

**Christian Marriage:
The Quadrilateral and Marriage in The United Methodist Church**

The Rev. Dr. Keith Cressman

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Opening Thoughts

Is God trustworthy? Is God worthy of investing your life in him?

The positive representation of LGBTQI+ values in nearly every form of media, from online presence to children's entertainment programming, signals the near completion of a decades-long process to desensitize and convert American public opinion to favor sexually intimate relationships between people of the same sex. The SCOTUS has placed the government's imprimatur on same-sex marriage. In pre-school and continuing through post-graduate studies, public schools have implemented policies inclusive of LGBTQI+ worldview and intolerant of and even shaming opposing views. The shift from a majority that defined marriage in traditional terms to a new majority that defines same-sex marriage as the norm seems all but complete.

However, some dissent from the new majority and do so with good reason. You may be one.

Experiencing the moral norms of culture change around one is unsettling, especially when one's belief remains consistent. Persons who a few years ago felt supported by institutions such as schools and courts may now find their views excluded by those very same societal structures. You may think that your full participation in your own culture is unwelcome. In many situations, persons loyal to Jesus Christ and the Christian Church witness their denomination or congregation redefine marriage in ways antithetical to previously held church doctrine and standards. They experience dissonance between their understanding of human sexuality and the possibility that these institutions now represent the Lord's true intentions for human sexuality. This unsettling cultural shift can give rise to doubts of faith.

Whether a Christian accepts the restated definition of marriage or holds to the more traditional view involves considerations other than whether the majority adopts one position or the other. Christians consider the teaching of the Old and New Testaments. The interpretation of these sacred texts relies on understanding Scripture through the lenses of Christian tradition, reason, and experience.

This discussion presents a summary of Scripture related to human sexuality and marriage by applying a processing grid The United Methodist Church calls The

Wesleyan Quadrilateral. The conclusion is that God and his word are worthy of our trust and are reliable sources to understand sex and marriage.

Regardless of whether you agree with the majority or whether others accept your deeply held religious beliefs, you can be confident and assured that God's plan is always the best. Therefore, I hope to help you understand and believe God and thus hold firm to the reasons for the moral choices you make.

Remember God's assurance to faithful people who entered unfamiliar and challenging times before them. While the times are different, God has not changed.

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Jeremiah 29:11

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

Joshua 1:9

God bless you and strengthen you as you seek to follow Jesus Christ.

Keith Cressman

Teacher. Pastor. Lawyer.

Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, *New International Version, NIV.*

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I. Introduction

In the past half-century, few subjects have created as much controversy for the Church and society as homosexuality. So many people have been wounded. All caught in the religious and cultural turmoil need compassion and understanding.

People tend to lean toward two types of reactions. First, they either ignore the LGBTQI+ community, respond with fear, fail to become informed, make hurtful comments, and/or become homophobic¹ or second, they non-critically affirm same-sex behavior within a committed relationship as a blessed, God-intended way of life.

Ministering both to people who engage in homosexual behavior and to those bewildered at the prospect is a pressing mission challenge for the Church. But, unfortunately, the generally muddled response of the Church to the needs of Christian people who feel adrift in a sea of ambiguity has not been constructive.

Richard J. Foster, a modern Christian writer, describes the extreme responses, “Those who are clearly homosexual in their orientation often feel misunderstood, stereotyped, abused, and rejected.... Those who believe that homosexuality is a clear affront to biblical norms feel betrayed by denominations that want to legislate homosexuality into church life.”²

This paper aims to offer a reasoned presentation of Scripture and tradition as it shapes the experience and discourse around same-sex sexual behavior in the Church. I hope that this discussion will help Christians know and follow Jesus and, thus, love and glorify God and better understand and love others. This writing results from my search to discover and understand the authorities and sources relied upon by others.

¹ “Homophobia” is the hatred or fear of homosexuals, sometimes leading to violence and hostility. However, disagreeing about the status of LGBTQI+ persons or the morality of same-sex behavior is not homophobic, although it is a term often used in attempts to silence disagreement. Even use of the term “homosexual” is considered outdated and homophobic by some.

² Richard J. Foster. *Money, Sex, and Power: The Challenge of the Disciplined Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 107.

