

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND SAME SEX/GENDER SEXUAL RELATIONS AND UNIONS

I) PRELIMINARY INTRODUCTION TO THE TASK AT HAND:

I was asked by a trusted friend, colleague and pastoral teacher and advisor to provide him with some counsel and advice as to whether he should change his position on the issue as to how the Church should relate to people involved in same sex sexual relationships from one that is “Welcoming, But Not Affirming” to one which is both “Welcoming and Affirming”, meaning affirming or even endorsing the nature of their same sex, sexual relationship. I fear (in fact am now relatively certain) that I was very foolish in agreeing to take on this task. While I have read, and re-read, and then again re-read the three prominent texts on this subject (which I will identify later in this document), and have read and studied and meditated about what seem to be the relevant Scriptural Passages and Texts which scholars seem to agree reflect on this “Same Sex Sexual Relations” topic, and have considered commentaries on these Scriptural Passages, and while I have prayed deeply about this topic and have even dreamed about this topic, I find that my opinions on the subject have varied, all over the map, and that I am (and I would submit any individual is) really unqualified to make a decision about how the Church, or really any individual congregation should respond to this topic. Truth be known, at this point in this document I am not even certain just what my opinion on the topic should be. I will, as I go forward with this discussion, attempt to state an opinion on the topic, but I will do so with the proviso that, while the opinions of individual Christians on the topic are important, the position of the Church (or of any individual Evangelical Congregation) should be taken only after deep, prayerful, and Holy Spirit guided Scriptural studies are undertaken by at least a council of the leadership of the Church (or of the Evangelical Congregation). This approach is the approach which has been utilized by the leadership of the Church from its very inception, when the Church has been confronted with important doctrinal questions which have threatened to tear the Church asunder or prevent its growth. In every such instance doctrinal issues were resolved by a “council”, if you will, of the Church leadership after careful studies of Scripture, dialogue and the prayerful seeking of advice from the Holy Spirit. Such was the approach of the Apostolic leaders of the Church with the “Jerusalem Council” of Acts 15 which determined that “what seemed good to us and the Holy Spirit..” only a few requirements of the Jewish Law would be required of Gentile followers of Christ, and that some of the most basic requirements of that Law, including the centuries existing Scriptural requirement of circumcision would not be so required. Such a corporate, group or council approach was used by the Church each time it was confronted with a doctrinal or theological crises. It was the approach of those Councils of the Church which led to the canonization of the books of Scripture, and to the establishment of such important Christian doctrines as the one recognizing Jesus as being both fully human and fully divine, and the doctrine of the Trinity (something which is not even explicitly mentioned in Scripture but was determined to best describe the manner in which God has worked throughout history).

So, in my judgement, the task which I agreed to undertake is one which likely no individual should undertake by himself or herself. Rather, it is a task which should and must be undertaken by Church leadership, and in the case of individual Evangelical congregations, by the leadership of that congregation, as, fortunately or unfortunately (whatever your point of view might be) Evangelicals really have no Church hierarchy which can decide (maybe the better word is “dictate”) church doctrine, leaving each Evangelical congregation to being pretty much on its own in making decisions as to what the practices of that congregation will be. That said, I am going to try to arrive at a personal opinion on the topic at hand (as I have stated at this point in this discussion I have no such opinion or at least no definite such opinion) so that I might provide at least some helpful advice to my friend and colleague, who is called upon to provide advice and counsel to church pastors and leaders. Of course, my advice or opinion will be given with the caveat that, while one can have a very studied, prayerful and careful opinion on the topic, the Church or any individual congregation must make its decision about the topic in that manner in which the Church has acted, throughout the decades, as that manner is described above. I would urge that, at the very least a group of skilled people, each of whom is willing to take the time to engage in an extensive study of Scripture and relevant literature, both current and ancient, and to engage in prayerful discussions of the topic be put in place in order to critique, probably severely, my conclusions and the contents of this document, and to work towards a Godly, Spirit driven response to the task to which I have been assigned. As I have said, I do not think that I can or should do this alone.

All of this said, and my opinion (which, hopefully, I can state in the concluding portions of this discussion) notwithstanding, I am not certain that there is a “proper, right answer”, if you will, to the question which my friend has raised, that being should he change his view on the proper relationship of the Church towards those engaged in a Same Sex, Sexual Relationship from one which is “Welcoming But Not Affirming” to one which is “Affirming.” I think that it is possible to come to different responses to this question, without either (or any) such response’s being “wrong” or ‘Unbiblical.’ Surely we can agree that, when eminent, God Loving, Christian Scholars, using the same Scriptural Texts and Historical materials, and sound exegesis reach completely different positions on this question, it is possible that each of us (and maybe each congregation) can come to differing answers to this question, without any of us or any congregation “being flat wrong” in our, or its answer to this question. That is why I say that, our individual opinions notwithstanding, this issue needs to be resolved by the Church (or each Evangelical congregation) in that manner, described above in which the Church has resolved fundamental, probably divisive matters of doctrine throughout the history of the Church. I will also venture what is

likely a very radical, controversial opinion, that being that I think that, perhaps, each individual congregation will have to come to its own conclusions about the issue at hand. I don't want to be accused of being a "postmodernist", or a "relativist", but in the case of this highly controversial, possibly divisive issue, the statement of Stanley Grenz and John Franke in their book "Beyond Foundationalism" that "all theology is local" might be clearly applicable. Each congregation is faced with its own local culture, and the unique problems of the congregation and of such culture. Again, at the risk of encountering severe criticism or outright condemnation, I would believe that,

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again using the approach of Grenz and Franke submit that the Holy Spirit, speaking through Scripture, individually to the leaders and members of a particular congregation might well lead that congregation to a conclusion which differs from the conclusions of other congregations. If eminent scholars, who presumably submit themselves to the guidance and illumination of Scripture by the Spirit can come to diametrically different conclusions on the issue at hand, why should such not be the case of various congregations which prayerfully approach such issue. Is it possible that there is no "Absolute Truth" here? I think it possible that such is the case.

With these concerns I am going to do my best to respond to the charge given to me by my good friend. This response is, at best, a first draft of my response, and it is one which I hope can be submitted for a group review, a peer review if you will. I think that it is probable that this document will undergo numerous revisions and evolutions.

II) FURTHER RESTATEMENTS OF THE BASIC QUESTION:

I am not sure that the basic question which has been raised adequately describes the problems which the Church confronts. That basic question, which I have stated above, is: "Should the Church (or in the case of Evangelical Congregations which are not really led by any Church Hierarchy) Welcome (we should probably add, with Christian Brotherly Love and Fellowship) those involved in a same sex, sexual relationship, but Without Affirming that Relationship, or Should the Church Actually (in some fashion) Affirm or Endorse that Relationship?" I think that we need to add some additional components or basic boundaries or guidelines to this basic question. Some would be as follows:

- The Church does not endorse (and no congregation endorses) any sexual relations outside of marriage.
- So we are not talking about the Church's affirming or endorsing any sexual relationship, same sex or heterosexual outside of some marital relationship or at least some comparable relationship.

