

Revised New City Church of LA LGBTQ Statement and Policy

Revised on September 23, 2020

Definitions: There are three common positions related to how the church approaches the issue of LGBTQ inclusion:

- Side A believes that LGBTQ orientation and behavior are within God's will. A church that believes this fully includes LGBTQ Christians in the church and affirms same-sex marriages.
- Side B believes that LGBTQ behavior is not within God's will, but that orientation *itself* is not a matter of sin or salvation. A church that believes this includes LGBTQ Christians but calls them to celibacy and does not affirm same-sex marriages. There may be limitations regarding participating in certain leadership capacity for those who do not practice celibacy.
- Side X believes that LGBTQ orientation is sin. A church that believes this excludes LGBTQ people and does not believe that LGBTQ people can be Christians unless their orientation is converted.

New City's Leadership Team and staff (along with a married Christian gay couple who are part of the church) prayerfully considered this issue over a period of several months. We read two major position papers and two books, each by Side A and by Side B authors¹, and spent several months discussing them. We prayed over this issue, examined the relevant Scriptures carefully, processed them with one another, and sought counsel from many people. This first Statement was a product of that effort. This revised Statement is a product of continued discussion and study by the Elder Board.

One thing that must be clarified from the start: The Scriptures are our authority on this topic. Therefore, the heart of this statement relates to what we believe the Scriptures tells us about this topic.

New City's approach can best be described as Third Way (inclusive of both Sides A and B), which we describe as follows:

1. We reject Side X.

We do not believe that the orientation (same-sex attraction) itself is sin. Although there are disputes regarding whether the Scriptures prohibit same-sex behavior, there is nothing in the Scripture that says that the same-sex attraction itself is sinful.

We also do not believe that this is an issue of salvation. The heart of the gospel is that we are saved by grace, not by our works. This means that whether we are saved or not is not based on our sexuality. God's gift to us—a relationship with him—can't be earned; we can only receive it, and once we receive it, we can't lose it.² This is an important point because since it is not a salvation issue, this can be a disputable

¹ *A Letter to My Congregation* by Ken Wilson, the founder of Vineyard Church in Ann Arbor, Michigan. This is a Side A perspective.

Same-Sex Attraction and the Church: The Surprising Plausibility of the Celibate Life by Ed Shaw. This is a Side B perspective.

We also read the following two essays that have been coined by Justin Lee, the founder of Gay Christian Network (now Q Christian Fellowship), as "the Great Debate." These two essays are written by [Justin Lee, representing Side A](#), and [Ron Belgau, a celibate gay Christian and a friend of Justin, representing Side B](#).

² Some people ask, "But what if a person continues to sin after he or she becomes a Christian? Wouldn't that invalidate that person's salvation?" What if we asked the same question for all sins: After we become a Christian, if we continue to lust, judge, be a racist (maybe we grew up in a culture of racism and we don't even know we have this problem), be greedy, be bitter and hate, are we not saved? Is that what the gospel is about? God saves us but if

issue (refer to paragraph 3 below regarding Romans 14-15).

2. We believe that there is a reasonable dispute between Side A and Side B regarding what the Scriptures say about how LGBTQ Christians are called to live:

- **Old Testament**

Genesis 19

We do not believe that the Old Testament story of Sodom in Genesis 19 addresses committed monogamous same-gender relationships. The Bible does not say that the sin of Sodom is homosexuality. It describes the sin of gang-rape. It is a story of men raping other men as a form of domination and intimidation. Also, Ezekiel 16:49-50 tells us what the sin of Sodom was:

⁴⁹ Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. ⁵⁰ They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen.

It does not say anything about committed same-gender relationships.

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

We do not believe that the Levitical Holiness Code (Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13) addresses committed monogamous same-gender relationships. These passages are in the middle of the holiness code--the clean laws--which include laws prohibiting sex during women's menstrual periods, the wearing of certain kinds of clothes, the eating of certain kinds of food, among many other areas. A violation of the code is referred to as an abomination. The New Testament is replete, however, with references indicating that we are not subject to the Old Testament clean laws.