The audience I address is specifically The United Methodist Church and those of Wesleyan heritage and other Christians who would seek a deeper understanding. I do not attempt to address a broader audience being cognizant of C.S. Lewis' counsel that discussion of disputed points has "no tendency at all to bring an outsider into the Christian fold.... Our divisions should never be discussed except in the presence of those who have already come to believe there is one God and that Jesus Christ is His only Son."³

While I approached the topics with traditional values, I strove to delve into the discussion as a "classic liberal" who attempts to fairly evaluate the arguments, believing that given a fair hearing, truth will become evident. I encourage the reader to take a similar approach.

In this discussion, I will briefly describe the cultural and ecclesiastical debate over the meaning and expression of "love" and the paradox the debate presents. Then, after encouraging us to keep our focus on the person of Jesus Christ, I will attempt to unravel the paradox by applying the sources and criteria of The Quadrilateral. Finally, I will concentrate my effort on a reasoned investigation into Scripture and tradition and explain how experience is being misapplied. I hope this approach builds a constructive process that will lead toward a better understanding among all Christians.

II. The Church's Struggle with Same Sex Marriage

The debate over legitimizing homosexual behavior and its consequences has not gone well in the Church, despite the sincere efforts of most Christians to love as Jesus loves. Complicating the situation is the disproportionate amount of publicity granted a very few who have fostered inaccurate, broad generalities and caused pain.⁴ Rejecting homosexual behavior is, thus, often interpreted as a rejection of or hatred toward all people experiencing same-sex attraction.

Christians understand that God's message has a lot to do with love, and they generally want to witness God's love in their lives by reflecting it in their relationships with others. Jesus' followers are motivated to love others because they have experienced

³ C.S. Lewis. *Mere Christianity*. Preface. (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), viii-ix.

⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Westboro-Baptist-Church>, May 23, 2019.

and value the affirmation of God's love. People desire to be loved and accepted by others; the affirmation of others is treasured.

Correcting a fellow follower of Jesus when that person behaves in an unethical or immoral way is a loving responsibility. However, few people enjoy confronting another or being confronted. Hence, we are to "speak the truth in love."⁵ Difficult as they may be, these truthful, loving conversations help all participants overcome sin and mature as Christians.

While we expect others may not accept a decision we make, differing on a decision is not rejecting the other person as a whole. Yet tension is created when one Christian accuses another of not being loving because one views the behavior of the other as sinful. This tension is intensified by certain groups that preach hate.

A. Damaging Messaging

While most Christians strive to love as Jesus Christ loves, a small religious sect primarily from the same family is repeatedly granted national headlines as representatives of Christianity. Their message? "God hates fags."⁶ Many United Methodists, including me, witnessed this group's protests during the specially called General Conference in 2019.

Only the most hardened and callous are comfortable with this group's methods, language, and messaging. Most realize their techniques are utterly ineffective in convincing people that God loves them or invites people to discuss our need to be accepted by God.

The Gospel does not neatly fit on a bumper sticker, nor is it communicated by a slogan. The Gospel, and life, are more complicated than short sound bites and three-word phrases. People deserve more respect than that.

Nonetheless, a person experiencing same-sex attraction, having heard the Christian message as hateful, understandably, and regrettably, is likely to turn away from the loving Gospel message and the Church *in toto*. Having listened to the Gospel misrepresented, followers of Jesus may be embarrassed by it and sympathetic to the

⁵ Ephesians 4:13.

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westboro_Baptist_Church, May 23, 2019.

pain the misrepresentation inflicts. Both the LGBTQI+ community and many Christians respond by distancing themselves from such a message.

B. LGBTQI+ Response to Perceived Hate

When responding to what seems a message of hate, advocates for legitimizing same-sex behavior likewise implement two-minute sound bites and minimal word phrases. These appear in national media as well.

Having experienced personal pain and rejection, the LGBTQI+ community then attempts to discredit those who disagree with their lifestyle. Consequently, the following types of complaints and accusations have become familiar:

1. Rejecting one's sexual behavior is rejecting the person.
2. Segregation, victimization, and persecution due to sexual orientation cause personal pain and suffering.
3. Those who oppose same-sex sex are "homophobes" or "homophobic." (These terms imply that one suffers mental illness or ethical deficiency.)
4. Expressing opposition to homosexual behavior is "hate speech" and should be prohibited.

