

Pastoral Letter on Homosexuality

*By the Board of General Superintendents
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An Unavoidable Debate

The debate over homosexuality dominates lives, devastates families, divides societies, and destroys souls. It deserves the careful, prayerful attention of Christ-followers as we pursue our mission of spreading hope and holiness.

The Wesleyan Church recognizes its responsibility to speak the truth in love about all areas of life that have direct bearing on human spirituality, including human sexuality. From pastors, college administrators, youth workers, counselors and politicians—to parents, marriage partners, struggling gays and lesbians, corporate executives and militant activists—voices for holiness need to be heard in an increasingly jarring discussion that has so many eternal outcomes at stake.

New Times—Ancient Problems

There is little disharmony in the long history of the Church about homosexual behavior being contrary to Christian faith. The apostles, the writers of Scripture, the Early Church Fathers (like Tertullian, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, Origen, John Chrysostom and many others), great doctors and teachers of the faith (like Augustine and Aquinas), Reformers (like Luther, Calvin, Knox and Zwingli), John Wesley and the early Methodists, along with countless modern theologians, scholars and Spirit-filled Christians were all in one accord regarding the sinfulness of homosexual activity.⁴ In recent years, some denominations have condoned homosexual relationships as behavior compatible with a Christian profession of faith.

An Outlook Informed by Wesleyan Theology

So, what should be different about how Wesleyan leaders and churches approach the issue of homosexuality in contemporary societies and cultures? It is our intentional choice of a Christlike, Spirit-led, biblically informed “middle way” (*via media*) that refuses to regard people merely as victims of biology or fate, while rejecting self-righteousness, bigotry, dehumanizing humor, judgmentalism, and other intolerable responses as options that do not reflect the perfect love we hold as our spiritual and behavioral ideal. A Wesleyan *via media* honors God as our Creator and Sovereign, while respecting men and women as free-will agents with eternal worth and sobering responsibilities.

A Wesleyan outlook challenges uncertain science with unambiguous Scripture.

In confronting current social views and values, the Church accepts its role as a prophetic voice (calling people to righteousness) that is simultaneously compassionate (yearning and working patiently for all to come to repentance and life in Christ). This often means the Church must be countercultural—swimming against the tide of popular or political opinion by opposing things in society that have been corrupted by spiritual forces of darkness. At the risk and price of being branded, labeled, ridiculed, and persecuted, Wesleyans choose to align ourselves with the Word of God.

Consequently, we find no positive examples or justification anywhere in God's Word to sanction sexual relations between same-sex partners. Instead, we find multiple, unmistakably clear passages indicating that homosexual practices are the consequence of fallen human nature. The bad news is that all such sins cause separation from God. The good news is that the Scriptures offer abundant hope for deliverance and freedom, because as the writer of 1 John 1:9 said (noting that the Bible makes no distinction as to their type or frequency), "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from *all* unrighteousness." Wesleyans place confidence not only in the clarity of Scripture that enables us to discern right and wrong, but also in the authority of Scripture to define the boundaries for personal and social morality.

Science is unable to answer certain questions about homosexuality. Is it the result of nature or nurture? Is it a choice people make or is it a genetic inevitability? Is it morally right or wrong? Can people change their sexual orientation from homosexual to heterosexual?

While science may have unresolved questions, Scripture is unequivocal about the divine design for the sexes and the sinfulness of indulging sexual lust, fantasies, and relations—gay or straight—outside a faithful marriage covenant between a man and a woman.

- Malachi, Jesus, and Paul all quoted Genesis 2:24 in affirming sexual intercourse as a sanctified bond between a male and female that creates a "one fleshness" symbolic of God's intended intimacy with His people (Malachi 2:13-16; Matthew 19:4-6; 1 Corinthians 6:15-17; Ephesians 5:25-32). The differentiation and complementarity of maleness and femaleness is a direct reflection of our creation in the image of God. Therefore, homosexual behavior is contrary to the Creator's design for people.
- The Ten Commandments forbid stealing sex without marriage ("You shall not commit adultery"—Deuteronomy 5:18) and stealing marriage partners ("You shall not covet your neighbor's wife"—Deuteronomy 5:21). Again, the faithful, loving, self-giving, self-denying bond of marriage between a man and a woman is the only legitimate relationship for experiencing sexual intimacy.
- Leviticus 18 catalogs at least 23 different, forbidden sexual relationships (including homosexual coupling in verse 22), so as to leave no room for debate that sex is a spiritual matter, as well as a physical act, and that it is meant for expression solely between a husband and wife.
- Homosexual lust and behavior are characterized in Scripture as sinful. Old Testament examples include the men of Sodom, who demanded that Lot surrender two angelic guests in his home to have sex with them (Genesis 19:1-11); the men of Gibeah, who gang raped and killed the concubine of a man visiting their town, after he gave her to them for sex rather than himself (Judges 19); and Leviticus 20:13 condemns homosexual behavior among Israelites as a capital offense because of its negative social impact.
- In the New Testament, male homosexual practice is mentioned in three different lists of sins and sinners that incur the judgment and wrath of God apart from repentance and faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 1:24-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; and 1 Timothy 1:9-10). Romans 1:26 is the only clear biblical allusion to lesbian behavior, and it, too, is described as "shameful" and "unnatural".

Wesleyans, however, hold steadfastly and unapologetically to the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as God's inspired, infallible, inerrant, and supremely authoritative guide for Christian faith and conduct.⁷ We regard God's revealed truth as absolute (that is, it is valid in all times and places); the canonical revelation as complete (in other words, not open to addition by "new revelations" or subtraction by modern revisionist interpreters); and historic Christian faith and practice as wiser counsel than opinion polls or majority votes (although tradition is not in and of itself authoritative and is always subject to correction by the Word of God).

A Wesleyan outlook takes sin and human depravity seriously.

To do less repudiates the holiness of God and depreciates human freewill. We believe all people are born broken, with an inherited disposition toward wrongdoing and evil. We believe people become more broken by their own choices, by habitually giving in to their sinful nature, and by willing participation in personal and corporate acts of sin.⁸ Furthermore, we believe human destiny will be determined ultimately by our personal choices.⁹ Freewill comes with enormous risk to the Sovereign One who gives it (after all, it means we can reject Him) and enormous responsibility to those who receive it (for as we are reminded in Hebrews 2:3, “How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?”).

