

VA Conf. Presentation (Nov 5, 2016)

No other topic I know is so gut-wrenching. I know some really good and nice people who are lesbian or gay. Some are in covenant unions and some are not. How does one deprive anyone of the joy of sexual relationships? Also, how does one legitimate sexual relations forbidden by Scripture, church tradition, and which are hazardous to health. Hard, very hard decisions must be made. And we must begin with clear thinking about what it means to both be faithful to Scripture and to love our neighbors as ourselves. The discussion about same sex must be placed in a larger biblical and theological context: namely how we become saved, what discipleship means for those following Jesus, those “born anew,” those seeking to grow in Christian faith.

1. *Homosexuality (2003) vis á vis Slavery, Sabbath, War and Women (1983)*. Why different stance?

The criteria that applied to the four selected issues in *Slavery, Sabbath, War, and Women* did not apply to homosexuality, namely, that there are Scripture texts that support either side of the arguments. I saw clearly that for homosexuality one encounters at the level of the “plain sense” of the text, i.e., the meaning that the texts have had for Judaism and Christianity for centuries, only prohibitions, and strong ones at that. Thus, hermeneutical work, assessing the relation between the text in that culture and its meaning for our culture, needed to be done. Such investigation would assess the relationship between the scriptural teaching and the view of some in the church that what we are talking about today is essentially different from what Scripture speaks about. (p. 16)¹

2. God created humankind male and female. The second creation narrative (Gen. 2) climaxes in *marriage*, complementary to the first creation narrative climaxing in the *Sabbath*. In God’s intention Sabbath and marriage of male and female are twin pillars of God’s will for humans. Same sex unions are antithetical to the biblical valuing of male and female becoming “one flesh” in marriage and then potential procreation. For these reasons four OT texts proscribe same-sex practices. In Chapter 2 of my book I consider the pro and con arguments regarding four OT texts that view same-sex relations negatively: Gen. 19; Judg. 19; Lev. 18:22 and 20:13. The commands in Leviticus are considered irrelevant by same-sex proponents since they occur in the

¹ See the helpful Editorial in *Perspectives* (Aug-Sept 2005, p. 3) on limitations & ambiguities of analogies.

Holiness Code, which forbids other practices irrelevant to today. Further, these scholars classify these prohibitions as “purity” laws, peculiar to Israel.

But before we dismiss the two prohibitions in Lev. 18:22 and 20:13, we do well to remember that it is from this Holiness Code that Jesus quotes the second part of the double love commandment: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev 19:18). This command occurs about mid-way between the two commands against same sex relations.²

Further, in chapters 18-23 the recurring warrant for all commands is “I am the Lord your God,” occurring 36 times. In the longer section known as the Holiness Code, Leviticus 17–26, “I am the Lord your God,” occurs ca. 50 times. The reason for these commands is clear: don’t live like the Canaanites or Molechites who follow other gods. You are mine, and therefore be different from them. Some scholars dismiss these same-sex commands saying they referred to pagan cultic practices, and that’s not our context today. But we would not say that for “Love your neighbor” or the commands to do justice for and show mercy to the poor, widow, and alien.

My view on this is, yes, same-sex relations were practiced by those who worshipped Molech and this alerts us to a significant point: idolatry and same-sex practice are textual coordinates. That raises questions about the growing popularity of same-sex practices today, given the trend of our culture to become idolatrous in many areas, in making greed and sexuality our gods. In Jesus’ and Paul’s listing of sins and in the early Church Fathers’ idolatry and immorality together with greed are closely linked, e.g. Eph. 5:5, “Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure person, or one who is greedy (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God” (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9-13; 6:9; 10:7-8; Gal 5:19-21; Col 3:5-6; 1 Tim 1:9-10; Rev 22:15).

² To contend that this proscription is there because of Israel’s strong objection to wasted seed, as Ted Grimsrud has argued, makes no sense. The story of Onan is nowhere close as context. Further, there are at least ten times more restrictions on heterosexual intercourse in the Holiness Code than on same-sex.

3. What does Jesus have to do with this issue?

Does Jesus speak to the issue of homosexuality? One anecdotal quip is:

“Did you see the book, *Jesus and Homosexuality*?”

“No, what does it say?”

“Well, when you open it you find only blank pages!”

But is this really true? If Jesus said nothing explicitly on homosexuality, does that mean he gives no moral guidance on the issue? Jesus said nothing against his followers participating in war (he commended the faith of the centurion in Matt. 8:5-12; see also Mark 15:39). Nor did he ever speak directly against the institution of slavery, so widespread in the Roman world of his time. But does this mean that Jesus taught nothing pertinent to the issues of war and slavery?! My view, NO!

In Chapter 3 of my book I describe four teachings of Jesus that signal “halt” to homosexuality practices and four that might, but not necessarily, support the arguments of those who favor homosexual practice, especially covenant unions. I believe that all eight of these teachings reinforce the commands to love God and neighbor.

The four against are:

1) Jesus’ strong and unequivocal teaching against lust (Matt. 5:26-28). To be sure, this moral pitfall applies to both heterosexual and homosexual desires and relationships. Here I quote Mark Thiessen Nation:

Is it irrelevant that gay men as a group are by far the most sexually promiscuous group? Some would want to say that this is because the state does not allow them to marry [but this has now (in 2016) changed], thus denying them structures for stability. But if this were true the second most (or equally) promiscuous group should be lesbians. But such is decidedly not the case. Heterosexual men are by far the second most promiscuous group (though far behind gay men).³

³ Mark Thiessen Nation, in *Reasoning Together: A Conversation on Homosexuality*, co-authored with Ted Grimsrud (Herald Press, 2008), 101. See further the discussion in Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 452-460; Jones and Yarhouse, *Homosexuality*, 109-110; and Thomas Schmidt, *Straight & Narrow?*, 105-108.

2) Jesus' negative judgment against *porneia*, the Greek word that denotes any sexual relationship outside heterosexual marriage. Jesus speaks against *porneia* (often translated fornication) on two separate occasions recorded in four different texts (see Matt. 5:32; 19:9 and especially Mark 7:21; Matt. 15:19). The word denotes all sexual genital relations outside heterosexual marriage.⁴

For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication [*porneia*], theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.