This brief description of some of the hills and valleys of the cultural landscape explains the internal dissonance which a follower of Jesus experiences toward same-sex behavior, gay friends, and Divine love. This internal dissonance is experienced as a paradoxical struggle within the church as well.

C. The Choice Between Acceptance or Hate

A churchgoer with a basic knowledge of Scripture grasps the idea that God loves people, and that Jesus is the perfect representation of God's love.⁷ After all, what greater love is there than for a person to live and then die for others?⁸

That same churchgoer generally recognizes that teaching found in that same collection of sacred texts does not look favorably upon, and even condemns, homosexual behavior. In the cultural context, these two premises seem paradoxical. Could God reject same-sex sex while still loving the LGBTQI+ person?

⁷ John 14:9.

⁸ John 15:13.

God indeed loves people. It is also true that Scripture categorizes homosexual behavior as immoral. LGBTQI+ persons may consider this hateful speech and hurtful talk. Is it love to tell a person their behavior is sinful when this message causes so much pain and rejection? Does not love demand acceptance of the person and their behavior by God and by us?

Adding to the dilemma is the social desire to get along with others and be loved and accepted. As a rule, haters are not loved and accepted. Instead, they are ridiculed, ostracized, and isolated. No one wants to be counted among the haters when they tell someone to sin no more.⁹

Understandably, many choose to love and accept others on their terms and receive love and acceptance in return. The choice is offered in the context and pressures of our cultural environment. Love and be loved or hate and be hated. Accept others, including all their choices and decisions, or be rejected. This paradoxical choice, however, reflects inadequate options and closed simplistic thinking.

[D. A Multi-Dimensional Response](#)

The perspective of our context is misaligned in part because the choice given to us is oddly and narrowly binary. To more fully understand people and issues, we need multidimensional critical thinking. For example, the question before a follower of Jesus is not solely between loving and being loved and hating and being hated. God's good work is not so easily depicted.

A paradox may be unraveled when the perspective and approach are appropriately set. For instance, the paradox of making something appear three-dimensional while being two-dimensional has been resolved. As the Renaissance began, artists depicted three dimensions on two-dimensional media by setting a single focal point, usually in the distant background. Painters and drafters have employed the technique ever since.

Similarly, for love to be God-love, it must originate from God, the focal point and source. Further, for it to accurately represent God, it must not be distorted in the process of transmission. A distorted expression of God's love is not a complete

⁹ John 8:1-11.

expression of God's love; it lacks a multi-dimensional perspective. More accurate expressions of God's love have a focal point other than the subjects themselves. That single focal point is God.

When asked what the greatest commandment is, Jesus replied,

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments.*¹⁰

Jesus' teaching shows us that while the overarching theme of following Jesus is love, the focal point of love is God. While the theme is love, its focus must remain on God for love to make sense. The focus is not love but God, the source of love.

Keeping focused on Jesus establishes and maintains the needed perspective on culture, society, people, and issues. When we take our eyes off Jesus, we focus on something else. Maybe we focus on another person or their perception of us. The other person begins to refract the light of Divine love into pieces of it. As this prism refracts God's love, we begin to see only shades and hues of love instead of God's whole and pure love. Taking eyes off Jesus changes the course of love, bending, dividing, and refracting love to less than the whole.

The cultural prism has shifted the debate on same-sex behavior to an incomplete spectrum of God's love: Accept a friend's behavior or hate your friend. Accept a friend's behavior and be loved; reject it and become a despicable hater. Culture, like a prism, refracts and distorts love and creates a false dichotomy of choice.

When the focal point shifts from God to our friends, well-intentioned efforts to love our neighbor become primary. Our neighbor's feelings begin to influence our thinking and eventually dictate our decisions. Shifting the focal point seems to resolve the dissonance in our hearts, but the angst and internal dissonance are only temporarily dissuaded. Making our neighbor our first love dethrones God. We crown the other person, and from the throne, our new leader demands our fealty. This new king is a false choice and false hope.

¹⁰ Matthew 22:37-40.