- We are not talking about a political issue, such as “should the state endorse same sex marital unions?” as, regardless of our views on the subject, that issue has been resolved by the Supreme Court of the United States, and, while I am reluctant to so state, it is my opinion that it has been properly resolved by that Court as the Constitution of this Country (which we seem to be willing to disregard at every turn) was designed, not to protect the majority or the majority opinion (an opinion of which I am increasingly skeptical) but was designed to protect the minorities, and minority, even highly unpopular opinions, from

oppression by the so called “Majority”, and the government itself. So, let’s put this “political” side of the Same Sex Issue aside. It has been resolved. Rather let’s talk about the Church and our Congregations as we wrestle with these “Same Sex Questions.”

So, at this stage of our discussion, I believe that our basic question should be modified to read: “Should the Church or Our Congregation Affirm, Endorse or Even Celebrate (or Sanctify by a Proceeding Comparable to the Marriage of a Male and a Female) a Monogamous, Permanent (to the extent that any marriage in this day and age can be viewed as permanent), Until Death Do Us Part, Relationship, Including a Sexual Relationship Between Individuals of the Same Sex?” We are not talking about promiscuity, whether among totally “straight”, heterosexual individuals, or individuals of the same sex, or “sex outside of marriage, whether heterosexual or same sex.” I think that, even in this day and age when “Sex” seems to be thrown at us at every turn, and the Church’s position (which we believe to be God’s position) that Sex Outside of Marriage is Wrong and Sinful and Contrary to God’s Plan seems to be viewed as being “terribly old fashioned and outdated”, the Church (and each Congregation) should continue to strongly affirm the Church’s position that “Sex Should Not Occur Outside of Marriage (or at least some relationship which is comparable to marriage).” The position that Sex is a Gift From God and Should be restricted to marriage (or a relationship comparable to marriage) should continue to be strongly affirmed.

But a further modification of our basic question is also required. One of our authors, whose book will be discussed below, Robert A.J. Gagnon, is of the opinion that individuals who have a sexual orientation directed towards other individuals of the same sex, who fully accept Christ and His Gift of Redemption, but who do not Repent from the actual engagement in sexual acts with a same sex partners, even those who enter into a covenant type of relationship (comparable to marriage or even marriage), but continue to pursue the relationship and to engage in those acts will be denied Redemption and the Kingdom of Heaven and will, in effect, be condemned. So, if that is the case, then, obviously, the Church and each individual congregation has no choice. Its Christian duty to individuals who have a “Same Sex Orientation” is to, lovingly, in the spirit of brotherly love, not just welcome such individuals, but do all within its power to discourage conduct which comports with their Same Sex Orientation, and to Repent from such conduct, and to deny themselves of such conduct. Most certainly, if Gagnon is correct in his conclusions then the Church (and no congregation) can, in any way, affirm or endorse, much less sanctify

by some marital ceremony a Same Sex Union. So, perhaps, our basic question can be rephrased to read: “Can the Church or any Congregation, in a manner which is consistent with the dictates of God and Scripture, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, not just Welcome individuals who have a Same Sex Orientation, but actually Affirm their entering into, an ongoing, monogamous, hopefully permanent Union, such as marriage or something similar thereto?” If we want to ask this question in a way in which the “rubber meets the road” so to speak, we might even add “or would the Church or a Congregation in doing so facilitate the eternal condemnation of such individuals and of their being denied entry into eternal life with God, and their being condemned to hell,

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whatever hell might be?” We hate to ask this question in such a blunt, no holds part manner, but that is the way in which it appears that the question must be so asked. If our basic question is phrased in this manner, then we cannot help but be impressed with the seriousness of the question at hand. So it has to be approached in a most serious, studious, prayerful manner, not simply by individual Christians but by councils or groups such as those described above. Candidly, I don’t think that we should each be left to our own individual conclusions on this topic.

III) MY BACKGROUND, EXPERIENCES AND PROBABLE PERSONAL BIASES:

While each of us who is engaged in a serious matter of Biblical Exegesis does his or her best to approach the matter without personal biases, it is really impossible to do so. We all have had our personal upbringings, experiences. These factors lead us to have certain predetermined ideas about virtually any subject or matter. That fact does not mean that we cannot “change our minds”, but it does mean that we have to be aware of our at least “starting point” biases. In some cases, if we are not careful and do not submit ourselves to a critical review by others, those biases can cause us to “start out with a conclusion and then work to justify that conclusion.” If scientists are honest, even they will admit that much of science leads to a conclusion which existed before the scientific investigation even started. Certainly such can also be the case with Theology. We have all witnessed the manner in which preachers or even learned, academic theologians, can start out with a strong theological belief or conclusion, and then, in effect, by “proof texting” justify that belief or conclusion.

So, in order that my work in this document can be properly reviewed and criticized, let me describe my personal background as it has existed with respect to the questions we have raised, as those questions are described above. My background, experiences and yes “learning” have led me to form some basic conclusions, which have varied over time, about the basic subject matter we are confronting in this discussion. In fact, I started the endeavor reflected in this, admittedly preliminary draft of this

document with a conclusion which has varied, and continues to vary as I work on this document. It is because of my “varied conclusions”, in none of which I have completed confidence that I invite a review of, and critique of this document by others who are willing to engage in the hard, prayerful work which even considering the questions and subjects discussed herein requires. The questions which have been raised, as they are described above cannot be answered with “off the top of the head” or “proof texted”, or simplistic answers. I do not shy away from severe critiques of my work and conclusions, and, in fact, invite such critiques.

I am an old (79 years old), white, straight male (and while I am almost afraid to admit it, f “Republican Leaning” (does that make me a “Deplorable)) who, while not raised in what I would consider to be a “privileged” situation, certainly was raised in a good, solid, financially comfortable, but not wealthy, supportive, two parent family (who encouraged hard work and a Christian manner of thinking), with three, mutually loving and supportive siblings. My grammar school education was in a very good Catholic Grade

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School. I graduated from a large, Columbia, Missouri Public High School where my co-students were, as far as I know, all straight, mostly white children. Certainly all of my friends, buddies and sports team mates were “normal, straight, teenaged boys”. I think that you can safely say that, to the extent we even thought about same sex sexual relations, we were truly severe “homophobes.” There very idea of homophobic sexual relations, at least among me, would have been truly shocking to us. We all used all of the pejoratives which could be used to refer to gay folks, even though, insofar as we knew, we personally knew of none. Nothing which transpired during my college years (the early 1960s) or law school days did anything to change my basic outlooks on the same sex issues. Admittedly, I did not receive a broad, liberal education (which might have caused me to re-examine my basic views, as I was educated in two basic, what I call, “Trade Schools”, Engineering and Law. So nothing about my education led to any broadening of thought on the same sex issues. I don’t think that my attitudes towards these issues changed (if I even thought about them) during my early years of law practice. But then I began to notice some things, which caused me to have a slow change of basic conclusions. I had several clients (male and female) who were gay, and who were obviously very good, fine, kind, intelligent people, some of whom were living in what appeared to be “binding arrangements.” Two men, who became my friends, were living in such a relationship. When my aging parents required assistance, that assistance was provided, over a very extended period of time, first for both of my parents and then for my father after the death of my mother, by two women, who were (are) the most compassionate, wonderful people I have ever known, and who had a lesbian relationship, and who had been living together for many years and who continue to live in relationship today. These women became wonderful friends of my