3) Jesus and the divorce trap-question. Jesus states clearly in the Gospels that God's intention in creation is that marriage unites male and female to become one flesh. This oneness is God's mystery and gift, not to be undone by divorce. Joined to this in Matthew is Jesus' hard teaching about becoming eunuchs in order to enter the kingdom of heaven (19:10-12).⁵ I have

⁴ I find it amusing that in an article in the Fall 2006 issue of CSER Review (Committee for the Scientific Study of Religion), Chairman R. Joseph Hoffmann, with impressive scholarly credentials (Harvard, Oxford, Heidelberg), makes the case that Jesus never spoke against homosexuality, though he had the occasion to do so, when he spoke against lust, adultery, anger, and murder. He could have cited Leviticus and condemned homosexuality, but "he never had a word to say about *porneia*" (p. 8). He then depicts Jesus as a wandering charismatic, bonding with men (and then joins Paul to the same life-style).

My response: This is not true. Jesus used the word *porneia* right after the text where Jesus warns against lust: in the exception clause in Jesus' word against divorce and remarriage (Matt 5:32; 19:9). But more pertinent, *porneia* occurs in Jesus' list of sins castigating those who rejected his message: Mark 7:21-23 (parallel Matt. 15:19).

Dr. Hoffmann, in his "scientific" approach to Scripture, refutes his own position in his statement: "But he (Jesus) doesn't have a word to say about *porneia*, a word that can mean simply 'fornication' but more often means homosexuality" (p. 8, col. A). If Dr. Hoffmann is correct in this, then he has sealed the case: the NT definitely is against homosexuality, since the various grammatical forms of *porneia* occur ca. fifty times, always with negative sexual connotation. In Paul's lists of sins, *porneia* regularly occurs first, as it did in Jesus' list. With the historic decision reached at the Jerusalem Conference to receive Gentiles uncircumcised, *porneia* occurs among the four practices explicitly forbidden, triply stated (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25). Hence, beginning with Jesus, it later occurs frequently. Either Dr. Hoffmann made a huge mistake in his judgment that *porneia* most often means homosexuality or his whole article seeking to support homosexuality is refuted by the frequency of NT occurrences of *porneia*. One major factor that drew me into writing on this difficult subject is that more sloppy exegesis occurs on this topic than any other I know. My book seeks to be corrective.

⁵ I am aware that a recent dissertation, done in Scandinavia, has argued that the Greek word for eunuch might be translated "homosexual." Perhaps so, but the idea that one becomes such to enter the kingdom infers no sexual practice at all. The only gain for the homosexual cause would be that Jesus indicated that some were born that way and some are made that way. In the history of interpretation this has been taken to mean castration. On balance, all that Jesus says, occasioned by the divorce controversy, speaks against, not for homosexual practice, though it might be taken as a text indicating that Jesus and the culture of that time recognized the that some people are born with lack of heterosexual desire. Whatever the word eunuch means, it does not provide moral grounding for same-sex practice. Jesus' word implies refraining from sexual activity, thus joining the NT valuing of celibacy (1 Cor. 7:6).

never heard a sermon on becoming a eunuch for the sake of the kingdom. A complementary text is 1 Cor. 7:6, in which celibacy is considered the superior gift to marriage—also a gift.

4) Jesus on adultery (Matt. 5:31-32; Luke 7; John 4; 8:1-12). In Mark 10, Matthew 5:32, and John 8 Jesus clearly indicates that adultery violates God's will. The breaking of the marriage bond violates God's will. These teachings of Jesus argue against homosexual practice in the same way Jesus' teaching on love of enemy and nonresistance argue against participation in war.

Four teachings of Jesus that could provide support for same-sex covenant unions are:

1) Jesus' association with outcasts (sinners and tax collectors, lepers, the poor). This point and example is ubiquitous in the Gospels. But we must also note that these categories differ in moral connotation. Jesus came to save sinners, but not to bless sin. With Jesus sinners are accepted, affirmed, and transforming into God's beloved children.

2) Jesus' ethics of compassion and holiness.

3) Justice, judgment, and mercy.

4) Jesus' call for both discipline and mercy.

Justice is enormously important, but not in the Greek sense of fairness or everybody getting an equal share. In Scripture justice is tempered with mercy and compassion. All three points here are double-sided: compassion with holiness, justice and mercy with judgment, and mercy in discipline. These points provide guidance for us in relating to gays and lesbians.

Before we turn to Pauline texts I raise an important question, at least it is important to me: Who is Jesus? Any credible Christian answer depends upon the revelation in Scripture. To put the authority of Jesus above the authority of Scripture is an oxymoron. Yes, we do believe Scripture's primary function is to point to Christ and we seek Christocentric interpretation of

Scripture. But without Scripture we would not know Jesus. The Jesus we know is the Jesus revealed to us by Scripture.

Yes, we can separate the Gospels from Paul's writings and prioritize the Gospels over the later letters as basis for our authority, but we do so at our peril. Do Paul and Jesus have differing views on sexuality? No, both regard the Genesis 1 and 2 view of human sexuality (male and female) as foundational, with the union of male and female in life-long marriage as normative. Culture, whether in ancient Greece or Rome or even ancient Israel, or modern American, Asian, or African constructs all kinds of "set-ups" otherwise (bisexuality, polygamy, polygyny, prostitution, kings with concubines, serial marriages, homosexual, queer, etc.). But all these are of this temporal world, including varied heterosexual practices as well. In all this the devils gets credit too for the confusions of God's creation design, clearly affirmed by Jesus (Matt 19:5-6).

5. Pauline texts. My recent treatment of Romans 1:18-32: Uniform 2016 SS summer, No. 4 (modified)

Bad or good news? Why did Paul start the body of his letter (v. 18) to Christian believers in Rome, whom he had not met, with such a blast?...To start this study at verse 18 without reference to verses 16-17 would be a huge mistake. Verses 17 and 18 parallel each other, linked by the word *revealed*. Verses 16, 17, and 18 begin with *for* (NRSV; *gar* in Greek), Paul's stylistic manner of introducing an important and crucial declaration. The first declaration affirms Paul's understanding of and commitment to the gospel, which "is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes" (v. 16). The second declaration is that the gospel reveals the righteousness of God, a righteousness that is by faith unto faith (v. 17), "first to the Jew, then to the Gentile" (v. 16). Starting at verse 18 misses this context of God's provision of salvation for all people, and badly misconstrues Paul's intentions in lambasting humanity for its idolatries and sins. The second "revealing" (God's wrath) is, in fact, known only in light of the first "revealing" (God's righteousness). Those who don't know Jesus Christ's saving power will likely not agree with Romans 1:18-32!