However, the Greatest Commandment directs our gaze back to the source, resetting perspective and thus making the scene comprehensible. Love God. This is the first commandment, both in order and in priority. The choice is reframed when we shift our focus to God.

Jesus teaches that perfect obedience of God is perfect love.¹¹ Can we, therefore, disobey God and still love God and neighbor? Must we reinterpret Scripture, changing the long-held understanding of God's revealed will, to match our need to please our neighbor? Or shall we submit to the traditional interpretation and application of Scripture? Our challenge seems to be trusting God to love our neighbor through us. Shifting the focal point of our love back to God enables us to love others in light of God's love rather than love God in light of our love for others. The Greatest Commandment is to love God first, after all, not to love neighbor first.

Until the focal point among followers of Jesus is restored, the picture will remain distorted, and God's love will be only partly seen and experienced. We are incapable of loving others until we submit ourselves to God. Then, we love God by focusing on and obeying him. It is only then that love truly wins.

E. The United Methodist Church's Expression of Love for God and People

The paradox described above is daunting. However, the United Methodist Church weighed in as early as 1972 with expressions of love toward people and faithfulness to Scripture. The United Methodist Church's current statement affirms all people while rejecting behavior that is incompatible with Scripture.

...We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. All persons need the ministry of the Church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self. The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. We affirm that God's grace is available to all. We will seek to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.¹²

¹¹ John 14:23-24.

¹² *Book of Discipline UMC 2016*. United Methodist Pub House, 2017. Paragraph 161.G. This statement represents only part of the work of The United Methodist Church regarding human sexuality.

Can we untangle the seeming paradox of loving God and loving neighbor?

III. Analysis

A. The Wesleyan Quadrilateral¹³ is a Tool for Discerning Truth

Philosophy, law, religion, sociology, and science seek some process to develop beliefs and standards. No matter the line of inquiry or discipline, the tools available to do so include: 1. Some authoritative, primary source, 2. Compilations and collections of works derived from the primary source, 3. Developing thoughts, and 4. Experiences validating the concepts and ideas. These four, in combination, make up our understandings and experiences that, in turn, heavily influence our relationships, concepts of truth, and other aspects of perceived reality.

As John Wesley inquired into the doctrine and practice of Christianity, he relied on four sources. The United Methodist Church states that Wesley “believed that the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in Scripture, illuminated by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason.”¹⁴ Dr. Albert Outler, a Wesleyan Scholar, dubbed these sources “The Quadrilateral.” A square is a quadrilateral with four sides of equal length. As the United Methodist Church applies the term, however, the sides are not given equal weight. Scripture is more heavily regarded than the other three. It is considered primary.¹⁵ Of the four sources, Scripture is the best expression of God’s inspired self-revelation. Thus, The Quadrilateral is a four-sided concept of unequal portions. The other three derive from and reflect on Scripture.

The Quadrilateral may be viewed as two sets of two sources each when we consider the time-tested nature of the sources and group them accordingly. The sets are Scripture and tradition, then reason and experience.

1. Scripture and Tradition

Scripture and tradition help guide us in the search for truth. Each has withstood the challenges of many cultures through the ages. As we interact with biblical authors and writers of the Christian tradition, we join a conversation with those who have previously made similar journeys and asked these same questions.

¹³ *Book of Discipline UMC 2016*. United Methodist Pub House, 2017. Para 105.

¹⁴ *Book of Discipline UMC 2016*. United Methodist Pub House, 2017. Para 105.

¹⁵ *Book of Discipline UMC 2016*. United Methodist Pub House, 2017. Para 105.

The framework of the journeys and the language forming the questions may be expressed differently over time. As we move into a post-modern culture in the West, society and individuals influenced by post-modernism minimize the enlightened modern era formulations. Not all agree that Scripture is primary, and some suggest that one of the other three, or possibly none, should be. As a result, personal experience, tradition, or reason may be regarded as primary by some.

2. Experience and Reason

Experience and reason are inescapable personal expressions of our faith and our encounters with God. Often, they are influenced by issues and feelings of the moment and our context and thus are less reliable by themselves for discovering truth. However, they are tools immediately at our disposal to analyze and understand Scripture and tradition. How could we read and apply Scripture and tradition without reason and experience?

