

Homosexuality and the Church, Part Two – Dan Hitz

In last month's article we looked at the basic structure of Matthew Vines' theology in his book, *God and the Gay Christian*, and evaluated them in light of what the Bible says about sexuality. This month's article examines some of Vines' beliefs at a deeper level. The primary resource for this article is Joe Dallas' seven-part blog, *Assessing Matthew Vines "God and the Gay Christian"* which can be found at www.joedallas.com/blog. There are two excellent resources for a more in-depth study of this topic. Joe Dallas' book, *The Gay Gospel*, was written in 1996 and presents the beliefs of the gay-affirming church in general, and how we can present a Scriptural response. *Can You Be Gay and Christian?* by Dr. Michael Brown was written in 2014 and is a 286 page response to Vines' book.



The gay community has a habit of redefining words to change perceptions and win the debate in the poll of public opinion. If you redefine the word "disagreement" to mean "hate", you can no longer have a respectful disagreement in which both parties sincerely try to hear and understand the views of the other. If you add to your new definition of hate the thought that if we respectfully attempt to disagree with the concept of embracing homosexuality we are actually "homophobes", then we have now sculpted the perception that people who respectfully disagree with the LGBT community are now mean spirited, homophobic bigots. Add to this the unfortunately reality that

not everyone in the church follows the Apostle Paul's instructions to "speak the truth in love", throw in the thought of guilt by association, and you have effectively painted all of those who do not embrace homosexuality as hatemongers. To Millennials, and an increasing number of the older generation in the church, truth is relative and personal experience is the filter by which they interpret Scripture. Therefore, redefining words and sculpting perceptions is far more powerful than many of us in the older, conservative Christian community realize.

Matthew Vines is the kinder, gentler version of an advocate for embracing homosexuality in the Christian church. Nevertheless, he also works to redefine words and shift the interpretation of Scripture. Joe Dallas points out that Vines, and many others in the LGBT community, take issue with Paul's use of the Greek word, *arsenokoite*, in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:9-11. The word is translated to mean homosexual in English. Some dismiss the word because it was coined by Paul, himself. This is not out of character for Paul as he coined 179 words in the New Testament. Vines goes on to assert that Paul was actually not referring to homosexuals specifically, but to those who were immoral or prostitutes as the word was used to mean in later writings. Dallas shows otherwise when he breaks down *arsenokoite* to its two root words. *Arsenos* is a word which identifies one as male due to specific body parts. It is used in Romans 1:27 where Paul writes about men engaging sexually with other men. *Koite* refers to a marriage bed with its specific sexual connotations as in Hebrews 13:4 which states that the marriage bed should be kept pure. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, confirms this concept as it uses those same root words in Leviticus 18:22 which reads, "Thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind". It is true that the words were later used to mean an overtly immoral man or prostitute, but Dallas brings out the fact that the meanings of words do shift over time. He uses the example of the word "whore" which means "prostitute" in the King James Version. That word is used today in reference to a woman who is sexually promiscuous, but does not literally sell her body as a prostitute. Therefore we can conclude that Paul's words for homosexual mean a man who has sex with another man in any situation, not just in cases of those who are idolatrous or prostitutes, regardless of how the word was used later on down the road.

Vines also asserts that the Hebrew word used for abomination in Leviticus refers more to something ceremonially impure, rather than something inherently wrong or detestable. He states that the main issue is the context that it is practiced in rather than the action itself. The problem with this interpretation is that there are no qualifiers in those verses to state that only idolatrous homosexual acts, or acts involving prostitution, are wrong; but loving homosexual acts are acceptable. Dallas notes that if we were to accept Vines' interpretation of the word abomination in Leviticus, then we would also have to accept the concept that adultery and incest in those same verses would also be acceptable as long as they are practiced between two loving and committed people. This is clearly not the case.