Taking sin seriously means taking human responsibility seriously also. This is why Wesleyan theology ascribes guilt to sinful behaviors, but not to sinful desires or temptations. A broad definition of sin as any shortcoming or failure (accidental or intentional) to attain God’s perfect standards ultimately means viewing some people as passive victims of circumstances beyond their control for which they will still be punished by God. On the other hand, the classic Wesleyan definition of sin as the willful violation of the known law of God takes human freedom into account. Consequently, we say acts of sin must be dealt with by forgiveness; temptations to sin must be overcome by faith in the Lord’s sanctifying grace at work in the obedient disciple’s life (“walking in the light,” as 1 John 1:9 describes it).

How does this relate to sexuality? A Wesleyan outlook distinguishes between temptations arising out of an individual’s sexual orientation and his or her personal choices to act out those desires. A person is not guilty simply because he or she experiences wrong desires or feelings of temptation. Guilt comes from willingly nursing and pursuing those wrong desires. For example, heterosexual persons are not asked to repent because they have heterosexual desires. Rather, we urge them to submit their desires to God’s commands, fully surrender and consecrate their lives to Him, and rely on the indwelling, sanctifying power of the Spirit of Christ to enable them to live in victory over their fleshly nature and desires. Similarly, we should not condemn people simply because they feel homosexual desires. We should call them to repentance and forgiveness only if intentional acts of sin in thought, word or deed take them past thinking and feeling to doing and being.

The basis for this understanding is a biblical view that that sin is more than just falling short of God’s perfection and standards. It is the willful violation of His revealed laws and truth. Guilt is incurred when one willfully does what he or she knows to be wrong, whether or not a person has ever read or heard the written Word of God. As Paul reminded us in Romans 1:18-20—

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

God’s Word clearly warns that some people will not inherit the kingdom of God because of their impenitence and rejection of Christ as their Savior and Lord. As lay theologian and Christian apologist C.S. Lewis put it in *The Great Divorce*, “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’ All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell.”¹⁰

Yet, hell is not the only option. Hope, holiness, and heaven are choices for everyone thanks to Jesus

Christ! He is our great salvation—available as the free gift of God’s love to all people, along with the very faith necessary for believing and receiving Him. Except for those too young or too mentally impaired to be held accountable for their choices, we are each responsible for choosing either to accept or reject this salvation.¹¹

It is not a specific type of sin that makes one person more deserving of wrath or special punishment than others. It is noteworthy that the Apostle Paul lumped homosexual sinners in the same category as heterosexual sinners. In an illustrative list of lost souls in 1 Corinthians 6, he includes the sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexual offenders, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, slanderers, and swindlers. Other types of sinners are warned about their spiritual peril elsewhere in Scripture, too, including lawbreakers of all kinds—from coveters to murderers, from the unforgiving to the unbelieving, from the uncompassionate to the unrepentant. Homosexual lust and acts are sin, and like all other sins they result in separation from God that can turn into self-inflicted, everlasting pain and torment—in spite of the Lord Himself moving heaven and earth to save people from such consequences.

Judgment is not the message in which the Church delights, even though we obediently warn people about its inescapable reality. However, we always share it as a plea for people to repent and be saved. Transformational grace is our true joy to proclaim. The good news is that the Lord has provided a way to escape sin and hell for “all who believe” (see Romans 3:22-24, 6:22-23; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-14; and 2 Peter 3:9). Human depravity can be undone. God’s Word reveals that sinners of all sorts are the very kind of people He is ready to embrace with grace. In fact, after citing a rogue’s list, the Apostle Paul bluntly declared, “That is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Wesleyans take sin seriously, but we do so with wholehearted assurance of the availability and transforming power of God’s saving, sanctifying grace.

A Wesleyan outlook confronts determinism with the optimism of grace.

We do not believe that anyone is predestined to homosexuality or destined to remain in an endless loop of sinful habits, followed by repeated failure and habitual repentance. The Scriptures promise more than forgiveness of sins—they promise deliverance from sin’s domination over our lives. Jesus said, “. . . If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. . . . Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:31-32, 34-36).

We trust the testimony of Scripture that people can change. We are also confident of this because of firsthand evidence. We have witnessed the gospel transform individuals, families, communities, nations—in fact, the course of history itself. For good cause we believe this divine power is still operative here and now...in our own lives and in the lives of people around us. As the Lord says, “. . . Those who hope in me will not be disappointed” (Isaiah 49:23). There is living proof all around us that His word is true. Therefore, we are not ashamed of the gospel, “. . . because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16).

Our churches are full of persons who have experienced God’s power in their lives. They have been forgiven and become forgivers. They have instantaneously or through disciplined effort and divine enablement been delivered from addictions, resentments, compulsions, and temptations. Sins and perversions they once delighted in indulging have become repulsive to them. Broken relationships and trust have been restored. Diseases have been cured. Emotional and physical wounds have been

healed. Demons have been exorcised—as well as personal demons, like pride, self-centeredness, lust, anger, and every other imaginable vice. Finances have been repaired. Honor and dignity have been rebuilt. These grace stories are so commonplace that they are often overlooked or thought unremarkable. Yet, the compound magnitude of the evidence of life transformation experienced by Christ-followers is compelling: God’s grace changes lives!

In his book, *Loving Homosexuals as Jesus Would*, ex-gay Chad W. Thompson testifies to his own transformation and that he knows dozens of men and women who have successfully changed their sexual orientation. “But for many of these men and women,” he says, “sexual reorientation was not necessarily their main objective. Their objective, instead, was obedience to God’s plan for their lives.” He then adds, “...Those who change have one thing in common: perseverance. The process of change takes time because it rides on the sanctification process, which is a lifelong process. And Jesus, being the facilitator of our sanctification (or “spiritual cleansing”), is ultimately in charge of the results.”¹² While some might quibble a bit over instantaneous v. progressive sanctification, we all applaud recognition of the fact that it is the mighty inner working of the Spirit that brings about genuine transformation in the lives of those who trust and obey Christ.

Therefore, we assert without hesitation that homosexual attractions and habits, like all other temptations and sins, can be overcome by the grace of God. Along with Paul in Galatians 5:16-17 and 24-25, we say:

... Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature.... But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

So confident of grace as we are, we also recognize and admit the challenges facing Christians struggling with homosexuality who sincerely want to live by the Spirit. Deliverance may be, but is not always, instantaneous, and it will certainly not be without struggle for most. However, the desire and the courage to be transformed are the direct result and influence of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and “... he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6).