The present perception of the role of experience differs significantly from the understanding of John Wesley.

Wesley's personal experience validates and brings to life Christian teachings of Scripture. Experience for him (a "strange warming of his heart" in time of despair¹⁶) is an encounter that brings to life and confirms the teaching of Scripture (even the worst sinner can be saved by grace¹⁷).

Personal experience, then, draws a person to a more profound experience of faith in the Author of Scripture and reinforces the reliability of those teachings. At times, experience may leave understanding to catch up or open a new stream of Christian tradition to discover.

Since Scripture is primary, experience properly understood neither contradicts Scripture nor provides a primary means of knowing or discovering truth. Thus, some experiences are not truthful, even though they are real. When an experience irreconcilably conflicts with the clear teaching of Scripture, the experience, however moving and authentic, is not reliable in determining true belief or morality.

¹⁶ John Wesley's Journal entry, May 24, 1738.

¹⁷ Ephesians 2:8-10

Our experiences, understanding, and ability to reason and interpret Scripture are limited. The Holy Spirit must lead all investigations. Pray that we will be inspired with the Spirit of wisdom and revelation¹⁸ to understand Scripture with the inspiration with which it was written. As a result, we can love God and live in loving relationships with our neighbors. We can overcome a paradox and, thus, love people and proclaim uncomfortable truth.

3. Conflicting Applications of the Quadrilateral

How we perceive and apply The Quadrilateral forms our communities of affiliation.

While there is one Quadrilateral, different communities and applications of The Quadrilateral have developed. Communities that emphasize Scripture as primary may tend to delve into the traditional writing and thoughts of faithful Christians who have built a 2000-year record. These communities enjoy a well-reasoned dialogue with forebears of faith and Scripture as they strive to know truth through Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. This community will value its rich heritage and be slow to veer from it. It interprets tradition, reason, and experience in light of the primacy of Scripture. It authentically reflects its beliefs and the fellowship with all who have gone before. These groups may be called “orthodox” or “traditional.”

Communities that emphasize experience or reason will change more rapidly as their larger society’s and participants’ personal experiences and reason uncover new information. These communities may be more malleable and adaptive to personal and communal preferences, expressions, and experiences. Scripture is one of four relatively equal sources to consider when discerning truth. These communities authentically reflect their individuals’ beliefs, needs, and desires in the context of their larger and interconnected communities. These groups may be called “Progressives.”

4. A Broader Context

Our cultural context tends to frame our discussions. Thus, it is not only the Church, and United Methodists, in particular, that struggles to discern the relationship between foundational documents and experiences, traditions, and reason of a people. This struggle is ongoing, for example, in secular jurisprudence. As a result, our laws tend to develop a similar tension of four sources and two communities. Thus, current

¹⁸ Ephesians 1:15-23.

debates regarding the United States Constitution's interpretation also reflect the Traditionalist and Progressive distinction.¹⁹

Traditionalists may be understood as "originalists" who do not desire to add or subtract from the original intent of the writers of The Constitution (the primary document). The Constitution is thus interpreted considering the meaning of original intent. Therefore, the original intent is given more weight than subsequent theories or politics at large.

On the other hand, constitutional progressives view the Constitution as a "living document" subject to change and interpretation to fit the governed population's current desires and perceived needs. Moreover, subsequent scientific discoveries may alter the "God-given" rights and responsibilities delineated by the framers of the Constitution. Thus, original intent may be given less weight than the immediate need to rectify a perceived injustice or to create a protected "right."

Our cultural institutions include priorities and processes containing opposing views that parallel the four sources we rely upon and our opposing views. Thus, the Quadrilateral, identified explicitly in Wesley's work, is pertinent and shares its four vantage points with other disciplines of inquiry.

I will now present a brief overview of the background story and then apply The Quadrilateral to the question of same-sex marriage.

B. The Marriage Question

1. The Big Story

Beginning with the creation account of Genesis, the biblical pattern for marriage is a woman, a man, and God in faithful covenant.

It was not good for the first human to be isolated and alone. Thus, God took away part of who Adam was and created another human named Eve. Creation has never been the same.