Vines asserts that Paul condemns certain types of homosexual activities that are demeaning rather than homosexuality as expressed in a loving, committed relationship. Dallas points out that Vines uses three arguments to reinforce his position. First, he claims that Paul had a limited understanding of homosexuality. He explains that Paul was unaware that there really were committed and loving homosexual relationships in his

time, even though such relationships were included in the writings of the philosophers of Paul's day, including Plato. Although Paul would not have agreed with much that Plato and the other philosophers wrote about, he likely would have been familiar with what they wrote. Paul demonstrated his ability to connect with people based on their cultural beliefs when he addressed those at Mars hill about their altar to an "unknown god". Using the thought that Paul was limited by his own intellect as he wrote Scripture also dismisses the role of divine inspiration of Scripture. Surely the Holy Spirit was well aware of the full scope of homosexuality in Paul's day, and would have bypassed Paul's human limitations as He inspired the Scripture that Paul wrote. Dallas writes that another objection to Vines' interpretation of Paul's limitations is that the argument uses love to justify a relationship rather than the Word of God. Surely some loving homosexual relationships do exist, just as there are adulterous relationships in which the participants deeply love and care for each other. Love cannot justify sin, even when love coexists with sin.

Secondly, Vines claims that Paul was not condemning loving homosexual relationships, but the exploitive homosexual relationships that were prevalent in his day. Vines notes that same-sex relationships in Paul's day often occurred between younger men and older boys, creating a power imbalance; or between masters and slaves who may have been willing or unwilling participants. Vines gives another example of inappropriate sexual behavior in Romans 1:26-27 which talks about men and women being given over to vile passions, turning from the natural interaction with the opposite gender, and committing "shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error". Vines, like others in the gay-affirming church, draws the conclusion that these are not people who were born homosexual and who's natural inclination is toward the same-sex, but that these are actually heterosexuals who have turned away from their natural heterosexuality and have engaged in homosexual actions which were unnatural for them. They claim that homosexual acts are natural and acceptable before God for those who are born homosexual. They also conclude that the homosexual actions in Romans 1 are a reflection of the exploitive nature of homosexual unions in Paul's day, and not inclusive of the loving homosexual unions that occur today. Dallas notes that there are no qualifiers for acceptable or unacceptable homosexual behavior in Romans. He also notes that there are many other serious sins addressed in Romans 1 which would remain unacceptable even if those participating in those sins truly loved each other. He explains that if someone were trying to say today that only the brazen actions of immorality in the *Girls Gone Wild* videos are actually prohibited in Scripture, but loving acts of fornication between a male and female who are unmarried but deeply love each other are acceptable, we would say that this does not pass the test of Scripture. Neither do homosexual actions between two men or two women who love each other. Therefore, if we try to say that sex between a loving homosexual couple is acceptable, then we must say that all of the other forms of sexual sin in those passages would be acceptable if they are practiced between two willing people who love each other. This is not the case.

Thirdly, Vines argues that homosexuality was looked down upon in Paul's day because it required one of the participants to assume a feminine, or passive role, during intercourse. Since females had a lesser social status in that day, homosexual acts would have been unacceptable because they required one of the males to assume a feminine role. In other words, it wasn't that sex between males was wrong, it was the degrading nature of a man assuming the feminine role that was wrong. Dallas points out that Paul makes no distinction between the active or passive role and identifies the problem as men burning with lust for other men, regardless of who took what position. He again points out that there are no qualifiers in Scripture to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate homosexual acts, adultery, bestiality, or incest. If we are to allow legitimization of one form of sin, we would have to allow the legitimization of the other sins mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments.

As the cultural push and political pressure to accept homosexual behavior continues, it is important to be grounded in the truth of Scripture. Matthew Vines and many others in today's culture provide compelling, emotional arguments to embrace homosexuality within the church. It is important that we learn to examine these arguments within Scriptural parameters rather than relying on our emotional reactions. Today, many in the church elevate the command to love above the command for obedience to Scripture; however, true love that lasts for eternity will always be grounded in Scripture. True love that lasts for eternity will lovingly call people engaged in any form of sin to repentance at the foot of the cross, where they can experience the redemptive love and transitional power of Jesus Christ.

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