God's wrath revealed (v. 18). ...Commentators differ on whether *wrath* is to be understood as God's direct judging action or more impersonally. C. H. Dodd is a noted proponent of this latter view. He suggests that *wrath* does not so much designate a "certain feeling or attitude of God towards us, but some process or effect in the realm of objective facts."⁶ The problem with this

⁶ C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, 48-49. Only in three cases (Romans 1:18; Colossians 3:6; Ephesians 5:6) is wrath specifically connected to God as subject. Much more often, Dodd says, wrath is "curiously impersonal" (Ephesians 2:3; Romans 4:15; 9: 5, 22; 1 Thessalonians 1:10).

view is that Romans 1:18 clearly links “wrath of God” to “being revealed from heaven.” If Dodd were correct, it should read, “outworking itself in human history as the effect of human sin.” This notion is present later in this text. God’s judgment is described through a three-fold “God gave them over” (vv. 24, 26, 28) to the effects of their failure to know God through the witness of creation.

In the latter part of verse 18, **people** “suppress the truth by their wickedness,” practicing “godlessness and wickedness.” The term for *wickedness* is *adikia*, which is a specific form of wickedness, namely, *injustice*. In verse 17, *righteousness* can also mean *justice*. Thus, “human injustice contrasts sharply with God’s justice.”⁷ Without doubt, “justice” is **God’s** justice, a major emphasis in Romans: we are *justified* (same root word) by grace through faith.

Creation has made God knowable. Verses 19-20 give the rationale for verse 18. Creation has made God knowable: “God has made it plain to them.” Creation makes plain “God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen” (v. 20). What is knowable of God through creation is blocked by wickedness suppressing the truth. For Paul this “knowable-unknowable” mystery has been revealed and therefore, we (all humans) are without excuse.

Short-circuited knowledge of God (vv. 21-23). These verses further explain why humans are without excuse: in the face of what they (could) know about God, they failed to honor and glorify God because of futile thinking and darkened foolish hearts. Then in their ignorance, “although they claimed to be wise” (!), “they became fools” (v. 22)—the first step toward idolatry. Here begins the text’s “exchange” series, which together with “gave them over,” is the passage’s signature marking. The first “exchange” trades “the glory of the immortal God for” idolatry: “images” of “a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles” (v. 23). They worship these rather than the Creator.

First “give over” and second “exchange” (vv. 24-25). God’s “giving over” is now manifest specifically “in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.” Why? Because they swapped the “truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator” (v. 25). Enraptured with worship of the true-Creator God in his spirit, Paul suddenly exclaims: “who is forever praised. Amen.” Paul punctuates his dismal portrait of idolatrous society with worship of God who has given humans over to their sinful ways. But God has not “given up” on them. Otherwise, there would be no gospel, no Romans, and no good news for the self-centered sexual sins of his and our cultures.

Second “give over” and third “exchange” (vv. 26-27). The second occurrence of “God gave them over” together with the “exchange” pattern (v. 26; implicit also in v. 27) is manifest in sexual desires.⁸ Numerous scholars have explained these verses as inapplicable to what today we call homosexual or GLBTQ orientation and practice. These explanations, however, do not persuade.⁹ Six differing explanations implicitly regard the others as unsatisfactory, an exposé of the inadequacy of any one of them. A seventh response (Walter Wink’s) argues for a total

⁷ N. T. Wright, *Romans, The New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. X, 432, column 1.

⁸ For a diagram of the “give over” and “exchange” pattern see John E. Toews, *Romans*, Believers Church Bible Commentary, 70–71, and Willard M. Swartley, *Homosexuality: Biblical Interpretation and Moral Discernment*, 53.

⁹ *Homosexuality*, 54–65.

disconnect between this text and today's same-sex discussions. We do have different understandings—to some extent—of homosexual desire, but that does not necessarily silence this text in regard to same-sex practices. Paul is not saying that an individual with same sex desire is idolatrous but that a culture which condones same-sex behavior has fractured God's creation sexual order. N. T. Wright concludes: "What we cannot do is to sideline this passage as irrelevant to Christian ethical discourse . . . or pretend that it means something other than what it says."¹⁰ ***The catch-all scope of wickedness (vv. 28-32).*** Here occurs a third "God gave them over" to base minds and unfit behaviors, filled with all manner of "wickedness" (or "injustice") (vv. 28-29). Paul names twenty evil behaviors, enough to catch all people in the net (vv. 29-31). Even worse, though knowing God's decrees, they "approve of those who practice" these evil things (v. 32). Paul now has built his platform from which to proclaim God's mercy and salvation to all who have sinned and fallen short of God's glory, but not until closing a few more loopholes (in Rom 2:1– 3:20).

In 1 Corinthians 5:9-11 and 6:9-11 Paul includes several lists of condemned behaviors (cf. 1 Tim 1: 10 for similar use of *pornois* and *arsenokoitais*). Quotations are from the NRSV, except for three transliterated Greek words, discussed below):

1 Cor 5:1, 9	1 Cor 5:10	1 Cor 5:11	1 Cor 6:9-11
It is actually reported that there is <i>porneia</i> among you, and of a kind not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife.	not at all meaning <i>tois pornois</i> of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolators, since you would then need to go out of the world.	But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is <i> pornos</i> or greedy, or is an idolator, reviler, drunkard, or robber.	Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! <i>Pornoi</i> , idolators, adulterers, <i>malakoi</i> , <i>arsenokoitai</i> , thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers--none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.
I wrote to you not to associate with <i>pornois</i> ,			

The word which occurs in all four contexts, and about 50x in the NT, is *πορνεία* or *pornos (oi)*, meaning "one who practices sexual immorality," often translated "fornicator," but in 5:1 *πορνεία* denotes a male perpetrating incest. The meaning of the other two underlined terms is much debated (somewhat evident in comparing Bible translations). The term *arsenokoitai* occurs also in the Sibylline Oracles (dating in composition from 2nd century B.C. to AD 250,

¹⁰ Toews, *Romans*, 435.

quite likely known to Paul). These Oracles were originally Jewish and were likely later “christianized.” The current translation of 2:73 by James Charlesworth reads, “do not practice homosexuality, do not betray information, and do not murder” (cited in Swartley, *Homosexuality*, 141). In a related “Oracle,” 3.764-66, The Charlesworth translation says: “Avoid adultery, and indiscriminate intercourse with males. Rear your own offspring and do not kill it, for the Immortal is angry at whoever commits these sins.” The earlier H. H. Charles 1911 edition says “shun adultery and confused intercourse with males, and do not kill babies.” To me it is clear that we can know, if we wish, what these terms mean.¹¹

An English derivative from this Greek word *porneia* is pornography, which is as great an issue for our church members, greater in numbers to be sure, than is same-sex partnership.