¹⁹ Generally, see Rivkin, David B., and Andrew M Grossman. "What Kind of Judge Is Neil Gorsuch?" *Wall Street Journal*. Opinion. February 01, 2017. p. A17.

The couple was charged with few responsibilities: care for the garden, imitate God's creativeness by having children, and refrain from eating from one of the trees in the garden. They would enjoy a good relationship with their Creator as long as they followed God's few and simple rules. Those were the terms of God's covenant with them.

Unfortunately, they ate from the forbidden tree. Adam and Eve's choice broke the covenant with God, resulting in difficulties in every aspect of life and expulsion from Eden.

Whether one takes the story literally or metaphorically, the lesson for us is the same. A man and a woman, created by God, were given responsibilities that they did not keep, and thus, suffered the consequences of their decision. Choices to disobey God continue to separate people from God. However, through the loving gift of graceful forgiveness in Jesus Christ and the victorious power of the Holy Spirit, choosing to obey continues to reap the blessings of a special relationship with God.

As we obey and follow Jesus, our relationship with God is restored, the covenant is renewed, and we are transformed. This great hope is available for all people.

Relying on this hope, Christians anticipate the return of Jesus Christ. Christ will defeat evil. Eden will be restored, and all who follow Jesus will live in the actual presence of God.

2. The Marriage Story

Marriage includes elements of a restored Eden. In many ways, the relationship between God and people is presented in covenantal marital love.

Marriage imitates and thus represents in many ways the relationship of Christ and the Church²⁰ and God and His people.²¹ Marriage is covenantal, sacrificial, good, important, sacramental, fulfilling, challenging, mission-purposed, disciple-making, gospel-sharing, God-glorifying, unifying, physically and spiritually reproducing, and adventurous. Similarly, we see these advantages in the church among Christians.

²⁰ Ephesians 5:31-33

²¹ Isaiah 62:5

Among Christians and non-Christians alike, marriage potentially produces significant social capital.²² Studies show that husbands and wives are emotionally and physically healthier, wealthier, more satisfied, and safer than their unmarried counterparts.²³

Children reared by both biological married parents are less likely to be poor and more likely to stay in school through college, experience fewer behavioral and emotional problems, and be more optimistic about life.²⁴

Society is better where healthy marriages are nurtured, encouraged, and supported.

Thus, one can understand some of the reasons the LGBTQI+ community jealously and zealously advocated for civil recognition of marriage between two same-sex persons and celebrated the June 2015 decision by SCOTUS.²⁵ Civil recognition of same-sex marriage will transform the culture, family, and the face of society. However, whether these marriages will equally contribute to social capital, as do healthy heterosexual marriages, is yet to be seen.

The question before society is whether same-sex marriage will benefit involved individuals and secular society. However, the question before the church is whether recognizing same-sex marriage ecclesiastically will advance the Kingdom of God by helping people believe, obey, and follow Jesus and glorify God.

The crux of the question is whether homosexual behavior, that is, same-sex sexual relations, is blessed by God or is sinful. If this behavior is sinful, it cannot contribute positively to the Kingdom of God. But, on the other hand, if God blesses the behavior, then it will contribute to advancing the Kingdom of God just as heterosexual marriages do.

²² Why Marriage Matters: Twenty-Six Conclusions from Social Sciences (Institute for American Values); Healthy Marriages, Healthy Lives: Research on the Alignment of health, Marital Outcomes and Marriage Education (California Healthy Marriages Coalition); Testimony of Dr. Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, National Marriage Project, before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Children; The Positive Effects of Marriage: A Book of Charts, Patrick Fagan.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Obergefell et al. v. Hodges, Director, Ohio Department of Health, et al., Supreme Court of the United States, June 26, 2015.

IV. Application of the Quadrilateral to Same-Sex Behavior

Whether homosexual behavior is a sin is crucial for Christians even though the discussion sometimes seems limited to other topics such as personal rights, passions, hatred, and freedom to love.

Is homosexual behavior sinful? It is imperative to know the truth about this question. Jesus said the truth would set us free.²⁶

The following discussion demonstrates the conclusions drawn by applying The Quadrilateral and allowing that process to lead us to answers to questions related to the sinfulness of homosexual behavior.