parents, and of myself and my siblings. They are just plain, good, solid, loving, compassionate people. We have had two male neighbors who have lived in relationship for years. The second date which I had with my wife involved our attendance at a “commitment ceremony” for two women, who were great friends of hers, and which was conducted by a female Episcopal Priest. While I did not get to know the two women well, they seemed to be wonderful, young women who were truly committed to each other. I think that my experiences, over time, caused my personal attitudes towards same sex relationships to move from one which just plain could not accept them, to one of “well, that is their business and not mine, and whatever they do in their personal lives is ok with me.” However, as our society has “moved forward” it appears that the current culture now demands, and has demanded for some time, not just that we “accept” same sex, sexual relationships but that we affirm, endorse and celebrate those relationships. I have to confess that, while I understand and affirm the Supreme Court’s conclusion that the Federal Government and the Governments of the various states must allow for marriages between people of the same sex and must afford to the partners in such marital relationships all of the rights and benefits (and, correspondingly, all of the duties and obligations) which such governments afford to parties to heterosexual marriages, I still somewhat shy away from the perceived requirement that I, personally, endorse, affirm and celebrate same sex sexual relations. I have to make that confession. I still find myself being uncomfortable when a man refers to another man as “my husband” or “my wife”, or when I see movie or TV commercial

scenes which clearly involve same sex couples, or, frankly, when I think much about Same Gender Sexual Acts. So I have to confess and recognize my ongoing biases in these respects. However, from a societal, cultural point of view, my biases are irrelevant. Our society/culture and our legal and governmental authorities have spoken on the issues. The question before me and us is whether our culture and governing systems are now telling the Church or our individual congregation that it, perhaps, needs to reexamine its traditional postures against Same Sex Unions and Relationships. While Stanley Grenz came to the conclusion that the posture of the church towards such Unions and Relationships, I am wondering whether, in view of his (and John Franke’s) conclusions (as I understand them, and I admit that can be wrong) in “Beyond Foundationalism” to the effect that: 1) all theology is local, and can vary from one congregation to another, 2) each congregation must seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, speaking through Scripture (i.e. the Spirit’s speaking currently, in each congregation’s culture and situation being the “norming norm” of theology), 3) each congregation must find ways to relate to the given, local culture in which it finds itself, and 4) such culture and theology must “speak to each other”, with each, in some respects, guiding the other, he would conclude that the time has come for the Church to reexamine its long standing positions on such Unions and Relationships. I do not know the answer to that question

and, unfortunately, since Mr. Grenz has passed away we cannot direct that question to him. However, I do believe that the cultural sea changes with respect to the issues at hand should at least cause us to fall back, and take a re-look at and a reexamination of our longstanding postures. Maybe the longstanding postures and traditions of the Church (our of our individual congregation) towards Same Sex Unions will not or should not change, but it would sure not hurt to take a fresh look at same.

IV) SHOULD A CONGREGATION EVEN UNDERTAKE AN EXAMINATION OF ITS POSTURE ON SAME SEX/SAME GENDER SEXUAL UNIONS?:

One might well ask whether a pragmatic pastor or board of what seems to be a successful congregation should even undertake to deal with the issues relating to Same Sex Unions/Relationships or the questions which we have raised, above, in this document. After all “Sex Issues”, particularly “Same Gender Sex Issues” or issues relating to “Sexual Identity” or “Sexual Identity Confusion” are the “third rail of Church theology”, which can tear a church asunder. Such issues can totally destroy church unity. Most certainly we have learned, from observation and experience that raising any of these issues in a Congregation Wide, publicly disseminated pastoral sermon would not be the appropriate way in which to pursue any of these issues. That said, however, it is respectfully submitted that, eventually, in one way or another every congregation will be confronted with these issues. Perhaps:

- A pastor will be confronted with a request to perform a Same Gender Marriage or Union, or
- A Same Gender Couple will desire to join a congregation, or

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- Low and Behold, it will be discovered that a church board member or even a ministerial staff member is living in a Same Gender Union (and a couple of our local congregations have made such a discovery, which they handled very poorly), or
- It is initially believed that, as Robert A. J. Gagnon urges, that individuals who continue in a Same Gender Sexual Relationship/Union are, if they don't repent and terminate such a relationship, deprived of redemption, a strong belief in Christ notwithstanding, and it is discovered that there are folks in the congregation who are parties to such a Relationship/Union, in which event one would ask whether the Congregation has an obligation to these individuals to try to persuade them to terminate their Relationship.

- The day comes, as it most certainly will, when other circumstances force a congregation to take positions on these issues.

So, maybe we can try the ostrich approach and hide our heads in the sand, and hope that our congregation does not have to consider and take a position on the Same Gender issues, but I don't think that this approach will work, long term.

V) RISKS OF EVEN DISCUSSING THE ISSUES:

Obviously even discussing Same Gender Sex or Sexual Identity Issues involve risks. If one were to venture even a slightly negative opinion about these issues or any related issues, then he or she runs the risks, in this day of the "Cancel Culture" of being called a "bigot", or "hate mongerer", a "facist" or worse, or God forbid, a "Republican." No matter how skillfully one chooses to discuss these issues, even if he or she does so with great sensitivity and in a loving manner, he or she runs a great personal risk of being publicly castigated for "hateful, bigoted, discriminatory" thoughts or speech. So, obviously, any discussions of these issues must proceed with the exercise of the highest degree of care. Note that even if "positive views" of these issues are discussed, the mere fact that a group or congregation even feels the need to discuss the issues might be perceived as evidencing a lack of "acceptance" of that which is deemed by the culture to be "obvious."

As I have approached this project, I have tried to discuss the Same Gender Sex issue with people I trust, as I wanted to have the benefit of their views. Frankly, I was taken aback by the intensity of the reactions which I received. I was interested in the medical science relating to "Sexual Orientation", and, therefore, sought to discuss the matter with my son-in-law, a Medical Doctor Psychiatrist, and a highly respected clinician and academic researcher. I can best characterize his reaction as being an expression of a learned opinion that the Church (and he comes from an Islamic background, but is a Christian, and his wife, my daughter, is certainly Christian) is behind the times and is contributing to wrongful discriminatory

views of people in Same Gender Sexual Relationships or who have Sexual Identity issues. Our own children, 3 of the 4 of which are strong Christians, think that it is obvious that the Church is way behind the times in failing to endorse Same Gender Unions. My sister, who is a devoted Christian, expressed almost disgust that I would be so backward as to even think that the Church needs to discuss Same Gender Sexual Union issues, as it is clear that such Unions are perfectly fine and are none of the Church's business. I have also spoken with some friends and persons with whom I have become acquainted about

the issues. Each of these people is a devoted Christian. While some of those I spoke with are strongly opposed to Same Gender Sexual Unions and feel that the current society discussions about “Gender Identity” are silly, most of them advised me that they know of Same Gender Unions of people in their own families or people with whom they are acquainted and stated that, in their opinions, we need to recognize that such Unions, which can be as strong as a marriage, exist and should be accepted. So, I have to ask myself “Is the Church behind the times in its views or traditions relating to “Gender Identity” or “Same Gender Sexual Relationships or Unions””? Does it need to re-examine its views?