- **New Testament**

The New Testament passages are more disputable in their interpretation. Both Side A and Side B have plausible interpretations of the texts.

Romans 1:26-27

The passage is talking about human rebellion. Instead of acknowledging God, we decided to seek idols and rebel against God. Romans 1:26-27 says:

²⁶ Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷ In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

Side A argues that it is critical to interpret the passage in light of the kind of same-sex relationships that existed in Rome. They note that Rome was rampant with same-sex relationships that were very

we continue to struggle in sin, we are a goner? We miss the whole point of the gospel if we believe this. We have made the gospel into a Kingdom that we can enter into if we stay good. No. The gospel says that we are all more messed up than we think we are. But, God loves us more than we can ever imagine. The reality is that we are all sinners even after we become a Christian.

promiscuous and explicitly in the context of idol worship. They argue that having sex with boys and participating in orgies and prostitution were a part of the culture at the time. Even Plato did that. They argue that that's what Paul is referring to in this passage. Therefore, they argue that it is *not* referring to committed same-gender relationships or marriage. Side B argues that the meaning is plainly clear. It doesn't talk just about men but also about women. This is the only passage in the New Testament that can be interpreted to mean sex between two women. Side A argues that the reference to women may not necessarily refer to sexual relationships. Side B notes that the language is broader and inclusive of all same-sex relationships.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and 1 Timothy 1:8-10

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 says this (KJV):

⁹ Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, **nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,** ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

The word "effeminate" and the phrase "abusers of themselves with mankind" are critical to interpreting this passage. The phrase "abusers of themselves with mankind" also appears in 1 Timothy 1:8-10. What do these words mean? They were later translated as "male prostitutes, sodomites" in NRSV and "men who have sex with men" in NIV. The two terms are combined in NIV. The two terms in Greek are:

Malakoi: this word, translated as "effeminate" in the KJV, literally means soft. Greeks had a culture of keeping boys for sex. They were male prostitutes. Married men frequented them. That's why some of the translations translate this word as male prostitute.

Arsenokoitai: this is a compound word that combines the word "male" and "bed." This verse and the 1 Timothy verse are the only two places this word is used in the Bible and in any ancient Greek writings. So, most scholars believe that Paul coined the term. The KJV translates this as "abusers of themselves with mankind." Side A argues that no one really knows the meaning of the word. So, they argue that we should not translate it as the NIV does or the NRSV does. Side B notes that there is one other place that these two words are used. It is in the Septuagint LXX, the Greek translation of the Old Testament that was available to Paul at the time. And the Leviticus passage we talked about earlier uses both *arseno* and *koitai*, although not together, to describe homosexual sex. So, Side B argues that *arsenokoitai* means men having sexual relationship with men. Side A, however, argues that *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* must be translated together to mean "the young male prostitutes and men who have sex with young prostitutes." They maintain that the passage is not talking about committed and loving monogamous same-gender relationships. It is undisputed among scholars that this kind of prostitution was common in Greco-Roman culture.

• Does Agape Love Take Precedence?

Side A argues that we are no longer under the law, but we are called to live by the Spirit. They argue that the point of a rule, whether it is in the Old Testament or the New Testament, is not to get us to obey its literal meaning, but to obey its spirit. And they argue that the big picture of the Scripture is to teach us to love--not in a love anyway we define it kind of way--but with a Christ-like, self-sacrificial, and unconditional *agape* love. So, they argue that any rule must be tested by this spirit of the rule: Does it promote agape love? They acknowledge that behaviors like rape, idolatry, prostitution, child exploitation, adultery, and fornication are examples of the results of selfish, fleshly motivation; not love for God or

others. But if two people love each other with all their hearts, and they want to commit themselves to each other in marriage in front of God and other witnesses—to love, honor, and cherish; to selflessly serve and encourage one another; to serve God together; to be faithful for the rest of their lives--it should be allowed because it promotes *agape* love.