A. Reason

You may have a default method to approach a question in life. Of the quadrilateral, reason is my default. Studying science and growing up with parents who made the sciences a part of regular logical conversation helps me feel comfortable with reason. This is not to say that reason is necessarily the most reliable but, instead, that it is, for me, a familiar way to approach the questions of life. Whichever is your default or favorite, it is a tool to help us find truth rather than a source of truth itself, at least until we consider Scripture. But more on that later.

Studies indicate that 2 to 4% of the North American population consistently experiences same-sex attraction.²⁷ The range of same-sex experience ranges from passing, short-term same-sex attraction to adopting a self-identified, intrinsically gay persona. Alfred Kinsey's research indicated in the late 1940s that persons experience sexual attraction along a continuum. He devised a scale of 0 to 6. Those scoring '0' are exclusively heterosexual, while those scoring '6' are solely homosexual.²⁸ Three (3) is the mid-point. He found that few people score either a 0 or a 6.

Some have extrapolated Kinsey's work to envision a gender spectrum or a social gender different than binary biological gender classifications. Within these extrapolated theories, persons choose their gender identity. Not all agree with these propositions. German sociologist Gabriele Kuby describes the political movement

²⁶ John 8:32.

²⁷ Gary R. Collins. *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide*, 3rd edition (Nashville: Nelson, 2007), 378-9.

²⁸ Collins. p. 378.

promoting these theories as representing an “attack on the dignity of the human being, and on society as a whole.”²⁹

A recent study of the genetic architecture of same-sex sexual behavior casts serious doubt on the Kinsey scale.³⁰ That study suggests several genes influence same-sex sexual behavior. These genes may cause a person to be 8 to 25 percent influenced toward homosexual behavior, but not more. Thus, the Kinsey sliding scale is not supported. The study further suggests that a person is influenced between 75 to 100 percent toward homosexual behavior by forces other than genetics. Those influences include enculturation, nurturing, societal norms and sexual experiences, or trauma. Regardless of the contributing factors, whether to engage in sexually arousing behaviors with another person of the same sex is a choice. Clearly, the Church’s role to uphold and teach godly principles is vital as a person develops sexual identity in a society that increasingly normalizes homosexual behavior.

The Church has a choice of how to demonstrate God’s love toward persons who, for whatever reason, experience various degrees of same-sex attraction.

For Traditionalists who conclude that same-sex behavior is a sin, loving people who experience same-sex attraction present an opportunity for the Church to imitate the grace-filled and redemptive work of Jesus Christ. For Progressives who believe God blesses same-sex relationships, homosexual behavior offers an ever-unfolding expression of graceful inclusion.

Progressives tend to believe that negative biblical teaching about homosexuality reflects the cultural understandings and practices of the authors’ times but does not reflect the will of God for committed, faithful gay and lesbian people today.³¹ Adam Hamilton suggests that the traditional interpretation of Scripture will be seen in the future much as proponents of slavery once used the Bible to justify slavery. While

²⁹ Benjamin J. Vail. *The Global Sexual Revolution and the Assault on Freedom and Family*.

http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Item/3357/the_global_sexual_revolution_and_the_assault_on_freedom_and_family.aspx . August 5, 2015.

³⁰ Andrea Ganna, etal. *Large Scale GWAS Reveals Insights into the Genetic Architecture of Same-Sex Sexual Behavior*. SCIENCE. 30 Aug 2019. Vol. 365. Issue 6456, page 882.

³¹ Adam Hamilton. *Homosexuality, Slavery, and the Bible*. Good News Magazine. May/June 2013. p. 24.

Hamilton correctly observes that societies have used the Bible to support slavery, he incorrectly concludes that the Bible condones slavery.³²

Having considered the value of reason, we will take a reasoned approach to gender qualification for marriage and sexual relations as we survey Scripture, tradition, and experience, beginning with Scripture.

B. Scripture

We begin with Scripture because, as we search for truth using the tools of the Quadrilateral, United Methodists, and much of The Church, have for centuries determined that Scripture is most important.

1. Gender Qualification for Marriage.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus endorses the Genesis model for marriage:

*"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate."*³³

Throughout Scripture, sexual relations between a married man and woman are affirmed and celebrated. The first human interaction is between a man and woman, and, among other things, they are told to have sex and make babies. God blesses the union.³⁴ Jesus' teaching on sexuality presupposes a male-female pair and his endorsement of the Genesis model clearly makes it the marriage model for Jesus' followers.