VI) INCREASING COMPLEXITY OF THE ISSUES:

Unfortunately, the “Same Gender Sexual Relationship” issues are becoming more, not less complex. Society now confronts us, not just with the issue as to whether Same Gender Sexual Unions should be affirmed, but whether it is even appropriate to discuss the basic issue of “Gender” itself. Our universities, and other important institutions, not to mention the Federal Government, consider any questions about a person’s Gender to be totally inappropriate, if not evidence of Gender Hatred. Universities now ask students just what “gender specific” or “gender neutral” pronouns they want to have used in referring to themselves. While I have not looked into the issue, I am advised by a friend, who is on a university’s faculty that there are a substantial number of potential “Gender Classifications” into which a person can elect to be defined or classified. A prominent Medical Association has declared that it is inappropriate for a Physician who participates in the delivery of a baby to assign a gender, male or female, to that baby as the child should be left to making such child’s decision as to the child’s desired or appropriate gender when such child achieves the age of reason. Please understand that I am not making light of the gender identity issues which some people have to confront. For whatever reason or causes which might exist, some people have to find their way to determine just what their gender might be. My point is simply that, when the Church or any congregation or pastor teaches that God created individuals with one of two genders, male or female, harking back to the creation story of Genesis, and that every person occupies one of these gender classifications it, he or she is, very likely, going to create a public firestorm or culture war. While some of us might well consider the current gender identity, gender pronoun, personally decided gender classification issues to be issues which have been taken to the extreme, I think that we might be very well advised to fall back and look at what Medical and Psychiatric Science and the Society or Culture at large might be trying to

teach us and at least ask whether or not our personal views (as well as the views of the Church and of our individual congregations) on these difficult issues need to be, at least, revisited and thoroughly and

prayerfully, with a careful study of Scripture, and the illuminating help of the Holy Spirit considered or reconsidered. Again, I find myself having to confess that I (at least as a single individual) feel that I am very ill equipped to try to advise any person, pastor or congregation, including my friend who has assigned me this task, about these Gender Identity issues. I again respectfully submit that issues, such as those we are discussing in this document, must be discussed in corporate or group settings. I would refer us to the teachings of Jesus, as set forth in Matthew 18:19-20: “Again I tell you that if two on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven...(f)or where two or three come together in my name there I am with them.” I need the help of a group of Jesus loving people, who call upon Jesus and the Holy Spirit to help guide us to some Godly decisions on the issues we are discussing in this document and which will be “pleasing to the Father”, even if there is room for disagreement. I sure think that there is plenty of room for legitimate, Godly disagreement on these issues.

VII) SOURCES OF FRUSTRATION:

If I was called upon to work with a group, such as the ones I have called for in the above parts of this document, I would tell the participants in that group that we are not looking for simplistic answers to our questions, as I think those are the sorts of answers which have driven discussions of these issues, in the past, and are even the sorts of answers which really silence any discussion of these issues. If we want to engage in a literal, “on the face of the words” reading of the Scriptural passages which are usually cited in any discussion of these issues, then it is not at all hard to come to flat, purportedly beyond dispute statement to the effect that “God condemns any Same Gender Sexual Relations Or Sexual Unions.” So, if we want the easy way out, we can quickly come to such a statement. However, if we want to truly examine these relevant Scriptural Passages, and consider the Cultural and Historical and Knowledge Base situation which existed at the time when the Passages were first uttered or written, and we want to try to understand not just what the passage *says* but *why* it said it at the time it was first spoken or written, and we want to try to move the application of that passage *from the there and then to the here and now* we are really going to encounter some frustrations if not outright discouragement. I have encountered these frustrations and discouragements, and right now, at this stage of preparing this document, am about so discouraged as to just give up. Why do I feel that way, and why might the participants in my desired group feel that way. Well there are a number of reasons for such feelings, including the following:

- No Knowledge of Ancient Languages: As noted above, my education was somewhat limited, as I attended what I have often called, two “trade schools” or professional schools, the college of Engineering (I have a Civil Engineering degree) and Law School (and I practiced Law for 53 years). I received no education in Hebrew or Greek, and while I took

Latin for 4 years in High School, I have no recollection of anything I learned in those Latin classes. If you read the books which I will refer to later in this document, you will note that part of the driving force behind the disagreements of the authors of those books are disagreements about the use and meaning of certain Greek or Hebrew words. Now these fellows are eminent scholars, who have studied Greek and Hebrew and if they cannot agree on what the words mean, or whether a given version or interpretation of the Bible is correct, how is someone like me, who does not know a word of Hebrew or Greek supposed to resolve their disagreements (and sometimes these are pretty caustically stated disagreements). These disagreements really come to the fore when one is trying to sort through the meaning and applications of Paul's Epistles, particularly Romans 1:18-30 (which are the driving force passages as to the Same Gender Sex issues) and the purportedly "supporting passages" of 1 Cor: 6:9, 7 and 12-20, and 7, Ephesians 5:21-33, and 1 Timothy 1:10. I have a lot of respect for these scholars and for the hard, detailed, well researched work which they have done, but if they cannot agree on what the original Greek words of these Passages were or meant or what the Passages mean, how is a person of limited educational background supposed to interpret and apply these Passages.

- Pauline Perspectives: Admittedly I really struggle with Paul's Epistles. In one passage he seems to require "abandonment of the Torah/the Law", and then a few passages thereafter, in the same letter, refer to a requirement or commandment of the Torah as if it remains of binding effect on Jews and Gentiles. The logic and flow of his arguments sometimes totally escape me. I know that I am not one who should be critical of such writing (as mine is far from clear and to the point) but he seems to have never seen a comma or period which he liked. I am mindful of the statement of the Apostle Peter which appears in 2 Peter 3:16, when he was speaking of Paul's letters and when he said "His letters contain some things which are hard to understand..." (now that is an understatement). So, when I find myself being forced into a position where I have to try to interpret and apply some passage or passages from one or more of Paul's Epistles, I have to admit, up front "Lord knows I could be wrong, and probably am wrong, now let's talk about it." This admission, however, is not sufficient to identify my frustrations with the Pauline Epistles. If we are to make a legitimate attempt to interpret one of these Epistles or a passage from same, then we have to try to "get inside the head/mind of one of the most intense, complex human beings who ever lived." We need to try to know

something about him and what he was about, and what he saw his mission (which he expressed as being the “apostle to the gentiles”) to be. To try to know these matters is really hard to do, particularly since scholars are now speaking of a “new perspective of Paul” or a “new Pauline Perspective.” These scholars disagree, sometimes very strongly, on even how we should try to view the very essence of Paul, and what he was about. At some point in the

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diatribe of this document I might give my very limited perspective of Paul, but, again, I do so with great concern and with an admission that “I might well be wrong.”