A Wesleyan outlook underscores people’s responsibility for cooperating with God’s grace.

Our understanding is based on the doctrine of *prevenient grace*—the ability God gives those who are “dead in transgressions and sins” (Ephesians 2:1) to respond to the gift of salvation He offers all people through Christ. John Wesley wrote, “The will of man is by nature free only to evil. Yet... every man has a measure of free-will restored to him by grace.”¹³ This outlook is expressed in The Wesleyan Church’s Article of Religion on “*Repentance and Faith*”: “We believe that for men and women to appropriate what God’s prevenient grace has made possible, they must voluntarily respond in repentance and faith. The ability comes from God, but the act is the individual’s.”¹⁴ The interplay of free grace and free will is called “synergy.” It does not imply that we are “saved by grace plus something else,” since apart from God’s enablement, our repentance, faith, and transformation are all impossible. Yet, because He has given us the ability to respond to Him, we are fully accountable for whether or not we do.

So, what does any of this have to do with homosexuality? The point is that, even if science proved a genetic cause (which so far it has not), nature would not excuse anyone from his or her

responsibility for obedience and submission to God's revealed will. Even if, as some admit, they have "felt" gay or like they were "trapped in the wrong body" since childhood, it would make them no less responsible for pursuing chastity and purity. Even if psychologists and psychiatrists yield to political correctness by refusing to provide reparative therapy for those who want to change their sexual orientation from gay to straight, God's grace has made deliverance possible for thousands who are not now what they once were because they have chosen to trust and obey Christ (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). The same biblical rules apply to homosexual temptations that apply to heterosexual temptations—we must flee from lust into the arms of God, our Deliverer and Protector. Homosexuals and heterosexuals are under the same biblical commands to abstain from sexual sins, like lustful longing (Matthew 5:27-30; Colossians 3:5-7); promiscuity (Proverbs 5:20-23; Romans 1:24; 1 Corinthians 6:18-20); and sexual coupling other than in the marriage bed (1 Corinthians 6:15-17; Hebrews 13:4).

Lest anyone think the Bible's prohibitions are a heavy yoke, the Scriptures are filled with reminders that those who submit to the will of God by respecting the sanctity of sex are blessed in all kinds of ways (often in the very same context where there are strong warnings against sexual sins, such as Leviticus 18 or 1 Corinthians 7). The obedient disciple is delivered from evil (Exodus 15:26; John 17:9-11; Galatians 5:16); freed from guilt and shame (Romans 8:1-2; Galatians 5:1; 1 John 2:28); equipped for self-control (Galatians 5:19-23); liberated for unhindered fellowship with other believers (1 John 1:7); filled with spiritual assurance (1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 John 1:9 and 2:3-6); empowered for holy living (Romans 6:17-22); and drawn into greater intimacy with the Lord (Romans 8:5-11). In fact, obedience fosters deep spiritual assurance that strengthens Christ-followers for victorious living (Romans 8:37; 1 John 2:15-17). By accepting responsibility for cooperating with God's grace, there is a way of escape from every temptation.

A Wesleyan outlook rebukes judgmentalism and cheap grace with a call to perfect love for others.

God balances judgment and love perfectly. Most of us are not so good at it. We are more prone to exaggerate one over the other—either erring on the side of turning judgment into searing condemnation or turning love into cheap grace. Neither is the desired "middle way."

Judgmentalism is thinking we are morally superior to others because we have not done the things they do (or at least we no longer practice them like we once did). It is the form of hypocrisy and lovelessness illustrated by Jesus' story in Luke 18:9-14 about two men who came to the Temple to pray—one a Pharisee (a Jewish spiritual leader with expert knowledge of God's law and its moral obligations) and the other a publican (a public contractor who worked for the Roman government to collect taxes, supply its army, and oversee government projects, and, therefore, regarded by most as a collaborator with Israel's enemies). As the two prayed, the Pharisee congratulated himself on his own righteousness, comparing himself condescendingly with the publican. The tax collector, on the other hand, "...would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner'" (v. 13). We don't even have to guess who Jesus said went home truly justified in the eyes of God.

There is a difference between judging whether or not someone's actions are sinful and treating them judgmentally as sinners. Being able to judge behaviors—in terms of discerning right from wrong and preferring what is right—is a virtue, not a vice. Judgmentalism, on the other hand, is sinful, because it involves putting ourselves in the place of God and assuming the right to heap condemnation on others. Judgmentalism often stems from a failure to distinguish between appropriate "tolerance" (accepting, valuing, and respecting other persons, even if one disagrees or disapproves of their beliefs or actions) and inappropriate "intolerance" (rejecting, hating, and

disrespecting others—sometimes even disguising prejudice as humor—and treating them as worthless or as objects of disdain).

While lovelessness is one extreme to avoid, so is turning love into mere sentimentality. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian and Christian martyr killed by the Nazis in World War II, coined the phrase “cheap grace” and described it as “the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline...communion without confession...grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ.”¹⁵ Cheap grace sentimentalizes God’s love, so that, instead of a call to transformed, holy living, the deceptive message people hear instead is, “Sure you are a sinner, but Jesus loves and forgives you, so everything is okay now. You’re fine just the way you are. Don’t worry if you’re not perfect—nobody is. Just do your best and God will take care of the rest.”

In stark contrast, Bonhoeffer confronted his readers with the call to “costly grace.” Costly grace requires submitting to Christ and following Him. It means to have a broken spirit and contrite heart. It is demonstrated by taking on His yoke—in other words, His way of living in total obedience to the Heavenly Father’s will. Costly grace was what Jesus had in mind, when He said we must love the Lord wholeheartedly and love our neighbors as ourselves. Choosing this life of perfect love is the way to pursue the sanctification Jesus prayed in John 17 that all His disciples would experience.

The Church through its ministers and members must choose whether it will hold people (including LGBT persons) in indifference, anger, and fear...or in concern, friendship, and love. One choice is carnal; the other is Christlike. We are called to practice Christlike patience, forbearance, mercy, and compassion—made possible by the inner workings of the same transformational grace that forgives our sins. Our immutable God is the God of love, who out of “the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience” (Romans 2:4) leads toward repentance those on whom His wrath is already being “revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness” (Romans 1:18). Love will not allow us as Christ-followers to take any action that short-circuits the ultimate objective of grace, which is to bring sinners to repentance—no matter what kind of sin ensnares them. As we are reminded in 2 Peter 3:9, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

The Need for Church Leadership

The current homosexual debate in North American culture raises many challenging questions that the Church must be willing to address through its preaching, teaching, witnessing, fellowship, counseling, caring and sharing.