5. Cultural Factors. Dr. Glen Miller posted on his June 18, 2015 blog the story of a Goshen doctor, Tobias Magatti, who grew up in Tanzania. His father had twelve wives, many children and grandchildren. He was well cared for as he died around 103 years old. His grandfather had twenty-four wives. Now he has only one wife: 24 to 12 to 1 in three generations. Yes, culture plays a major role in sexuality practices. That is why our current agenda of same gender sexual intercourse is difficult to address. But I do believe Scripture guides us on this sensitive matter. Scripture regards all people as sinners, but offers salvation to all, by grace through faith, with transformative behavior as a result of salvation. Does the gospel transform culture, or does culture shape the church? Or, are both true? Have we lost the mission vision of the last generation in which it was assumed that Jesus Christ, Scripture, and church transform people’s lives?!

¹¹ For discussion of 1 Thess 4:1-6, which proscribes violating a brother in the matter of immorality, see my book (*Homosexuality*, 71-72).

In *Homosexuality*, Chapter 5, I list ten factors of our culture that contribute to our current situation. Factors 6-9 (pp. 80-84 **list**) are especially relevant: 1) urban culture, 2) the sexualized culture in which we live that dominates TV ads, entertainment, leisure activities, sports, and the top headlines in the media—including our Mennonite publications; 3) the loss of the NT teaching on celibacy as a “better gift than marriage” (1 Cor. 7:6); and 4) the popular belief that sexual preference (orientation) is impossible to change together with the “born that way” view, which lacks scientific verification. Consider these findings:

A Danish Study re Sexuality (in *Parenting and Family*, ca. Sept. 06): “Childhood Family Correlates of Heterosexual and Homosexual Marriages: A National Cohort Study of Two Million Danes,” by Morten Frisch and Anders Hviid. Via Narth news On-Line, Oct. 17, 2006, this abstract.

The study focused on childhood correlates of first marriages (heterosexual, since 1970; homosexual, since 1989). Those born in the capital were less likely to marry heterosexually and more likely to marry homosexually than peers born in rural area. Urban sub-factors for more homosexual male marriages are: older parents, divorced parents, absent fathers, and being the youngest child. For lesbian marriage, a key factor was maternal death during adolescence. Conclusion is that childhood experiences are significant factors, of which more are present in the urban population.

My response: birth in the city per se is not the key factor, but the culture of the city, which concurs with Greenberg’s study in 1988 and my book, Chapter 5, which, however, does not detail these specific differences. The Danish study contributes new information.

While I identify ten different Western cultural factors that lie behind the emergence of this as an issue in contemporary society, none of these fully explain causation. David Greenburg’s massive study together with this Danish study, and Bob Gagnon’s careful work, verify that urban culture is *one significant* factor.

6. My doubt about the notion of orientation and genetic origin. If you have read my book, you know my agonizing over this question (see pp. 88-91, 143-44). The university *avant garde* literature on homosexuality (already in 2003) does not accept the notion of orientation because it views sexuality as a static identity. Some scholars, such as Foucault, Fogelman, and now Robert Goss, while affirming homosexual or queer theology, call for sexuality to become whatever we

want it to be—for personal fulfillment and/or for political purposes as well. At the other end of the spectrum, the conservative view doesn't accept orientation because the Bible doesn't teach it and it is viewed as a cop-out to Scripture's call to change from the old way of living to the new way of living in Christ, as 1 Cor. 6:9-10 declares.

Indeed, it is becoming clear that sexual desire is more fluid than the notion of orientation allows. In 2006 Clinton Anderson, director for the Gay and Lesbian Committee for the American Psychological Association said, "People do change; that cannot be denied. What we hold, however, is that [reparative?] therapy does not produce the change." Really? What about the hundreds or even thousands who have changed? Many of these participated in some form of Christian discipleship training, as is offered by the many organizations devoted to sexual counseling, or more broadly, identity (re)formation. It is becoming clear in scientific literature that fluidity in sexual desire means change, maybe not complete but enough that former lesbians marry and have a family.

In 2014 the British Royal College of Medicine revised its statement on homosexuality, which deleted its earlier phrase that homosexuality is genetic in origin. It now acknowledges that one's sexuality can change over time, given various factors. Mennonite church discussions, at least some voices, accept precisely what now the Royal College of Medicine no longer holds.

An email to me in 2015 from a Mennonite Wipf and Stock editor says, among other things:

My college age daughters (in secular university settings) tell me that sexual orientation is understood more as a matter of choice and they see a lot of changing and shifting of orientation with one person's own journey, perhaps because the options are also shifting and expanding. In this context, the issues of biology and monogamy, which used to frame the issues in past decades, are becoming less central, at least for the youngest generation that is now entering adulthood. My sense is that the playing field is not going to get simpler.

Debra Hirsch says in her 2015 book, *Redeeming Sex*, "No one is *born* gay or lesbian." (IVP, p. 113). Quite a surprise statement, since she fully affirms and ministers to people with

same sex desire.¹² Though herself earlier lesbian, Debra later married and she and her husband adopted a transgendered daughter. Debra and husband have had gays and lesbians in their household over the years. Debra has counseled hundreds. She shines in her ministry of compassion and embrace to gays and lesbians. From p. 131, where she locates same-sex practice as nonessential to doctrine for salvation or Christian discipleship, and frequently in Part 3 of the book, however, she disappoints, for her efforts to befriend gays and lesbians gives no hint of not condoning same-sex practice, which would seem to flow from her fine summary of William Webb's book.¹³ It seems, in the end, that her biblical contribution doesn't matter to the manner in which she ministers to gays and lesbians. Nonetheless, the book leads us in thinking about ministry to gays and lesbians, a key point with which our churches need help.