- Who Wrote the Books/Even Who Wrote Some of Paul’s Epistles: if you read the books which I will cite below in this document you will see that scholars debate the identities of certain books of the Bible, as to which I, at least, have had no doubts of authorship or of at least the initial Authorities who first orally spoke the words of the books, even if those words were latter reduced to writing by scribes. For example, I have believed that Moses first spoke or wrote Genesis, Leviticus and Deuteronomy, and that all of the Pauline Epistles contained at least the words of Paul, even if actually written by a scribe, although it is certainly obvious that Paul worked with one or more collaborators, including, for example, Luke. Now I read the Genesis, Leviticus and Deuteronomy might have had at least two authors, a Priestly Author and a so called Yahweh Author, and that some of the Pauline Epistles were not written or authored or spoken by Paul. These sorts of scholarly statements have led me to a sort of Spiritual Crises. I have resolved this Crises by resolving, in my mind at least that, regardless of who reduced Genesis, Deuteronomy, and Leviticus to writing, or when they did so, those Books contain the God Inspired words or ideas of Moses, that they are the Inspired Word of God, and that regardless of who reduced to writing any Pauline Epistle, that Epistle contains the ideas, and concepts and even the basic wording approved of or spoken by Paul and that the words are God Inspired. It seems to me that, scholarly arguments about Biblical authorship notwithstanding, and the fact that there can be various disagreements about the accuracy of the English Translations of our various English Language versions of the Bible notwithstanding, all of the Bible contains the Inspired Word of God, and that the Holy Spirit would not have allowed a total misstatement to appear in our Bibles. If I cannot start out with at least this basic belief/understanding then I am just plain done. We might look at our various interpretations/versions of our English Language Bibles in order to give us a broader perspective as to the meaning of any textual passage, but I cannot start out any work on the Project assigned to me with arguments that some passage does

not mean what it says because “some other guy wrote it.”

So, I advise any group which earnestly works on the Project of Answering the “Same Sex/Same Gender” issues before us that they are going to embark on a lot of hard work, and are likely going to encounter a series of frustrations and disappointments and that they need to continually encourage each other.

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For the reasons set forth above, I believe that any group which is assembled to try to deal with the issues at hand should consist of: 1) someone who has a good educational background in philosophy, 2) someone who has a good working knowledge of Greek, 3) true Biblical Scholars, 4) only people who are willing to do the necessary research and reading and do the hard work which the Project will require of them, and 5) only people who are willing to extend to each other an “umbrella of grace”, as strongly held views, some of which might even be heard as being initially “offensive” are expressed. It is really possible, or likely that strongly competing, strongly held views will be expressed, but the group discussions must proceed with grace and civility and a willingness to consider competing views.

VIII) SOME RELEVANT SCRIPTURAL PASSAGES:

Now that I have gotten past these, probably unnecessarily verbose preliminary statements, which I hope have convinced you that I likely do not know what I am talking about, let’s dive in and at least make an attempt at accomplishing a, hopefully reasonable, starting point in providing some answers to the questions about Same Gender Sexual Unions and Relations which have been raised in the above parts of this document. As we go forward with our discussions we will refer to several books, by eminent scholars. These books are mentioned below. However, before we get to those books let’s set forth at least most, if not all of the Scriptural Passages or Texts on which the authors of these books rely, with very fundamental disagreements, as we will see.

At the risk of overlooking some passage or text it appears that the relevant texts for our discussions are as follows (Note these come from the NIV Bible, which is the only one I brought with me/so, in our discussions we might review other versions/interpretations of the Bible which might provide a different wording, as even our authors/scholars cannot seem to agree on what the Hebrew Words that were used meant):

1) FROM GENESIS:

1:26-28: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them ‘Be fruitful and increase in number. fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves along the ground.’”

2:7: “The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.”

2:19-25: Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all of the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts fo the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the

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man to fall into a deep sleep and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man and he brought her to the man. The man said: ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman for she was taken out of man.’ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame.”

3-11: Of course, the story of the Fall and of its initial effects on mankind.”

(Note: We might discuss this in greater detail as we move forward, but if you look at the Book we will refer to below as “Gagnon” and particularly Page 56 and following pages you will note that scholars are not in agreement about when Genesis was actually first reduced to writing (perhaps during the Babylonian Exile) and about who the author(s) is (was). Gagnon identifies both a “Priesty” author and a “Yahwist” author. In Gagnon’s view and that of some scholars the Priestly writer was responsible for Gen. 1-4 and the Yahwist author for Gen. 2:4 to 3:24. Since I am having to draw some of my own conclusions, my inclination is to not put a whole lot of weight on the Genesis/Creation stories when I struggle with trying to answer the questions before us. I am inclined to look at the Creation story or stories (if there was more than one author) for what I am persuaded the purpose of such story to be. Rightly or wrongly, I am persuaded that the purpose of the story was to contrast the Hebrew, monotheistic beliefs that there is but one true God and that such God created the universe and the world and all of its creatures, including mankind, with the polytheistic beliefs of those Ancient Near Eastern Societies to which the Hebrews had been and were exposed, such beliefs being that there were multiple gods and that they were each

responsible for parts of creation and that man was created by those gods to help them out with their tasks. In my view, right or wrong, the author(s) of the creation story was not (were not) seeking to set forth the literal, scientific, genetic facts of creation or of the creation of mankind, and that a whole lot of his (their) cultural biases or cultural norms entered into his (their) stories. So when someone says to me that “we need to look at how things were pre-fall, as that is how God intended them to be”, I am inclined to be very skeptical of that statement. We know from Genesis that God did create the universe and the world and all of its creatures and mankind but I become very leery of reaching other conclusions from the pre-fall creation stories. So when I hear some Pastor preach a sermon, which relies on Genesis to say that “we were created male and female”, and those are our assigned genders, and two persons of the same gender cannot be bound in a union” I become pretty skeptical. The conclusion might well be true, but I do not think that the Creation passages of Genesis can be used as ironclad Biblical support for this conclusion.” Enough said-now argue with me. Let’s talk,)

2) GENESIS/THE FLOOD AND THE SONS OF NOAH AND THE “SIN OF HAM”/GENESIS 6-11

We are all familiar with the stories of Noah and of the Flood, and of the actions of one of Noah’s sons, Ham, which followed the flood. You might want to review these stories as they appear in Genesis 6-11. For the purposes of our Project, the important parts of these stories appear in Genesis 9:18-28 and 29. Therein we find a rather strange story of Noah’s 3 sons, Shem, Ham and Japeth. Ham was the father of Canaan. From these three sons came the people who were “scattered over the earth.” Now Noah became

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drunk and “...lay uncovered inside his tent. Ham the father of Canaan saw his father’s nakedness and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japeth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father’s nakedness. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father’s nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, he said: ‘Cursed be Canaan, the lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers.’ He also said ‘Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem. May Canaan be the slave of Shem. May God extend the territory of Japeth, may Japeth live in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be his slave.’” The story then goes on in Genesis 10 to provide a table or listing of Nations, the descendants of Ham (Canaan), Shem and Japeth. The descendants of Canaan, the son of Ham, were, obviously, the Canaanites who were to be driven from the Promised Land (In fact, if the Bible is read literally, they were required by God to be wiped out).