- What is the meaning of “maleness” and “femaleness”?
- What is the purpose of human sexuality?
- What is the meaning of “marriage”?
- Is homosexuality a voluntary choice involving moral responsibility or an inborn condition with amoral implications?
- What is sexual pathology?
- Can gays change their sexual orientation and become straight?
- What is the role of divine revelation in setting individual and societal sexual norms?
- What is the dividing line (or is there one and does it matter?) between acceptance and approval of someone who is gay?

- What does “tolerance” mean? Is it allowing others an equal right to believe, say and do whatever they wish, even if we disagree strongly with their opinion? Or is it treating all thoughts, values, beliefs, actions, and life styles as if they are equally right and valid?
- Are people defined by their “sexual orientation” or by their “spiritual obedience”?
- Can a homosexual be a Christian and can a Christian practice homosexuality and still be Christian?
- Are homosexual temptations and sins worse than heterosexual temptations and sins?

Church leaders must be willing to tackle life’s hard issues. However, our tone as we address difficult questions determines whether or not others can hear us. If the tenor of our voice turns shrill, we will be ignored. Hellfire and brimstone are real, but fear is not an effective change motivation for a generation that doesn’t believe in them anymore. Meanwhile, we cannot afford to be vague or evasive. Fortunately, the Church has already deliberated and spoken out publicly about many issues related to human sexuality in ways that provide wise counsel and guidance for current leaders.

What the Church Says about Sexuality

The main focus of The Wesleyan Church in regard to human sexuality is on being pro-marriage and pro-family—not on being anti-homosexual. Human sexuality is an arena for demonstrating reverence for God and holiness in relationships with others. We believe that the only legitimate relationship for fulfilling one’s sexual desires and needs is a lifelong, monogamous, loving marriage between a man and a woman. This means *all* persons are called to the *same* high standards of character and conduct. Unmarried, formerly married, widowed, or currently married—straight or gay—male or female—young or old—all are called to the same faithful observance of sexual purity and chastity.

In the context of marriage, sex is intended for expressing love and commitment, for strengthening a couple’s unity and intimacy, for giving and receiving personal pleasure, and for procreation. Departures from this Christian ideal—whether through emotional or physical affairs, pornographic gratification, promiscuity, incest, premarital sex, cohabitation before marriage, divorce, polygamy (or “serial monogamy,” as some have called multiple divorces and remarriages), and gay or lesbian liaisons—always pervert God’s perfect intention for the holy expression of human sexuality.

The Church’s stance on sexuality is biblical, historical, practical, and deeply convictional. “Collective conscience” is a term that describes the formal statements of Wesleyan beliefs and practices recorded in our official book of order.¹⁶ These statements are the result of a process of scholarly study, thorough debate, legislative agreement, and grassroots affirmation. They grow out of our understanding of the complexity and fallenness of human nature. They reflect our full confidence in the sufficiency of Jesus Christ’s atoning grace to save and sanctify all who put their faith in Him—regardless of their past actions, attitudes, or addictions. The following paragraphs of *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church* (2008 edition) articulate the Church’s collective conscience about God’s purpose for our sexual gifts and their expression.

Discipline 222—Article of Religion on “Marriage and the Family”

“We believe that every person is created in the image of God, that human sexuality reflects that image in terms of intimate love, communication, fellowship, subordination of the self to the larger whole, and fulfillment. God’s Word makes use of the marriage relationship as the supreme metaphor for His relationship with His covenant people and for revealing the truth that that relationship is of one God with one people. Therefore God’s plan for human sexuality is that it is to be expressed only in a monogamous lifelong relationship between

one man and one woman within the framework of marriage. This is the only relationship which is divinely designed for the birth and rearing of children and is a union made in the sight of God, taking priority over every other human relationship.”

Gen. 1:27–28; 2:18, 20, 23–24; Isa. 54:4–8; 62:5b; Jer. 3:14; Ezek. 16; Hosea 2; Mal. 2:14; Matt. 19:4–6; Mark 10:9; John 2:1–2, 11; 1 Cor. 9:5; Eph. 5:23–32; 1 Tim. 5:14; Heb. 13:4; Rev. 19:7–8.

Discipline 265:5—Covenant Membership Commitment “Toward Family”

“To follow the teachings of the Scriptures regarding marriage and divorce. We affirm that sexual relationships outside of marriage and sexual relationships between persons of the same sex are immoral and sinful. We further affirm that heterosexual monogamy is God’s plan for marriage, and we regard sexual sin of the spouse, such as adultery, homosexual behavior, bestiality or incest, as the only biblical grounds for considering divorce, and then only when appropriate counseling has failed to restore the relationship.”

Ex. 20:14, 17; 22:19; Lev. 20:10–16; Matt. 5:32; 19:19; Mark 10:11–12; Luke 16:18.

Discipline 410:5—Human Sexuality

The Wesleyan Church maintains a biblical view of human sexuality that makes the sexual experience, within the framework of marriage, a gift of God to be enjoyed as communion of a man and woman, as well as for the purpose of procreation. Sexual relationships outside of marriage and sexual relationships between persons of the same sex are immoral and sinful. The sinfulness of homosexual practice is recognized, and yet we believe the grace of God sufficient to overcome both the practice of such activity and the tendency leading to its practice.”

Discipline 3112—Ministerial Regulations on Marriage

“In performing marriages, Wesleyan ministers shall not unite in marriage persons of the same sex.”

Practical Perspectives for Wesleyan Leaders

Whether they are called upon to give guidance to church members or respond to inquirers and critics, some practical perspectives like the following can help undergird Wesleyan leaders who must deal with issues surrounding homosexuality.

Sex is a divinely created gift to humanity for both marital bonding and procreation.

The modern discovery of mammalian hormones like oxytocin (the so-called “love hormone” that plays an important role in orgasm and pair bonding) suggests that even at the biochemical level, God designed sexual contact between marriage partners to deepen their longing for, contentment with and devotion to each other. Stability in the husband-wife union establishes a solid foundation for family stability. The command to procreate, and thus sustain and multiply human life, necessitates the joining of male to female and explains the complementarity of God’s differentiation of the sexes. There is clearly divine design at work in human sexual physiology and psychology.