Sexual desire is not shaped without cultural influence, family dynamics, and personal experiences at early stages in life—sexual abuse is also a significant factor. The tide is shifting:

In what could be called a stunning reversal, Dr. Lisa Diamond, a top researcher of the American Psychological Association (APA) and avowed lesbian activist, states that viewing sexuality as exclusively two types — heterosexual and homosexual — that are rigid and unchangeable no longer applies. California psychologist Laura A. Haynes writes in the essay below that “the battle to disprove ‘born that way and can’t change’ is now over, and [Diamond] is telling LGBT activists to stop promoting the myth.”¹⁴

¹² Her view on this is: “But it is certainly understandable that many who experience innate homosexual desire would hold on to the ‘born gay’ theory—at least it *explains* why they feel that way” (p.113). She then quotes the latest statement from American Psychological Association that affirms the complexity of this matter:

There is no consensus among scientists about the exact reasons that an individual develops a heterosexual, bisexual, gay, or lesbian orientation. Although much research has examined the possible genetic, hormonal, developmental, social, and cultural influences on sexual orientation, no findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors. Many think that nature and nurture both play complex roles.

This information was accessed Oct 1, 2014: www.apa.org/topics/sexuality/orientation.aspx Hirsch then also notes that the LGBTQ community is divided on this. She quotes gay activist Tracy Baim, who says this gene theory “is a very dangerous and slippery slope...if there is a gay gene, should it be eliminated, or a child aborted, if it's found? Science fiction isn't usually far removed from science” (p. 114).

¹³ *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (InterVarsity, 2001). Hirsch's summary is 139-45.

¹⁴ <http://www.aoiusa.org/american-psychological-association-course-correction-sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-not-fixed-after-all/#comment-263285> Sept. 16, 2016 posting by Fr. Johannes Jacobse

The board of the Alliance for Therapeutic Choice and Scientific Integrity (ATCSI) has voted unanimously to endorse new terminology that more accurately and effectively represents the work of Alliance therapists who see clients with unwanted same-sex attractions. Reasons are the actual facts that change occurs, but on a scale, not **complete** change from same-sex to complementary sex.¹⁵

7. Issue of identity: who we are first and foremost

Our primary identity must be: **Key identity phrases from the Gospels:**

Forgiven of sin and forgiving others (Matt, Mark, and Luke)—the center of The Lord’s Prayer
Peacemakers and loving enemies (esp. Matt.). Taking up the cross.

Born anew to become children of God; abiding in the True Vine (Jesus in John).

The key identity mark in John is that **we love one another**.

Jesus’ Farewell Prayer: that all his disciples be one, as Jesus is one with the Father.

From Paul’s, Peter’s, and John’s letters, and Revelation:

Freely calling upon God as Abba, this is testimony of the Holy Spirit in us.

Cleansed by the water, the Word, and filled with the Spirit. Living in the Spirit,

Assured by the threefold testimony: Spirit, water, and blood (1 John 5:7)

“In Christ” (in Paul many times): really important.

Transferred from darkness into light (Paul, Col. 1:13-14) or

Walking in the Light (Eph 5:8)

Singing “Hallelujah” with the redeemed followers of the Lamb (Rev)

What is my point? Never, never let us allow our primary identity—who we are in Christ Jesus—be usurped by one’s identity as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, heterosexual, etc.

Let’s put first things first. Only then do we, as a congregation or larger church with our diversity of viewpoint on sexuality matters, have the possibility and privilege of being one in Jesus Christ.

8. **Just war/just same-sex.** With some precedents in the ancient Greek world Augustine performed a remarkable task, a sort of “beautiful dance” for his time and culture. In the fourth century the Roman Empire turned Christian and had to continue its defense and expansion by war with ever-increasing military budgets. He concocted a “just war” theology. What strikes me is the parallel between “just war” theology and “just same-sex” theology. The theological planks in both are similar: *love* of God and neighbor—even enemy in Augustine’s frantic twist; *justice*, to protect against evil’s triumph; and *inclusion*. Inclusion was automatic in Constantinian

¹⁵ Posted Oct. 26, 2016: <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?shva=1#inbox/157fe2e2b6dec715>

society since everyone born within the limits of the Empire was baptized.¹⁶ My question: are those advocating same-sex practice and marriage tacitly assuming a “just same-sex” theology? If that is the case, it begs to be acknowledged, with criteria developed to parallel “just war.”

9. Where do we go from here?

A most relevant theological consideration is eschatology. Eschatology saves us from despair over all these cultural sexuality confusions. Jesus says in the age to come they neither marry nor are given in marriage (Mark 12: 24-27). I believe eschatology is at play in Paul’s word that celibacy is the better gift, better than marriage, because it frees us for kingdom work—to get as much done for Jesus before the end comes. Anabaptism regards eschatology as a moral muscle giving us strength to live faithfully in the present. When one is free from marriage, one has greater freedom to do as Jesus and Paul did, move from one town/city to another to spread the gospel. Today it would be freedom to take mission assignments anywhere in the world.

¹⁶ The closest parallel to empire “inclusiveness” as an analogy to “just same-sex” reality today would be the Western powers serving as a quasi-Christendom umbrella under which “just same-sex” colonizes societies wherever its Empire exists—now even more universal than the Roman Empire. With today’s powerful media “just same-sex” colonization of other societies by USA, in particular, can happen within a generation—Hollywood and Silicon Valley are powerful. The “sea change” in the West’s sexual ethics since the late sixties has been phenomenal, and the pace of that change can now occur in some societies within a decade wherever the West has significant stake.

As Mennonites, who perhaps have too easily refused “just war” theology—which dominated Christendom for seventeen hundred years and continues today in most mainline Christian denominations (excepting *nuclear war*), we might need to repent of our Mennonite notions of nonconformity to dominant society. But I prefer that the Christendom “just war” proponents repent and Anabaptist Mennonites hold to conscientious objection to all war.

In “just war” and “just same-sex” there is always collateral damage: soldiers *and* innocent civilians are killed in “just war” and victims of HIV-AIDS die in “just same-sex”—now forty million worldwide and still spiraling (see Addendum 2, close in number since 1970 to all the casualties of “just wars” on both sides since 1940, including WW II (but this does not include the 6 million Jews in the Holocaust and ten million or more in Russia’s Gulag).

Family also can serve the cause of mission, as many have done in various ways. One family in the Belmont Neighborhood Fellowship sometimes takes in homeless people and helps them get a new start. However, family can become an excuse not to take risks in helping needy people.