(Note: “A majority of scholars” (I am really skeptical when I read that a “majority” of the people of any discipline agree on anything) purportedly agree that, in view of the strong condemnation of Canaan (the son of Ham, peculiarly not Ham himself) and of his descendants, including the Canaanites, Ham did more

than view his father's, Noah's nakedness, but actually engaged in some form of homosexual act upon Noah, probably in order to try to achieve power since, culturally, the penetration of a male by another male reduced the status of the penetrated male to that of a female, a perceived weaker being. So some site this story of the "Sin of Ham" as being one of the Biblical stories of the Old Testament which shows that God strongly opposed homosexuality. Many scholars attribute God's instructions to the Israelites to "wipe out" the Canaanites as being justified by God's Character, which abhors sin and demands justice, and the abhorrent practices of the Canaanite culture, which included rampant homosexuality and child sacrifice. Robert A. J. Gagnon, in his book, "The Bible and Homosexual Practice" which we will try to discuss in detail, later in this document, finds links between the story of Ham (Ham's Sin) and the actions of the Canaanites which led to their being driven out in that the language of Leviticus 18 specifically refers to the practices of the Canaanites which caused the land to vomit them out. We will discuss Leviticus 18 below. So, while I might not specifically cite same herein, some of the Biblical stories about God's instructions to wipe out the Canaanites, and of Joshua's conquests could be relevant to a discussion of the questions before us in this Project. It might also be noted, in passing that some the so called "sin of Ham" was cited as justification for the institution of slavery in America. Obviously I put no weight at all of the story of Ham as being any justification, what so ever for slavery, and I am not sure I put any weight on it when it comes to a consideration of the homosexual issues. It just seems to be a weird story. Perhaps in making this statement I open myself up to being criticized, which is fine. I invited discussion and criticism.)

3) SODOM AND GOMORRAH/GENESIS 18-19:

I think that we are all familiar with the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, as it appears in Genesis 18 and 19. You might want to review these stories. Briefly stated, God, after an argument with Abraham about whether He, God, should destroy all of these cities because of what God had heard about the terrible sinful conduct of the residents of these cities, sent two angels to Sodom to carry out the destruction mission. They

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were invited by Abraham's nephew, Lot, to spend the night with Lot and his family. During the night "men from every part of the city of Sodom-both young and old-surrounded the house (Lot's house). They called to Lot: 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them. Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him, and said 'No my friends, don't do this wicked thing. Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don't do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof.'"

(Note: It is oftentimes appropriate to just say "I don't know", because, frankly, I don't know what to make

of this rather strange story of Sodom and Gomorrah. Again, I will, in following parts of this document refer to a book by Robert A.J. Gagnon, which I will cite as “Gagnon.” He finds an element of condemnation of homosexuality in this story. Gagnon refers to the Prophet Ezekiel who Gagnon believes found a link between Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 (which we will discuss below) and the sins of the Canaanites which led to their being driven out of the land, and the Sodom and Gomorrah story. So, in Gagnon’s view (see page 85 of his book) these links in Ezekiel’s thinking might also mean that Ezekiel defined as one of the concrete manifestations of sin at Sodom sexual immorality (the other being social injustice). However, Gagnon also concludes that the “deeper sin of Sodom from Ezekiel’s perspective....(was that)...the inhabitants of the city became ‘prideful’ and ‘haughty’ as a result of the city’s prosperity, and in their prosperity they both neglected the poor and committed a particular abominable act of sexual immorality.” (See Gagnon, page 85.) However, I will also cite another book by James V. Brownson which is titled “Bible Gender and Sexuality”, and which I will eventually cite as “Brownson”. Brownson finds that the strongest points made by this Sodom and Gomorrah story are ones of a “violation of the strong requirement for hospitality” of the culture which then existed, and of a condemnation of the pride of the city’s inhabitants. Some commentators are of the belief that the people of Sodom were enjoying huge prosperity and had become prideful, and, for want of a better term just plain “bored” with all of the usual pursuits of life and that they, therefore, “lusted after unusual” sexual practices. I do not know which scholar, if any is correct in his or her views of this strange story. To me, at least, it is rather difficult to believe that “all of the men (meaning all of the men of Sodom) from every part of the city of Sodom-young and old-....” (who surrounded Lot’s house and demanded to have sex with Lot’s visitors) were men without wives or female companions, and who had what we might call today “a homosexual sexual orientation”. To me, at least, the point of this story is that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah had simply become totally depraved, like the people of the parts of the world destroyed by the flood, causing God to elect to destroy them. Obviously, Lot is not the measure of a good father, who valued his daughters, and, most certainly, this story also shows how females were not highly valued in the culture of the times. So, maybe, again, the best thing for me to say about this Sodom and Gomorrah story is “I don’t know” when it comes to our project at hand. I, at least, do not give it much weight for our purposes here.

4) THE LEVITE AND HIS CONCUBINE/JUDGES 19-21:

This is another strange story, which you are acquainted. During the period of the Judges, one of continual ups and downs, faith and failure of Israel, a Levite took a concubine who was unfaithful to him and

who left him and went back to her father’s house. The Levite went to recover her in Bethlehem and on the way home to the hill country of Ephraim with her and his servant and donkeys (which it seems ends

up being more valuable than the concubine) he stops in Gibeah, a city of the tribe of Benjamin. An old man from Ephraim, who as living in Gibeah, invited the Levite, with his concubine and his servant to spend the night in the old man's house, where the old man provided them with his hospitality. During the night "some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house...(and pounding on the door)...they shouted to the old man who owned the house, 'Bring out the man who came to your house so we can have sex with him.' The owner of the house went out and said to them 'No my friends, don't be so vile...(since)...this man is my guest, don't do this disgraceful thing...'" The old man then offered the Levite's concubine and his own virgin daughter to the men of the city. The men, however, would not listen so the Levite (what a guy and what a priest) sent the concubine out to the men, who then raped and abused her throughout the night and apparently killed her. When the Levite came out the next morning he found the dead concubine at the door. He put her body on a donkey and took her home and when he got there "...he took a knife and cut up his concubine, limb by limb, into twelve parts and sent them into all areas of Israel." He then told everyone that "'I and my concubine came to Gibeah in Benjamin to spend the night...(and)...during the night the men of Gibeah came after me and surrounded the house, intending to kill me.'" He then described how he had cut up the concubine's body and sent it around and then asked "...Now all you Israelites speak up and give your verdict.'" As a result the Israelite, after asking for God's instructions (and they were told to "go up against Benjamin") went to war versus Benjamin and wiped out many of them. They also took an oath that none of their daughters would ever marry a Benjamite. Then, in order to later provide Benjamites with wives, but without violating their oath, sent their daughters out into the fields, and allowed the Benjamites to come take them (abduct them) for wives.

(Note: You can make of this story what you will, but my take, beyond the candid admission "I don't know" is comparable to my reaction to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. To me, at least, it does not provide much helpful light for our project at hand. I guess I might ask in jest "why, if the Benjamites were of a homosexual orientation they needed wives?" I would also add that the continuous recital in the Book of Judges that during this era "...all the people did what was right in their own eyes.." the author(s) of the book signal, repeatedly, that the world had gone seriously awry. I take that conclusion to be the basic point of the entire book. When we go afield from this basic point in order to find specific Godly commands, then, in my opinion we are stretching the narratives of the Book of Judges too far. So, I don't find this story to be helpful in our project.)

5) DEUTERONOMY 22:5: "A woman must not wear men's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing for the Lord your God detests anyone who does this."