The Lord expressed His satisfaction repeatedly in Genesis chapter one with everything He made. However, after the crowning accomplishment of creation – namely, the formation and breathing of life into the first people –He said everything was “*very good*” (Genesis 1:31). The use of this superlative eliminates any doubt about the purposefulness and holiness of every capacity with which God made us, including our physical capabilities, mental faculties, emotions, spiritual awareness, and free moral agency.

To be even more to the point, sexuality as God intended for it to be experienced and enjoyed by men and women is holy. It is part of the image of God each of us carries at the very core of our being throughout our lifetimes. Sexual union provides relational glue for couples as they literally and without shame become “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24-25), even co-creating flesh in the act of parenting and nurturing new lives. Human sexual desire and activity are almost sacramental – reminding us to live in loving, loyal relationship with God and with one another. For this very reason, in Ephesians 5:31-32 the Apostle Paul used the sexual union of husband and wife as a metaphor to illustrate the mystical intimacy of Christ and His bride the Church.

Same-sex attraction is a corruption of God’s design for human relationships.

Is homosexuality a personal choice or a biological fact? Is being gay the product of nurture or nature? Is it determined by genetics (“I was born the way I am”) or by environment (“something or someone else made me this way”)? Is it the way God creates people or the way people become as a result of circumstances beyond their own control?

According to the Scriptures, Adam and Eve’s sin had immediate spiritual, physical, psychological, social, and other consequences for them and for the entire race to come from them. Separation from God’s immediate presence, feelings of alienation toward one another, Eve’s pain in childbirth, Adam’s toil made harder by thorn-infested ground, physical death, and a myriad of other hardships came into the world as a direct result of their rejection of God. Homosexuality is the consequence of sin, not a condition created by God. It bears all the marks of the curse.

The idea of “sexual orientation” has become a controversy in the contemporary Western social debate over homosexuality. It carries a technical meaning for some and political overtones for others. Legislators and politicians use it without definition, leaving open the door for future interpretation and application of associated laws. The American Psychological Association, on the other hand, defines “sexual orientation” as “an enduring emotional, romantic, sexual, or affectional attraction toward others,” that may include desires, feelings, and behaviors that are normal and positive variations of human sexuality “along a continuum that ranges from exclusive heterosexuality to exclusive homosexuality and includes various forms of bisexuality.”¹⁷ It is a definition that legitimizes these self-identities and treats psychology professionals who disagree as homophobic.¹⁸

The question remains open whether genetic, hormonal, environmental or volitional factors—or some combination of factors—cause people to feel same-sex attractions. Yet, none of these potential causes changes the moral responsibility and accountability of every person to live according to God’s revealed will. The heterosexually inclined are under the same rule of abstinence until marriage and self-control when married as the homosexually inclined. The rightness or wrongness of any sexual behavior has more to do with one’s spiritual orientation than his or her sexual orientation. Romans 8:5-7 puts it like this:

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.

Spiritual transformation trumps sexual orientation. That’s why the Apostle Paul urged, “...Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature.

They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want” (Galatians 5:16-7). Biblical theology, not psychology, defines what is normal or abnormal in human affections and behavior.

Speaking the truth in love, the Church must never quit calling “sin” by its proper name solely for the sake of political correctness or popularity. Sinners will never be persuaded to repent if no one believes they are one.

Same-sex attraction and behavior based on such attraction are separate issues.

Sexual desires are a battleground for domination of our spirits. Such desires are practically universal and lifelong. Uncontrolled they lead to great harm and guilt; self-controlled they can yield great blessing. As a natural human impulse, before marriage sexual attraction is an important aspect of courtship, romance and marriage in many cultures. In marriage, sexual attraction strengthens the faithful coupling and companionship of marital partners, consequently resulting in the populating of our planet and the perpetuation of the human species in keeping with the Creator’s plan. Outside of marriage, sexual attraction can result in lust, fornication (sexual relations involving unmarried persons, including premarital sex), adultery (sexual relations with someone other than a person’s spouse), incest, rape, and the prostitution of body and soul.

Sexual attraction originates with God-given, internal desires that are initially within one’s own power to control. What about persons who feel attracted to others of their same sex, though? Are such attractions God-given desires, too? The Christian response is no. The subversion of a normal human need or desire for self-deceived, self-aggrandizing, self-centered or self-destructive reasons is a *temptation* – not a gift from God.

We see this exemplified in the temptations of Jesus by Satan in the wilderness at the beginning of the Lord’s public ministry.¹⁹ Every temptation Jesus experienced was an allurement to evil, based on the twisting of an otherwise legitimate need or desire. Hunger and want were used first by the Devil to tempt Jesus to meet physical needs without relying on His Heavenly Father as His provider. Then, Satan urged Jesus to presume upon God’s protection by jumping from the Temple roof in Jerusalem, making a spectacle of supernatural power in the process, in order to gain instant fame and attention for His cause. Finally, Satan tried to use Jesus’ ultimate life ambition (namely, winning the world’s spiritual freedom) to justify false worship in exchange for an easy path to political influence and control.

Obviously, external spiritual forces, as well as our own voluntary mental and physical cooperation in entertaining and prolonging temptations, can easily turn otherwise natural and good impulses toward evil outcomes. This is especially true of sexual temptations and sins, which is why Christians are explicitly warned to “flee” from these (1 Corinthians 6:18). The Scriptures describe sin’s evolutionary process in James 1:13-15:

When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

A person’s natural desire for sexual intimacy is not sinful in and of itself. Yet, natural desire can be distorted into “evil desire” – in other words, desire that twists and warps life away from God’s will and love’s way. It results in what John Wesley referred to as “sin properly so called (that is, a voluntary transgression of a known law).”²⁰ Sin is acting on desires in ways that are contrary to what is known by Spirit-led conscience or Spirit-inspired revelation to be right and good. Sin is

embracing temptations with our minds, lusting for their gratification in our hearts, and knowingly seeking to play them out in thought, word or deed. Temptations do not require forgiveness through Christ's atoning blood; sinful acts do.

Therefore, Wesleyans affirm that it is actual homosexual behaviors—not fleeting or even persistent homosexual urges and feelings—that alienate people from God. There are genuine Christ-followers who struggle with all sorts of temptations—including homosexual attractions. Yet, the good news is that through dependence on Christ, true deliverance from evil is possible (the kind of deliverance asked for in the Lord's Prayer). For some, this deliverance is experienced as miraculous or instantaneous release from sinful desires, urges, compulsions, habits and addictions. For others, deliverance comes in the form of daily strength to remain faithfully obedient to God, even when it means enduring thorns in the flesh that He does not choose to remove. The Christian who continues to feel same-sex temptations, yet maintains a sexually chaste life, is experiencing the delivering power of God's grace.