Both celibacy and marriage are to be viewed as serving a larger cause, to be involved, each in its own way, in furthering God's kingdom, witnessing to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Wesley Hill, a gay person who has committed himself to celibacy, has viewed this double mission-vision as complementary, with marriage pointing back to God's design in creation of male and female and celibacy pointing forward to the eschatological fulfillment when marriage is no more (Mark 12:24-25):

Neither celibacy or marriage is intelligible by itself; both are viewed as interlocking and mutually reinforcing, as they together point toward the eschatological reign of God. Marriage in the NT comes to be understood as a sign of Christ's love for the church (Eph 5:22-23) and as a figure for the eschatological marriage supper of the Lamb in the book of Revelation (19:2; 21:1-2).¹⁷

In this article Wes Hill develops three crucial emphases for churches: to give dignity to celibacy, theologically and practically; to teach the discipline of celibate sexuality; and to expect and direct celibacy toward spiritual kinship and friendship—as every person needs for meaningful living. This threefold task needs to permeate every menu of congregational life and church publications.

Where we go from here? I suggest, as has John Roth also, we put our decisions as congregations and conferences in dialogue with and seek counsel from the discernment and judgment of the Mennonite Church worldwide. If this is not done we become provincial and block the mission and unity of the Mennonite church worldwide (see here Romans 14–15).

¹⁷ Wesley Hill, "Washed and Still Waiting: An Evangelical Approach to Homosexuality," *Journal of the Evangelical Society*, 59/2 (2016), 328. This article is a follow-up to a review of his earlier excellent book, *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality* (Zondervan, 2010).

Further, given the importance of teaching celibacy as a gift and Christian calling as noted above, we need to learn to speak of same-sex *kinship* for the sake of personal shalom and health. If two men or women choose to live together as friends we should not assume genital sex.¹⁸

A congregation that makes inclusion of gays and lesbians its hallmark, or any identity group as such (e.g., people with the “right” last name), threatens its central Christian beliefs for baptism, discipline, and fellowship. Every congregation should welcome all people and seek to utilize the gifts of all.¹⁹ This involves costly discipleship and transformation for all of us in values, practices, and priorities. In our present conflictive situation we must also consider what we believe about sexual ethics more broadly, and here I recommend the book by Jonathan Grant, *Divine Sex: A Compelling Vision for Christian Relationships in a Hypersexualized Age* (Brazos Press, 2015). Indeed, homosexuality is not a free-standing issue; it is part and parcel of changing

¹⁸ Most interesting is such a Christian kinship couple living together had to post on Facebook to say they are not lesbian, to clear up, apparently, wrong assumptions.

¹⁹ The illusion of inclusion: why becoming a so-called “welcoming” congregation is not a good idea, in which “welcoming” is narrowed down to this particular group:

a. If one includes gays and lesbians in sexual relationships, can we support also those who are seeking to change from same-sex practice to heterosexual practice. If we don’t, we are exclusive, and are denying that a fresh encounter with Christ may change one’s life! In one church with strong advocacy to accept gays and lesbians where I spoke on this topic, one woman who had left lesbian relationships years ago, is now married and mother of three, feels ostracized. In a small Circle Group to discern, though, she has freedom to speak.

b. Many gays and lesbians are not interested in a church that welcomes only those in covenant union. A gay man who spoke in the 90s at an AMBS colloquium said, “Why would I go to a church that wants to bless gay and lesbian covenant unions. I’m not in a committed relationship, don’t plan to be in the near future, and I don’t want to be celibate. Is this person to be included or excluded? He grew up in a Mennonite family. How can our churches be open to *ministry to gays and lesbians* realizing that such represents a *spectrum of situations* and desires?”

c. Suppose the two persons in a same-sex covenant relationship (or even marriage) are not both Christian: one is Christian and one is neo-pagan or even atheist, as is sometimes the case. Proponents of homosexuality say that the Leviticus texts and the 1 Corinthians 6:9 forbade same-sex intercourse because it was a pagan cultic practice—but that’s not what we are talking about today. Actually, in some cases we are. We might ask why it is that numerous homosexual people are drawn to neo-pagan beliefs and practices today. Can the church bless a union that is only one-sidedly Christian?! Membership may be an easier issue, because each stands alone. But usually those who seek membership desire the blessing of the church on their union. Hence, the problem.

d. A deeper issue. Once a congregation blesses a gay or lesbian covenant relationship, can and should the body limit inclusion to gays and lesbians in covenant unions? If they do there will be painful exclusions (see b above), the very thing the congregation originally sought to overcome.

sexual ethics in the last five decades. Heterosexual ethics have also changed.²⁰ Pornography, an addiction for too many youth, men, and women of all ages is now even “capturing” our children.

My position: I am welcoming and affirming of gays and lesbians as persons with gifts of value to the church, but I do *not condone* same-sex genital sexual practice in light of biblical teachings regarding marriage and prohibitions against same-sex genital practice. We must respect and *love one another* amid our discernment. My major concerns are the effects this huge shift has had: on love for Scripture; daily Bible reading and meditation in the home; Bible teaching in congregations (both worship and Sunday School); the importance of Bible courses in our colleges and universities;²¹ rupture of unity in the church; and loss of passion for mission.

Mennonite membership in Ethiopia, growing like mustard seed, is over double, almost triple, the combined membership of MCUSA and MCCanada together. MWC membership in the Congo is about double. Membership in Tanzania will soon exceed that of the above combined also. What lies ahead for the denominational Mennonite Church in USA and Canada is unknown, but current loss of congregations and diminishing membership forebodes a bleak future. Let us not lose heart, however, but abound in love and commit to mission and truth.²²

²⁰ The sexual turmoil that hit university and seminary society in the late 1960s and early 1970s is well illustrated by two realities I encountered while at Princeton Theological Seminary, 1968-71: wife-swapping and one professor said to have three wives. Since then sexual practices have tamed a bit or I have just been more insulated from that world.

²¹ Departure from Scripture’s teaching against homosexuality practice too often leads church members to “shelve” the Bible, and not make it a primary source in moral guidance, to see what it says, and discern what it means. If Scripture is to be a moral guide for our lives, we need to know what it says and what it mean for us on same-sex genital relationships. A gem from Walter Moberly tells why:

Why bother with the Bible at all? In a culture impatient of traditional authorities, why should Christians go through the complicated rigmarole of biblical interpretation? Is it not a prime case of “If you will believe outdated nonsense, then you must expect the consequences?” Why not abandon the Bible and be free? To such siren voices the Christian response is, in essence, simple. When you have found the pearl of great price, the one thing needful, then you are foolish to let it go. There is—in the God revealed in Jesus Christ, to whom Scripture bears witness—a reality, a love, a truth which is worth holding on to, come what may. What is at stake is not petty rules and restrictions on puzzles about contemporary sexuality, but one’s whole understanding of life and death.