6) TEXTS INDICATING THAT HOMOSEXUAL CULT PROSTITUTION EXISTED IN ISRAEL DURING THE PERIOD OF THE DIVIDED MONARCHY:

Gagnon, in his book, at pages 100-110 cites a number of Old Testament Biblical Texts

which, he concludes, provide “good evidence of homosexual cult prostitution in Israel during the period of the divided monarchy.” I am going to leave it to you to review these pages of Gagnon’s book and the Texts he cites and his interpretation of those texts, so that you can draw your own conclusions about his beliefs as to

“cult prostitution.” I think that he makes a good case that, in fact, homosexual cult prostitution (together with numerous other awful, God dishonoring practices) did exist in at least the Northern Kingdom.

7) LEVITICUS 18:22-24 AND 20:13:

-Leviticus 18:1-30: Leviticus 18:1-30 contains what is sometimes referred to as the “Holiness Code.” It begins: “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘I am the Lord your God. You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the Lord your God. Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the Lord.....then follows a list of sexual instructions and prohibitions down to vs. 22, which reads “Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman, that is detestable...”. Then at vs. 24 it is stated “Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways because this is how the nations I am going to drive out before you became defiled. Even the land was defiled: so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants....”.

-Leviticus 20:13, which is a part of Leviticus 20 that provides for penalties for certain actions reads: “If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable (some interpretations read “abomination”. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.”

(Note: These Levitical texts receive a huge amount of discussion by both Gagnon and Brownson in their respective books and we will leave our discussions of these texts to a discussion of the conclusions of Gagnon and Brownson, as well as some discussion of the conclusions of William J. Webb in his book, “Slaves, Women and Homosexuals”.)

8) THE WITNESS OF JESUS:

Some proponents of same gender sexual relationships on what they perceive to be the silence of Jesus on the subject of homosexual practices. Gagnon, in his book, finds this position to be unpersuasive in view of Jesus’s general approach to the Mosaic law, Jesus’s appeal to Gen. 1:27 and 2:24 in his discussion of divorce (Mark 10:1-22) and his apparent embrace of an exclusively heterosexual model of monogamy, together with his positions on other matters having to do with sexual ethics which were more-not less-rigorous than those of his surrounding culture. Some relevant passages are as follows:

a) In Matthew 5:17-19 Jesus says: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or

the Prophets. I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these

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commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

b) In Matthew 5:27-29 Jesus says: “You have heard it said, ‘Do not commit adultery. But I tell you that any one of you who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

c) In Mark 7:21-23 Jesus interprets the saying about what defiles a person as follows: “for it is fromthe human heart that evil intentions come: sexual immoralities....adulteries....licentiousness...All these evil things come from within and defile a person.” (Note: Gagnon argues that no first century Jew would have heard these words, and the Greek word for sexual immoralities (*porneiai*) without having in mind the list of forbidden sexual offenses in Leviticus 18 and 22. See Gagnon’s book at page 191)

d) In teaching about divorce, in Mark 10:4-8, among other points, Jesus appears to refer to the creation story of Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, when he says “But at the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore, what God has joined together let man not separate.” (Gagnon argues that this teaching of Jesus, as well as the passages of Genesis stand for the proposition of Male-Female Complementarity, which lies at the heart of Gagnon’s positions against homosexual unions.)

e) While there are many Gospel passages which teach and stand for the proposition that Jesus came to heal the sick and the sinners, and to bring the lost into the fold and provide them with forgiveness and redemption, including the Parables of Luke 15, Gagnon argues that the Gospels, as a whole teach that Jesus provided forgiveness but also demanded repentance from sin and, at least to some extent, obedience to God’s commands and laws and decrees, and it is his argument that, while same sex sexual relations would be forgiven by Jesus, such actions have to be repented from and a failure of repentance and continued same sex conduct can lead to condemnation (apparently a loss of one’s redemption/saving. We will discuss this more later, but you should refer to pages 210-227 of Gagnon’s book for his citation of what he finds to be the relevant passages of the Gospels.)

8) THE PAULINE EPISTLES:

Now we really come to the crux, for Christians, of the issues of our project. That crux is found in the Pauline Epistles. I will try to set forth the relevant passages herein. The most important

passages, and the one as to which there is the greatest disagreement of our authors, Gagnon and Brownson, as set forth in their books which we will discuss below, are those in Romans 1, which we will get to, but let's lead into those passages by setting forth other relevant passages in the historical order of the Epistles which contain them as follows:

a) GALATIANS/A.D. 49 (Note: Historically, Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, had taught in the gatherings of Gentiles in Galatia. Apparently, a group of Jewish leaders (like truth tellers of one party who follow around a politician of another party) would then come and teach that what Paul had taught was wrong, because, in order to be a follower of Christ, one had to first follow all Jewish laws and traditions, including the

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absolute requirement of circumcision. Paul was outraged by the fact that some of the Gentile converts were led to believe what he thought to be the false teachings of these Jewish leaders. We cannot cite or quote herein all of the relevant passages of Galatians, which is believed to be the very earliest Epistle penned in roughly AD 49, but if you read this Epistle you will see that Paul strongly opposed the teachings of these Jewish leaders and that he even came into direct opposition with and argument with Peter. So, let's review at least some relevant passages):

A) Throughout Galatians 1 Paul expresses his disdain for the teaching of those who followed him and threw the Galatian converts "into confusion." He goes on to say: "I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. "

B) Galatians 2:6-10: "...I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews. For God was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews was also at work in my ministry as apostle to the Gentiles."

C) Galatians 2:15-16: "We who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners know that a man is not justified by observing the Law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the Law because by observing the Law no one will be justified."

D) Galatians 3:26-29: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

(Further Note: I am not a trained theologian. Therefore, I am a bit reluctant to state many opinions about Paul's Epistles, which, as I have already admitted, I find hard to read and understand. But, to me at least, Galatians, Paul's first Epistle, sets forth the heart and soul of his beliefs, as an Apostle to the Gentiles and not the Jews, as well as of the arguments he makes in his following Epistles, including Romans.)

b) THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL/THE FIRST CHURCH COUNCIL CALLED TO RESOLVE VERY PRESSING ISSUES OF THE CHURCH/FAITH/A.D. 50

While, obviously not an Epistle, it is important to note that Galatians was, apparently penned in AD 49, whereas the Jerusalem council described in Acts 15, apparently as a result of disputes involving Paul, Peter and others as to what edicts or parts of the Jewish tradition Gentiles would be required to follow or practice in order to be followers of Christ, was not called until AD 50. There, after careful study of Scripture (a Bible study), which clearly required circumcision, and hearing the testimony of witnesses and seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the council of the church leaders, the Apostles caused a letter to be penned for the Gentiles, which read in part: "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things."

(Note: As stated above it is my belief that the issues of this Project we are working on are so critical to the

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Church and Church Unity, and to every congregation and its unity, as to require that those issues be thoroughly reviewed, and discussed, with the guidance of learned, God fearing people, and with the guidance of Scripture, as illuminated by the Holy Spirit whose illumination should be prayerfully sought by the group/council. I remain very reluctant to express opinions about what the position of the Church or any congregation should be on the issues we are discussing as I think the story of the Jerusalem council advises us as to how these issues should be approached.)

c) 1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-11/A.D. 55 (the so called "Vice Lists"): "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexual immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will 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."

