

The concept of homosexuality, same-sex love, as a disease or sickness was laid to rest in 1973, when the American Psychiatric Association removed it from their compendium of mental illness. The idea of same-gender loving as a crime was laid to rest by the Supreme Court decision, *Lawrence v. Texas*, in 2003. It's time to lay to rest the contention that homosexuality is a sin. To accomplish this is the work of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), for we are “reformed, always being reformed,” by the inspiration of the Spirit of God.

Our hearts and experience confirm that some of our beloved children, parents, cousins, classmates, co-workers, Sunday School teachers, pastors, bus drivers, physicians—you name them—are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT). We all know a LGBT person, perhaps even our own self, who is as faithful and flawed as anyone else; and we know that a person's intimate life or sexual practice to be no more or less sinful than anyone else's. Yet some voices in the Church continue to insist—based, it is said, upon Scripture and tradition—that all expressions of same-sex love are categorically and inherently sinful.

More Light Presbyterians is grateful that God is always transforming us, by shining “more light” on our understanding of Biblical interpretation and church history. We don't simply force our conclusions to fit the realities of God's creation and the world. We experience the Holy Spirit to be alive and at work within us. Letting go of the claim that same-sex love is a sin, we can then experience the reformation of our hearts, minds and faith, demanded by Jesus, the Word of Life.

We know that God cares about the substance, not the form, of all our loving relationships.

Scripture

The same reasoning and logic that convinced us that women speaking in church is not inherently sinful, or that divorce is not a sin, can also confirm for us that expressions of same-sex love are not sinful. When the handful of verses used to support the claim that homosexuality is sinful [Gen 19; Lev 18.22, 20.13; Rom 1.24-27; I Cor 6.9; I Tim 1.10] is placed under “the lens of Jesus' gracious life and ministry” [Jack Rogers, **Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality**, p. 50], we understand that none of these texts applies to LGBT people living moral lives and bearing the fruits of the Spirit listed by the apostle Paul in Gal. 5:22.

The proper use of the tools of contemporary Biblical scholarship sheds new light on the authorship, social context and audience for passages cited to support the claim that heterosexual marriage is the sole prerequisite for blessed and healthy adult life. The first two chapters of Genesis are often quoted to argue that God created

marriage between “Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.” The purpose of the beginning of Genesis is to explain, “Where do we come from?” Presbyterians affirm the answer is “from God.” Theologian Peter Gomes reminds us, “The creation story is not...a paradigm about *marriage*, but rather about the establishment of human society” [**The Good Book**, 149-50]. To twist the meaning of Genesis to place homosexual love beyond God's good creation is to exploit a given text for one's own purposes and prejudice.

Finally, many scriptural passages can be read to support full acceptance of LGBT people in the life of the church. From the love described

between David and Jonathan, or Ruth and Naomi, to warnings not to judge others in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, the Bible emphasizes non-judgmental welcome. For example, in Acts 10 the Holy Spirit inspires a Jew, Peter, and a Gentile, Cornelius, to overcome their harsh judgment of each other. Peter says, "...God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean...", and "I truly understand that God shows no partiality" [Acts 10.28, 34]. With the Spirit's help, the early Church reformed its understanding of God's embracing love—and came to welcome both Jewish and Gentile Christians into the fold. May their example guide the Church to follow the same Spirit now!

Tradition

What a blessing to live in the branch of Christianity whose charism is the knowledge that change and growth are necessary and possible in Christian life! First-century Jews were threatened by war and the possibility of extinction so they overvalued procreation in order to build a strong nation. Until the 19th century, the word "sodomy" meant any sexual act that did not have the potential for procreation. The word "homosexuality" first appeared in 19th century biblical translation, but there is no word for homosexuality in the original languages of the Bible: Aramaic, Hebrew or Greek.

Throughout its history the Church has struggled with the tension between preserving religious beliefs and traditions of the past, and receiving new inspiration and understanding from the Spirit of God in the present moment. The genius of our Reformed and Presbyterian ancestors was the insight that an essential element of Christian faith and culture is the expectation of and provision for change. Our polity and experience teaches us that the best mechanism



for maintaining balance between tradition and inspiration is that of learning together—in church, Session, presbytery and General Assembly. For decades, the voices of faithful LGBT Presbyterians have been excluded from denominational discernment. The conversation was *about* rather than *with* LGBT persons in the Church. The Spirit's conversion is only possible when all voices are heard and valued. More Light Presbyterians—lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and heterosexual allies—are committed to the wildly inclusive love of God and to Spirit-led change, so that all may be welcome, affirmed and equal in church and society.

Conclusion

Yes, some past Christians understood and accepted homosexuality as illness, a crime and sinful. We understand much more now about human development, sexuality and same-sex loving relationships. So, now we can be informed and know that homosexuality and same-sex loving is no longer a sickness, no longer a crime, and no longer a sin.

Now, we know that God cares about the substance, not the form, of all our loving relationships. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, bringing more light into our hearts, minds and faith, More Light Presbyterians affirms that it's about time to celebrate that *all* love is good and holy!

Additional Resources

William Stacy Johnson, *A Time to Embrace: Same-Gender Relationships in Religion, Law, and Politics*, 2006.

"Presbyterians and Human Sexuality, 1991: Keeping Body and Soul Together: Sexuality, Spirituality, and Social Justice." Order number PDS #OGA-91-001, [PCUSA].

"More Light on Sexual Ethics," www.mlp.org/links

"For the Bible Tells Me So," DVD, directed by Daniel G. Karlslake, written by Daniel Karlslake and Helen R. Mendoza. www.forthetellmeso.org

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