²² The Amish population in USA, by procreation not mission, is 4x larger than MCUSA membership!

10. Unity within the body of Christ must be our priority amid all our discussions and decisions. Jesus' farewell prayer in John 17 focuses on unity—that they may be one as I the Son am one with Father. These are Jesus' last words to his disciples as a group. I believe they would also be Jesus' last words for us today (see **handout**, from Commentary and its companion volume).²³

The Ending and Beginning

Where is my compassion for the marginalized? Not categories, but people. I love, or try to love all people, and without labels. A Pittsburgh Mennonite lesbian in a letter in *The Mennonite* in 2014 makes a key point: stop identifying me with a label, LGBT. I want to be known as a person with my distinctive personality and gifts. I support that and would vote for our church papers never to use labels: not “LGBTQ” or “homosexuals.” Both hide us from real people whom we are called to love and walk beside toward God's transformation of our lives, whatever that might mean. I have and continue to relate to people who are gay or lesbian. I don't know all the answers to this vexing problem but I do know Jesus' prayer for us, with a threefold sequence:

Protect them from the evil one.

Sanctify them in/by your truth.

Make them one as I and my Father are one.

(see handout for Jean Vanier's meditation on unity and other poetry in the same book).

Two accompanying handouts

1. The pertinent texts in 1 Corinthians 5–6 and Romans 1.
2. Jesus' Prayer for Unity (John 17).

Addendum 1 Presentation in Gayle Gerber Koontz's class on sexual ethics (2013), focused on Romans 1:18–3:26, which includes a correlation between Swartley's *Homosexuality* and Ted Grimsrud's/Mark Nation's *Reasoning Together*, to which Loren Johns and I were responding)

Addendum 2 Same sex practices and HIV-AIDS

²³ Willard Swartley, *Living Gift: John's Jesus in Meditation and Poetry, Art and Song* (Evangel Publ., 2013).

Presentation on Homosexuality: Focus on Romans 1:18 to 3:26 Willard Swartley (3/28/13)

citing John Toew's on Rom 1:18-2:3. *Romans* (BCBC, 2004: 48-49); wms modification:

The sin of humanity is that men and women did not glorify God or give thanks. Humanity knew God, but did not recognize or honor God. The fundamental human perversion is rejection of God.

Two points here are important and foundational for Romans. First, the language is covenantal. *Glorify* and *give thanks* are relational terms that come from the OT. Creation establishes a bond between Creator and creature, but humanity rejects the bond. Second, the language used to reject the relationship is "honor-shame" (385-86). *To glorify* is *to honor* and *to give thanks* is to express gratitude for a relationship.

The judgment for refusing to be in covenant with God is that human beings became "empty-headed" in thinking and unperceptive in discernment. Humanity loses touch with reality, does not think clearly, when it rejects God. The refusal to acknowledge God has consequences for knowledge and understanding (epistemology). It distorts the Creator-creation order, and leads to ungodliness and injustice (*adikia*).

1:22-2:3 The Just Retribution of God

This section has a distinctive structure: the logic of the Jewish scheme of just judgment (*ius talionis*): crime, judgment, and punishment. The scheme is repeated four times, 1:22-24, 1:25-27, 1:28-31, 1:32-2:3.

<u>Crime</u>	<u>God's Reaction</u>	<u>Moral Consequences</u>
v. 22 - asserting to be wise, they exchanged (<i>allassō</i>)	v. 24 - therefore (<i>dio</i>) God gave them up	v. 24 - impurity, dishonoring of bodies
v. 25 - who (<i>hoitenes</i>) exchanged (<i>metallassō</i>)	v. 26 - therefore (<i>dio</i>) God gave them up	vv. 26-7 - sexual perversion to degrading passions (NRSV)
[vv. 26b-27 females/women exchanged (<i>metēllaxen</i>) the natural intercourse (<i>chrēsin</i>) for the unnatural (<i>para phusin</i>) Likewise, the males/men gave up (exchange implied) natural intercourse, consumed with passion (<i>orexei</i>) for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men, and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.]		
v. 28 - they not thinking fit to know God	v. 28 - just as (<i>kathōs</i>) God gave them up	vv. 28-31 - unthinking mind, to social vices [20 of them]
v. 32 - who (<i>hoitenes</i>) knowing the just judgment of God, worthy of death	v. 2:1 - therefore (<i>dio</i>) no excuse	2:1-3 - judge yourself, judgment of God

The issue in vv. 22-24 is idolatry; humanity exchanges the glory of God for glorying the human and animals. Verse 23 refers to Israel's worship of the golden calf at Sinai by citing Psalms 106:20 and Jeremiah 2:11. *God gave them up*--the language involves an act of divine judgment—to impurity and the dishonoring of the human body. The most patent manifestation of both is sexual immorality. Linking idolatry and sexual immorality is common in the OT and Judaism. Idolatry, the root human sin in Jewish thinking and in Paul, leads to all other sins. But the logic of "idolatry leads to immorality" is usually applied to the Gentiles. The surprise here is that Paul uses the unfaithfulness of Israel itself, not the Gentiles, to document idolatry. [Most scholars, however, regard this as Jews' view of Gentile vices].

The key idea is "exchange" in vv. 25-27. Humanity exchanges the truth and worship of God for self-worship. The creature is substituted for the Creator. The judgment is specific: sexual immorality, exchange heterosexuality to homosexuality (associating idolatry & homosexuality as the primary example of sexual immorality was common in Jewish literature, wms, 36-37) [Toews, *Romans*; Homosexuality: 383-85]

The Literary Context, and Function of this text in larger context: 1:16-3:26

- v. 16 The salvation canopy of the whole: “I am not ashamed of the gospel:
it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith,
to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Gentile)”

Chiasm of larger unit:

- A The Righteousness (Justice) of God Revealed, 1:17
 B The Wrath of God Revealed against all ungodliness and wickedness/injustice
 of those who suppress the truth in their wickedness/injustice (*adikia*), 1:18
 C Case 1: Idolatry and Sexual Immorality, 1:19-27
 Plus twenty other “debased mind” forms of wickedness, 1:28-32
 C' Case 2: Self-righteous judgment upon those who do these things,
 when/for you are also doing them, 2:1-3
 Cases closed: all people, Jew and Gentile, under God’s judgment, 2:4–3:4
 B' All under power of sin, and judgment of God’s wrath (3:5-6)
 None righteous, not even one (3:10ff. citing Pss 14, 53)
 Every mouth silenced; whole world held accountable, 3:5-20
 A' The righteousness of God is revealed through Jesus Christ to all who believe, 3:21-26
 No distinction: *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (3:23)
Justification (5:1; 1 Cor 6:11) is a gift of grace through redemption in/by Jesus Christ!