The saving, sanctifying grace of God in Christ through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit is the double-cure for the corruption of God's purposes for human sexuality.

Humanity's need for grace is universal, but so is God's offer of grace. Therefore, while the Scriptures tell us that "...All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), they also declare that "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man" (1 Corinthians 10:13). "Whosoever will" statements are found throughout the Gospels (Matthew 10:32, 12:50, 16:25; Mark 3:35, 8:34, 8:35; Luke 9:24), as well as in Revelation 22:17, and they are implicit everywhere else! Without exception or exclusion, the Scriptures invite every person to take hold of God's salvation: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). To all who struggle with sexual temptations, the Word says, "The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body" (1 Corinthians 6:13). In fact, the same power that raised Christ from the dead is our guarantee of deliverance from these temptations, so that we can honor God with our bodies (1 Corinthians 6:14 and 20).

Reconciliation with God is the foundation for reconciliation with oneself and with others.

Many homosexuals experience inner turmoil over their own confused sexual identity and its consequences, including a conflicted personal conscience and damaged self-image. Suicide rates are significantly higher among homosexual males in comparison to the general population. Many gays and lesbians have unresolved issues with parents or family members. Some have done harm to themselves and others as a result of practicing promiscuous or unsafe sex. Some have broken others' hearts in the pursuit of their own selfish desires.

No matter how broken our lives have been, though, becoming God's friend opens the door for restoring friendships with those we have hurt in the past through seeking and freely giving forgiveness, making restitution, and adopting new practices of humility and love. Entering into a right relationship with God and restoring right relationships with others is also personally liberating—paving the way for release from guilt and shame, new self-confidence and inner peace.

The Church's Gifts to Those Who Are or Have Been Homosexual

So what can the Church do to minister to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons? Basically, the same things we would do for any other neighbor or friend whose life we hope to see transformed. Our first priority as Christ-followers is to love God and love our neighbors. Therefore, someone's sexual orientation is no more a test of whether or not they deserve and receive Christian

compassion, witness and service than any other distinguishing factor, like gender, age, ethnicity, social, or economic status. What if Wesleyans envisioned ministering to those who are or have been homosexual by giving them the following gifts?

1. Sincere love

Freely and fearlessly loving God and loving others is the heart of holiness. The little, New Testament letter of Jude was written in the context of direct confrontation of immorality. Verses 22-23 remind Christ-followers to “Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.” Don’t miss the missional balance in these words. What does sincere love look like? It is “mercy mixed with fear.” It is more than sentimentality. Sincere love proclaims both grace (God is merciful) and law (fiery judgment comes on unrepentant sinners). Ministry to homosexuals challenges the Church to be both pastoral and prophetic—patiently teaching those who are wavering about what they should believe, while urgently warning and rebuking others who are heading in the wrong direction. It requires practicing both compassion (showing mercy) and confrontation (snatching people from danger). It involves appealing to others both emotionally and intellectually. If you are going to pull someone else from the flames, you may get singed a bit yourself. People will talk about leaders and churches that take a stand for righteousness. What should concern us most, however, is that in the process they can’t help talking also about the amazing love we are unafraid and unashamed to show those needing it most.

2. Surprising hospitality

Jesus extended friendship to lepers, prostitutes, social rejects and sinners of all sorts. His Church must gladly do the same as it incarnates His love in the world today. Stereotypes of biblical Christians as prejudiced, bigoted, fundamentalist hypocrites abound in contemporary media. However, the Church should refuse to be defined by critics and define itself instead by its own actions. Jesus said, “...Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). The Apostle Peter reiterated this when he wrote, “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us” (1 Peter 2:12).

Condemning and shunning others seldom wins their hearts and respect. However, we can choose to welcome and initiate friendships with unconverted homosexuals just as we would anyone else who is outside the faith. Likewise, we can treat those who say they are Christians, yet who are still living carnal lives, just as we would any other church friend, relative or new convert who is still practicing sinful habits out of a yet-to-be renewed mind and biblically informed conscience. A welcoming attitude does not mean abandoning biblical convictions. It simply means putting them into practice. Simple, loving hospitality opens doors into hearts where the gospel needs to go.

3. Selfless service

Romans 5:8 conveys a principle that needs to be practiced by the Church, when it declares, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” This is the principle of love taking the initiative in redemptive relationships. The starting point for effective outreach and ministry to others is fully consecrating our own lives to God. Such total commitment will be demonstrated in many practical ways. For example, it should go without saying that Christ followers will pray and intercede with broken hearts and earnest compassion for the unsaved. We will condemn hatred, ridicule, and violence aimed at other persons, including lesbians and gays. Within our spheres of influence, we will step up and speak out when others sin against our neighbors. This is living out Micah 6:8, which reminds us, “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly

with your God” (NIV). Some Christians worry that befriending and accepting someone whose life style is ungodly might be construed as approving of his or her behavior. Genuine concern actually communicates something far more important, though. It shows that love does not wait until it is deserved before lavishing itself on others.

4. Safe friendships

The Church should strive to be a safe place for individuals to open up transparently to one another in the midst of personal struggles and successes. *Koinonia*—that is, Spirit-filled fellowship—is expressed through loving support for one another that leads to personal growth and spiritual transformation. It goes without saying that leaders need discernment in creating appropriate venues for intimate counseling, prayer, discipleship and instruction, as not all subjects are appropriate for public disclosure or discussion. In addition, some immature persons or “wolves in sheep’s clothing” may try to take advantage of group settings to advocate positions that the Church does not support. However, giving people a forum is different from giving them a platform. Establishing safe friendships is slow, hard work sometimes, but it is the right thing to do. The Church is a Spirit-gifted community so that it can share gifts with its community. Some of the best gifts we can give the gay community are the “simplest” things—like listening, helping and caring. It is a gift to give others nonjudgmental acceptance and love. It is a gift to give them soul-nurturing touches (v. the sexualized touches many mistakenly seek as substitutes for real love). It is a gift to believe in people when they doubt themselves and to lend them faith when they have none of their own. It should be as safe for a spiritually hungry and thirsty gay person to become a friend with a Wesleyan as it is for them to become friends of Jesus.