(Note: One of the problems with trying to correctly interpret and apply the teachings of 1Corinthians and 2 Corinthians is that such Epistles/Letters were parts of an ongoing chain of correspondence of at least 4 letters, back and forth between Paul and some of the people in the Corinthian congregations, who raised questions or arguments with Paul, to which he sought to respond. We do not have all of the correspondence and perhaps not even all of Paul's letters to the Corinthians. This problem can become really acute when we seek to interpret and apply to our modern day culture what appear to be Paul's "instructions", if you will, about the roles of women in the church and at home/in marriage. Some scholars (e.g. Kirk MacGregor) believe that Paul was using a classic Greek Rhetorical device, where he would quote from a letter he received, and then rebut what he quoted. The problem-we don't get

quotation marks, and we don't know where Paul is quoting another on refuting what he has quoted. So caution has to be exercised in taking some passage from an Epistle and asserting that it sets forth a rule of normative conduct for Christians or their congregations. That is not to say that such might not be the case, but caution needs to be exercised. Furthermore, in seeking to interpret the vice lists of Corinthians 6:9-11, particularly with respect to the reference to "homosexual offenders", another difficulty is encountered. The Greek words used here were "*malakoi*" and "*arsenokoitai*" and these words were not words which were then (when the Epistle was penned or circulated) commonly used. There is a very strong disagreement among scholars (e.g. Gagnon (see pages 303, et. seq of his book) and Brownson (see pages 273, et. seq. of his book) about the actual intended meaning or meaning of these words as used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, and, as stated below, 1 Timothy 1:10. My quotations of the Biblical passages which appear herein come from the NIV version of the Bible, which, unfortunately, is the only Bible I brought with me when I started work on this Project. Some scholars believe that the English interpretations of the NIV Bible are unfortunate interpretations when it comes to the passages in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy. So, for my purposes in this project of trying to provide some answers to the questions which have been raised (as those questions are set forth above) I am going to be awfully cautious in my references to the "Vice Lists" of 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and 1 Timothy 1:10.

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You might very well disagree with my conclusions in this respect and I certainly respect such disagreements as I am anything but skilled in the Greek language or in the interpretation of Paul's Epistles.)

d) ROMANS 1/A.D. 57 FROM CORINTH: (Beginning Note: Now we come to the real crux of the arguments over the responses to the questions which we have raised for this Project, as those questions are set forth above. The main passages which are disputed by Christian Theological Scholars, as they consider these questions, are those of Romans 1:18-32 which are commonly seen as the central text for the issue for Christian morality of homosexual conduct. I will give the NIV quotation of those texts in a bit, but I think that one must review all of Romans, most certainly all of Romans 1, in seeking to properly construe and apply in modern day times, these passages from Romans 1. So please read (as I know you will, all of Romans, including, in particular, all of Romans 1 and all of Romans 16) as it becomes critically important to try (and the operative word here is "try" as even scholars who have worked for years on Romans disagree on these topics) to understand to whom Paul is addressing Romans, and why he is addressing them, and what purpose he is seeking to accomplish with them. These are not easy tasks but, in my judgment, they are critical tasks for purposes of our Project here.) Romans 1:18-32 from the NIV is as follows:

"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of

men who suppress the truth of 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 men are without excuse.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal men and birds and animals and reptiles.

Therefore, God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity, for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator-who is forever praised. Amen

Because of this God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these things but also approve of those who practice them."

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(Further Note: Who is Paul and his cohorts who helped with Romans talking to and who is he/are they talking about, and what is he/they saying about them?)

e) 1 TIMOTHY 1:8-11 (A.D.64/VICE LISTS):

"We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers-and for whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which he entrusted to me."

(Note: I refer you to the Note about the Vice List of 1 Corinthians 6:8-11 set forth above.)

f) OTHER EPISTLES: There are, of course, countless references to Sexual Immorality in other Epistles. That Paul stood strong against "Sexual Immorality" and that he viewed Sexual Immorality and Sexual Sins with the utmost seriousness cannot be disputed.

IX) ANCIENT HISTORY OF THE ANE WORLD PRE-DATING THE HANDING DOWN OF THE LAW/AS SUCH HISTORY MIGHT REFLECT ON HOMOSEXUAL ACTS:

If we review the relevant Scriptural Passages, as they appear above, the earliest, Old Testament ones which seem to directly address the issue of homosexuality are those which appear in Leviticus, particularly Leviticus 18:22, and Leviticus 20:13. These passages are set forth above. Now I must admit that I am not a Biblical Historian, who can confidently express an opinion about just when Leviticus was actually reduced to writing. I have been taught, and, therefore, have assumed that Moses wrote Leviticus, and that he did so when the Israelites were wandering in the desert after their Exodus from Egypt. If you look at Gagnon's Book, and the books of other scholars, you will find that there is dissent among Biblical Scholars about when the books of the Pentateuch were actually first reduced to written form by scribes. There is some scholarly opinion that this did not occur until the Babylonian Exile, and that, in the meantime, the traditions of these books were passed on and preserved orally. Please understand that while I would not, in any respect, question the belief that "All Scripture is God-breathed..." (2 Tim. 16), and is the inspired Word of God, I think that we have to be of the opinion that the authors, or authorities who first wrote or spoke the words of a Book of Scripture, and the scribes who eventually reduced those Books to writing (if the original authority who first spoke the words did not do so) were influenced by the knowledge which they had of what was going on in the world around them, whether that be the Ancient Near Eastern World (the "ANE" world), or the world of Israel itself, or the Greco-Roman World which existed when the Gospels were written and when Paul and the other Epistle writers penned their letters.

If this is a correct conclusion, then it might be important to know when, for example, Leviticus, and particularly Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 were reduced to writing. If Moses wrote Leviticus or first spoke it, while the Israelites were wandering in the desert (actually when God appeared before and spoke the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai) then what Moses and the Israelites would have known about the ANE world, and particularly Egypt from when they came would be important. On the other hand, if Leviticus was first spoken

by Moses in the desert, but was reduced to writing by scribes during the Babylonian Exile, then we might conclude that these scribes would have been impacted not just by what was going on in Egypt, but what had been going on in the ANE world, and in Israel before the Exile, and in Babylonia at the time when Leviticus was reduced to writing. In other words, these scribes would have had a much broader understanding of sexual, and particularly homosexual practices as they existed throughout the ANE world, and in the Promised land before the Hebrew conquest (meaning the practices of the Canaanites) and in Israel in particular (e.g. were there male homosexual temple prostitutes as Gagnon asserts) and in

Babylonia.

Now why is this important? You can assert that, irrespective of what the Biblical authors, or authorities or scribes might have known, Leviticus and the other books of the Pentateuch assert that God spoke to Moses from Mount Sinai and elsewhere and that Moses simply recorded God's words. I accept that assertion. You might well be right. Again, that is a matter for argument and discussion. My take, however, is a bit different. My take is that, yes God inspired/breathed the words of all of Scripture, but he used human beings, as His agents to actually set forth those words, whether in oral or written form, and those human beings were limited by, and impacted by what they knew and what they had experienced.

So if my take is a reasonable one, and we look at Leviticus 18 and Leviticus 20 and we want to understand, not just "what they said" but also "why they said it", we have to ask what knowledge the Biblical writers of Leviticus, whoever he or they might have been, would have known and understood about the then existent, and historical sexual norms and practices, and particularly the homosexual norms and practices of the ANE world, and of the inhabitants of the Promised Land before the Hebrew conquest, and of Israel itself.