Does this whitewash any of the sins recounted in chs 1-2? God forbid (*mē genoito*): Rom 6!

How preach and sing it? Ideas:

“O let all who are thirsty... Come...”

Come to the mercy seat (*hilasterion*, Rom 3:25), name sin, accept God’s righteousness.²⁴

No justice outside of God’s justice (justice is a cipher, unless it is God’s justifying us—a gift)

Worship God-Creator, not creature/creation, which manifests God’s majesty and wisdom

Let us not suppress the truth by our ungodliness, injustice, or self-righteousness

Correlation between Ted/Mark, Reasoning and wms, Homosexuality

<u>Ted/Mark</u>	<u>Willard</u>
p. 94 Mark’s list of “explanations” muting text for us	pp. 55-67 Examine the exegesis
p. 97 Re American Psychiatric Assoc.	p. 86 and notes 26-27 on p. 186
p. 111 Assumptions re. Jewish negativity to homos.	p. 36-37 (correct p.37: 4th: <i>para</i> , not <i>kata</i>) pp. 140-41, Appendix 1
p. 116 Ted, re. no other use of <i>arsenokoitai</i> , really! ?	pp. 67-71 & n. 39 on p. 192 (key article)
p. 144 Ted’s ref. to Sodom	p. 32 top, Appendix 1, 140-41
p. 148 Problem: “wasted seed” argument: majority of sexual prohibitions in Lev. 18-20 have nothing to do with wasting seed. Whole text, though, accentuates “for I am the Lord, your God”—36x. Most prohibitions are against pagan neighbors’ religious practices, and therefore condemned (OT German scholar, Klaus Baltzer, noted for his analysis of parallels between OT covenant and Hittite treaties)	
150-58 justice/injustice. To me, no sense in exegesis	key in hermeneutic task, pp. 96-97
160 middle: Sibylline Oracles unclear on <i>arsenokoitai</i>	p. 141 and 2016 VA Conf. art., trans. clear to me.

²⁴ The Greek word, *dikaio sunē*, may be translated *righteousness* or *justice*; similarly the adj., *righteous/just*. Protestant produced Bibles generally use *righteousness*; R.C. Bibles until recently, *justice*. Also many translations have “wickedness” in Rom 1:18 for *adikia* (cf. 1 Cor 6:1, 9). How does one get “justice” out of “injustice”—making justice the issue to approve as right what is in list of vices, including injustice (*adikia*)!?!? I don’t get Ted’s “reasoning.” The broader biblical emphasis on justice might and should play in the hermeneutic task, as noted above. Both Mark and Ted might do more on hermeneutic: how do we get from there to now: what criteria do we use (historical—Boswell; theological—Hays, analogical—Webb)? See my chapter 6 (93-113). Does analysis of our western culture belong to our discernment (my ch. 5)?

Addendum 2: Same sex practices and HIV-AIDS

With forty million people in the world living with or having had HIV-AIDS (see the 2015 *Elkhart Truth* article comparing Ebola with HIV-AIDS), we who believe life is sacred must say no to same-sex practices that certainly spread, and perhaps generate HIV-AIDS!²⁵ With Ebola death comes swiftly while one may be infected with the HIV virus for up to seven years before the AIDS diagnosis is evident. Approximately one million Americans have died from AIDS. This is love killing softly and painfully. This male and female death reality testifies to a literal meaning of “unnatural” in Romans 1:25-27.

In 2013 5000 infected in Florida.

In early 2016 an outbreak of 500 infected in Scott County (southern) in Indiana.

I know of seven Mennonite men who died from AIDS since 1970, but of no Mennonites who died fighting America’s wars during that period. Lesbian sex carries comparatively little health risk, except for slightly higher cancer rates. Hence it is easier for me to accept lesbian unions than gay ones. If change from homoerotic desire and practice is not possible, then celibacy would be the biblical option (here I affirm Ron Sider’s article, *Menn World Review*, Oct 27, 2014)). Even if we affirm a life-time union of two men or two women I do not think we should regard this as marriage in light of Jesus’ defining marriage as the union of male and female when questioned by the Pharisees on divorce, as well as his denunciation of *porneia* with the word occurring four times on three different occasions (Matt 5:32/19:9; 15:19; Mark 7:21).²⁶

²⁵ I’m quite aware than the larger number of HIV infections occur in southern Africa and to some extent in Asian countries through heterosexual intercourse. The rapid spread is due to married men who have sex with infected prostitutes and then heterosexual intercourse **or** when a male has had anal intercourse with another infected male without condom protection. In southern Africa men are absent from home to work in the mines for weeks as a time (rooming with other men) and then go home to multiple wives. The infection impacts the children of such heterosexual intercourse. In USA sharing needles for drug infusions is a major factor (witness the current Indiana Scott County problem). *The Week* (June 12, 2015) estimates 21.4 million are HIV infected that are not receiving treatment. Of some consolation is the cocktail of drugs used to abate, but rarely cure, AIDS. One of the first “cocktails” was “hatched” by a Mennonite researcher, based in Chicago, likely working for a pharmaceutical company. Dying of AIDS is a prolonged painful death. Little wonder that the Mennonite Kokomo woman sobbed as she told me her son’s story. Multiply this by *how many* parents in the Mennonite Church? No one knows. Further, no one can write about the tragic side of this reality in Mennonite papers. It is too painful, and in most cases, especially medical doctors and counselors, it would be a breach of confidentiality. Note how Dr. Don Martin’s 2015 May article in *The Mennonite* was snubbed by “picky” points in the June issue.

²⁶ Varied forms of the *porn* word occur 56 times in the NT, and most scholars would say that it includes same-sex. Most recent English translations use the word, *fornication*. But its meaning is broader, denoting incest in 1 Cor 5:1-3.