5. Supportive community

Homosexual individuals need the Church because everyone called to follow Jesus needs the help of other disciples to do it. Unfortunately, some leaders may fear that encouraging ministers and ministries to be “gay-sensitive” is synonymous with the Church becoming “gay-inclusive.” Gay-sensitive Christians and churches practice genuine, Christian tolerance—in other words, treating people with dignity, kindness and respect in spite of differing or even strongly opposing views. Loving people before they change, while they are in the process of changing, or even if they never change is one of the most perplexing challenges of being gay-sensitive. Gay-inclusive churches, on the other hand, regard homosexual orientation and conduct as welcome expressions of human diversity. They officially invite practicing lesbian, gay and bisexual people to become members. A few gay-inclusive denominations ordain openly gay clergy and support same-sex marriage. Obviously, the call here is not for Wesleyans to be gay-inclusive. It is simply for us, as examples of people earnestly pursuing lives of Christian holiness, to wrap our hearts around others who also need Christ’s love and the Church’s fellowship.

Some congregations will be tempted to substitute impersonal programming for personal outreach in this pursuit. Many of these will be good and needful things, like Christian counseling and support groups for ex-gays; family and marriage counseling for parents, spouses or children of loved ones who have announced they are gay or lesbian; compassionate ministries and hospice volunteers for AIDS sufferers; prevention efforts, like men’s and women’s groups that discuss biblical perspectives on sexuality, or high school and university campus ministries; educational forums on homosexuality; same-gender mentoring relationships for at-risk youth or new believers who are homosexually oriented.

More important than specific, targeted programs and activities for gays and ex-gays, though, is the unrehearsed, unhesitant, unfeigned love that is conveyed to them. A local church will become

known as a supportive community when those who struggle with homosexual temptations or life styles are made to feel that they are persons of sacred worth to God and genuine friends to us.

6. Scriptural discipleship

When it comes to homosexuality, it is possible for church leaders to say too little and too much. Speaking the truth in love means not dodging the reality of the sinfulness of homosexual behavior. At the same time, it also means holding out confidence in the transforming, sanctifying power of grace. The Bible speaks to the homosexually oriented person who wants to follow Christ. When Jesus said, "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:50), He did not mean for His other disciples to start their own list of exceptions. The promise in Romans 8:1-2 extends to all who are redeemed by Christ's atoning blood: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death."

Behavioral change and spiritual obedience must follow heart change, though—and heart change comes from hiding the Word of God in hearts and living it out in our daily lives. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the Church to create an environment of supportive discipleship and mutual accountability in which heads, hearts, hands and habits can be transformed and renewed. A church that is serious about ministry to homosexuals must be serious about disciple making.

Sooner or later, making disciples of those who are or have been homosexual will mean confronting the question of their participation in church membership, volunteer service, leadership, and even (in some cases) ordained ministry. Loving God by serving others is a pathway to spiritual wholeness. Providing Christ-followers with such sanctifying opportunities and supervision takes Spirit-filled discernment. Obviously, a person who is practicing an openly gay life style or who has only recently made a profession of faith and is still an untested novice should not be placed in church leadership (anymore than a promiscuous heterosexual should be made a church board member, Bible study leader or worship team member). However, redeemed, sexually reoriented or celibate single Christians should be encouraged to discover their spiritual gifts and listen for God's calling related to the unique role He wants them to have in building up the Body of Christ. As the Church sees evidence of their gifts and calling, along with their continued growth in grace and the fruit of the Spirit manifesting consistently in their lives, then increasing levels of trust can be extended. Our prayer is that everyone we disciple will "become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

7. Second chances

Wesleyans affirm the full spiritual assurance and security of the believer who trusts and obeys Jesus Christ as Lord. However, we do not believe in "eternal security" (the idea that once persons are saved they can never lose their salvation) for good reason: Believer's baptism does not remove one's freewill. People mess up. Some saints have become apostates. It's not that we encourage backsliding or falling from grace...we simply recognize the possibility of it and take this as an admonition to live as far away from sinful practices and as close to the Savior's purposes as possible. As Wesley said, "Every one, though born of God in an instant, yet undoubtedly grows by slow degrees."²¹

One of the gifts to be offered by the Church to those who are or have been homosexual is the assurance that we will stand by them as they "go on to perfection" (Hebrews 6:1 KJV) and mature in their love for God and for others. Few people are instantaneously perfected, simply by repeating "the sinner's prayer" at an altar. Working to see men and women overcome sexual brokenness will require forbearance with their doubts and weaknesses, forgiveness if and when there are lapses,

and frequent reminders of the sustaining grace of God. It will be ministry over the long haul for most, with us urging them to keep “Christ in you—the hope of glory” fully in view (Colossians 1:27). As faithful prayer and accountability partners, though, we can do no less.

Spreading Hope and Holiness

The twenty-first century opened with a generation that faces seduction by the values of an increasingly secular, materialistic, hedonistic global culture in which lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender life styles are touted as acceptable alternatives to heterosexuality. The Wesleyan Church, along with biblical Christians from many other denominations and local gatherings, is boldly responding by pointing to the glorious in-breaking of the Kingdom of God upon this world and the powers of darkness that have deluded it.

The Church continues to be God’s sole plan for incarnating the love and character of Jesus Christ for the sake of saving this generation. He is the ultimate friend of sinners of every sort. As fully-devoted Christ-followers, we should be unashamed of such associations, friendships, and labels, too.

The Church is the canvas on which God is putting His masterpiece on display for the whole world to see. It is full of inspiring examples of formerly wicked men and women who are now tangible proof of the power of the gospel to transform lives. What the Apostle Paul said to the Christians in Corinth could be said to many of us today:

“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? ...And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:9, 11).

Compelled by the love of God and filled with the optimism of grace, it is our privilege now to proclaim the good news to others that God will transform their lives, too.

The Church is the vessel from which God wants to pour out His compassion on the world, before the cup of His judgment and wrath on sin and death and hell is also poured out in the last days. May the words of Revelation 22:17 ring in our ears and be repeated by our voice—

“The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’
And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’
Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.”

The Wesleyan Church’s missional calling is to spread hope and holiness that transforms individuals, families, churches, communities and cultures. May the Lord enable us to stay relentlessly on task as we work and wait for His coming.

