically and understandably seen as exploitive, especially given that pederasty and slave-prostitution were the primary forms of same-sex relations with which Paul would have been familiar.

To condemn all modern-day homosexual relationships on the basis of the exploitive same-sex relations of Paul’s day would be the same as condemning all modern-day heterosexual relationships on the basis of David’s adulterous relationship with Bathsheba. Just as there is no blanket condemnation of all heterosexual relations because of some inappropriate heterosexual actions (rape, incest, adultery), so also we may ask if it is correct to issue a blanket condemnation of all same-sex relations because those referred to in Scripture were exploitive and thus inappropriate relations (e.g., rape & pederasty).

Further, in Paul’s time such homoerotic expressions were viewed as being against nature (cf. Rom 1). But what counts as natural or unnatural varies from age to age and culture to culture. (Consider Paul’s comments on hair length in 1 Cor 11.) In our present age we have come to understand that individuals are born with a sexual orientation of which they become aware as they mature. Sexual orientation is as natural and unchosen as left-handedness or brown eyes. It is simply part of the rich diversity of God’s creation.

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