Side B, however, argues that more specific teachings (as discussed above) must overrule the general teachings. They argue that we must submit to the mystery of God's design and it would not be loving to accept a lifestyle inconsistent with God's design.

- **Marriage Passages (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5, Mark 10:8, Ephesians 5:31)**

These passages say: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."

Side B argues that the Bible throughout Old and New Testaments teaches that a marriage is between a man and a woman. They argue that this complementary design of marriage is sacred because it reflects the marriage between Christ and the church. Therefore, they believe that those who have same-gender attractions are called to celibacy.

Side A, however, makes two arguments regarding this: (1) Those teachings are *descriptive* of their culture, not *prescriptive* for all same-gender relationships. The point of the passage is that marriage makes two into one, and its reference to a husband and a wife merely describes marriages at the time. (2) The Bible teaches that celibacy is a gift, not something that should be forced upon anyone. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 7:7, says that while he would prefer everyone to be celibate like him, "each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that."

In addition, some make the argument that just as accommodation has been made for remarriages because of the suffering caused by the prohibition even though Jesus spoke against it, similarly, an accommodation should be made for same-sex marriages because of the suffering it causes to those born with same-sex attraction even if it is against the teachings of the Scriptures.

3. We believe that Romans 14-15 teaches us to love one another and not judge one another even when we disagree.

The issue in Romans 14-15 was the dispute between those who believed in keeping the Mosaic food laws and those who didn't. Apostle Paul, who wrote this letter, clearly believed that we are freed from the Mosaic food laws (verse 14: "I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself"), yet, he commands the church to not judge those who believe in living by the Mosaic food law. Romans 14:10 says, "You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat." He calls them to love one another: "If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love." Furthermore, he commands them to "make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister." He calls the church to unity: "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification." Likewise, we believe that this is a disputable issue in the church and Romans 14 is instructive. We are called to not judge one another, to love one another, and to not become an obstacle to one another in our relationship with God, even if we think we are right.

Many LGBTQ Christians have experienced exclusion and judgment from the church. We must consider the pain and suffering caused by the church. Many have not only walked away from church but also from faith. Many have even committed suicide. Grace and love have been dimmed by fear, judgment, and condemnation. We believe that the church must repent. We believe that it is more important to seek, save,

and love those who have same-sex attractions than to *be right* on this issue. This is the foundation for our position as a Third Way church which embraces members of both Side A and Side B.

4. New City Policy

While we are committed to love one another under the unifying grace of God, in terms of the church policy, we cannot fully satisfy both Side A and Side B. Upon much consideration and prayer, the Leadership Team has come to a difficult decision on policy related to the inclusion and leadership of LGBTQ people in the church and the officiation of LGBTQ marriages. The Elder Board, after much discussion, study, and prayer, subsequently revised the policy as set forth below.

Our revised policy is as follows: (1) We accept into membership everyone who puts their faith in Jesus, is baptized, and signs the membership covenant, regardless of their sexual orientation; (2) LGBTQ Christians may fully participate in the life of the church and may be called to serve in any leadership position, and (3) each pastor may decide based on his or her conscience whether or not to officiate same-sex weddings and provide marriage counseling services.

We note that the sexual conduct standard for leadership remains the same for both heterosexuals and LGBTQ people: We believe that the Scriptures call us to sexual relationship only within the context of marriage.

This decision was very difficult and was made after much study, discussion, and prayer. While the individual members of the Leadership Team, and later the Elder Board, differed in their positions (some are Side A and some are Side B), they nonetheless came together in consensus for the sake of the church's unity. We are now asking the church to commit to the same spirit of unity.

We believe that this is not a salvation issue; it is an important but disputable issue. As such, under Romans 14-15, we believe that the Gospel teaches us to love one another, not judge one another, and seek the unity of the church even in the midst of differences. We believe that these policies best accomplish these goals.