- 1 The General Social Survey has been conducted annually most years since 1972 by the National Opinion Research Center and biennially since 1994. It is reported by the Association of Religion Data Archives, http://www.thearda.com/quickstats/qs_118_t.asp.
- 2 R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, gives a helpful and interesting discussion of the comprehensive strategy of those who support the gay agenda in chapter 16 of his book, *Desire and Deceit: The Real Cost of the New Sexual Tolerance* (Multnomah Books, Colorado Springs, 2008). Writing from a pro-homosexual perspective, Marshall Kirk (a neuropsychiatrist) and Hunter Madsen (a public relations consultant) coauthored *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the 90's* (Doubleday, 1989)—the *de facto* roadmap for contemporary gay activism.
- 3 The General Social Survey, http://www.thearda.com/quickstats/qs_118_p.asp.
- 4 John Wesley had little to say directly about homosexuality. However, his views are evident in his exegesis of biblical passages referring to it. Here are some examples from Wesley’s *Notes on the New Testament* (see

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/notes.i.html>). Commenting on Romans 1:24-27, Wesley described homosexual lust and behavior as “sin” that God punishes “by withdrawing his restraining grace,” and as “unnatural lust which was as horrible a dishonor to the body, as their idolatry was to God.” In his commentary on “idolaters and sodomites” in 1 Corinthians 6:9, Wesley wrote, “We may learn hence, that we are never secure from the greatest sins, till we guard against those which are thought the least; nor, indeed, till we think no sin is little, since every one is a step toward hell.”

- 5 For examples of varied attempts to obscure scriptural clarity about the sinfulness of homosexual behavior, see Mohler’s chapter on “Homosexuality in Theological Perspective: The Hermeneutic of Legitimization,” op. cit., pp. 51-61.
- 6 A few examples of common revisionist arguments intended to counter biblical prohibitions on homosexual practice include: (a) Biblical authors lacked a modern psychological understanding of sexual orientation, so their views simply reflect pre-scientific ignorance; (b) It is unloving and, therefore, would be contrary to the gospel to deny a sizeable minority of human beings who have same-sex attractions the right to express and seek fulfillment through that kind of personal intimacy; (c) Biblical proscriptions of homosexual practice are due to patriarchal, cultural prejudices that are no longer relevant in an egalitarian society; (d) The Old and New Testaments are simply human documents and have no universal moral or ethical authority; (e) Biblical prohibitions of homosexual practice are due to homophobic, heterosexist oppression that must be rejected and from which society must be liberated.
- 7 *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church*, Indianapolis, Wesleyan Publishing House, 2008, paragraph 218. Article 5 on “*The Sufficiency and Full Authority of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation*” in our “Articles of Religion” states: “We believe that the books of the Old and New Testaments constitute the Holy Scriptures. They are the inspired and infallibly written Word of God, fully inerrant in their original manuscripts and superior to all human authority, and have been transmitted to the present without corruption of any essential doctrine. We believe that they contain all things necessary to salvation; so that whatever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man or woman that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.”
- 8 *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church 2008*, paragraph 224. Article 8 on “*Personal Choice*” in our “Articles of Religion”:
We believe that humanity’s creation in the image of God included ability to choose between right and wrong. Thus individuals were made morally responsible for their choices. But since the fall of Adam, people are unable in their own strength to do the right. This is due to original sin, which is not simply the following of Adam’s example, but rather the corruption of the nature of each mortal, and is reproduced naturally in Adam’s descendants. Because of it, humans are very far gone from original righteousness, and by nature are continually inclined to evil. They cannot of themselves even call upon God or exercise faith for salvation. But through Jesus Christ the prevenient grace of God makes possible what humans in self effort cannot do. It is bestowed freely upon all, enabling all who will to turn and be saved.”
- 9 See Article 21 on “*Destiny*” in the “Articles of Religion,” *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church 2008*, paragraph 250.
- 10 C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce: A Dream*, Harper One, New York, 1973, p. 75.
- 11 See Article 9 on “*The Atonement*” in the “Articles of Religion,” *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church 2008*, paragraph 226).
- 12 Chad W. Thompson, *Loving Homosexuals as Jesus Would*, Brazos Press, Grand Rapids, 2004, p. 160-161.
- 13 John Wesley, “Some Remarks on Mr. Hill’s ‘Review of All the Doctrines Taught by Mr. John Wesley,’” *The Works of John Wesley*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Vol. X, p. 392.
- 14 Article 10 on “Repentance and Faith” in the “Articles of Religion,” *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church 2008*, paragraph 228.
- 15 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1959, p. 44-45.
- 16 *Discipline 400* (the preamble to the “Special Directions” of The Wesleyan Church, which are official advice to church members, but not Articles of Religion or Covenant Membership Commitments) provides the following definition and defense of “collective conscience”:
“ Issues arise periodically that require serious deliberation by the Church as a community of believers regarding its collective witness for Christ in society. Just as He does for individuals, the Holy Spirit also instructs the Church in discerning and applying biblical principles to its corporate response to current culture. Out of these prayerful deliberations, “collective conscience” statements are born. These statements are believed to be important enough that they should be a part of the identity of the Church and should characterize the lifestyle of those who are a part of our specific “family” within the larger Body of Christ. These statements are not implied to be conditions for salvation, and as such become legalistic and judgmental. Rather they reflect commonly held values of our Church that are voluntarily accepted in order to make a positive statement to society; to protect the wellbeing and integrity of each person; to bring transformation to culture; and to be a safe haven for those seeking refuge from the damages inflicted upon them by an abusive and godless society. By speaking collectively, the Church also seeks to provide examples for and encourage young disciples, recent converts, new members and its friends in conforming to Christ’s likeness in areas of personal conscience not yet informed by personal study and understanding of biblical principles.”

- 17 [Http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/sexual-orientation.aspx](http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/sexual-orientation.aspx), accessed April 18, 2011.
- 18 *Ibid.* See the discussion in this article of the American Psychological Association's condemnation of "conversion therapies" as what it calls "homophobia in treatment."
- 19 See Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, and Luke 4:1-13.
- 20 John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Beacon Hill Press, Kansas City, n.d., p. 54. See also Wesley's Sermons, number 19 on 1 John 3:9, entitled "The Great Privilege of Those that Are Born of God" (part II, point 2), where he states, "By sin, I here understand outward sin, according to the plain, common acceptance of the word; an actual, voluntary transgression of the law; of the revealed, written law of God; of any commandment of God, acknowledged to be such at the time that it is transgressed."
- 21 Wesley, *Works*, from a letter written June 27, 1760.