2. Same-sex Sex and Marriage

Many sexual acts are condemned by Scripture. Rape,³⁵ incest,³⁶ and homosexual behavior³⁷ are among them. Nowhere in Scripture are these behaviors tolerated, commanded, affirmed, or blessed by God. While advocates of same-sex sex often

³² Hamilton, *ibid.* *Contra* Hamilton: While Scripture was used by many to support institutional slavery, the New Testament writers did not hold that position. They were trying to guide followers of Jesus in faithful interpersonal ways within an oppressive culture enforced by the Roman Empire. With no chance or opportunity to change the system, they tried to help people resist the oppressive social structure while living within it.

³³ Matthew 19:4-6.

³⁴ Genesis 1:27-28; 2:18-25.

³⁵ Deuteronomy 22:25, for instance.

³⁶ 1 Corinthians 5:1, for instance.

³⁷ 1 Timothy 1:10, for instance.

minimize scriptural references to homosexuality, there is ample teaching in Scripture from which one can conclude that God does not bless such behavior. Following are specific examples.

a. Sodom and Gomorrah

Gen 18:20-21; 19:1-17

Genesis 18 and 19 relate the story of Sodom being judged for its wickedness. A reader learns that Sodom's wickedness included an overwhelming desire to homosexually rape Lot's guests. Lot thought it more acceptable to offer his daughters to the mob to heterosexually rape them rather than allow the mob to homosexually rape the men staying in his house. Although not all the unrighteousness of Sodom is inventoried in this text³⁸ for us, homosexuality is among Sodom's offenses.

Several New Testament writers elaborate on the events at Sodom. Among them is Peter.

2 Peter 2:6-10a

...if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; ⁷ and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless ⁸ (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)— ⁹ if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment. ¹⁰ This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the flesh and despise authority.

Peter encourages the Church to remain faithful even in an ungodly and unrighteous society. The behaviors of Sodom and Gomorrah serve to illustrate how depraved people can be and clearly do not condone any version of same-sex relationships. The Church should not conform to cultural standards but must, instead, strive to transform culture.

Jude 1:7

In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

³⁸ Ezekiel 16:49, for instance, highlights arrogance, gluttony, hard-heartedness, and neglect of the poor.

Rape is an immoral and perverse act. Here, the author writes in broad terms to present rape and other sexual sins, including homosexual behavior, as forms of sexual immorality.

Advocates of same-sex sex argue that the account of Sodom and Gomorrah condemns rape or violating the Middle Eastern value of hospitality. However, this text did not limit Sodom and Gomorrah's sins to some of them wanting to rape Lot's guests or violate a code of hospitality. Instead, Sodom was destroyed because the entire population was sexually immoral and perverse. Among their many sins was homosexual behavior.

Judges 19:22-25 (15-30)

The account of events recorded in Judges includes a resemblance to the treatment of Lot's guests.

This story opens with the plight of travelers who are refused hospitality by the town folk (v. 15-19). An older man then invites them to stay at his home (20-21). However, a pleasant evening is interrupted when some of the town's men show up at the old man's house demanding to rape the male guests (22). Instead, a female concubine is sent out to the men who then raped and abused her (23-26). The concubine subsequently died from the abuse (27-28).

Just as in the case of Lot's daughters, the rape of the male guest was considered worse than rape and abuse of the female concubine. How could this be? As horrible as heterosexual rape is, homosexual rape was considered even worse. The proposal to rape the male guest was evil because it was non-consensual/rape and because it involves same-sex sex. Thus, it was two sins, rape and same-sex sex.

b. Levitical Law

Levitical Laws address three distinct categories of sin: 1. Civil, 2. Religious, and 3. Moral. Civil law orders society and thus varies from culture to culture. Religious law regulates worship requirements and may change over time. Moral law reflects the nature of God and is absolute and unchanging regardless of the culture or time. Those who favor same-sex sex argue that same-sex sexual acts are sins of religious uncleanness limited to Old Testament worship requirements. The argument continues

that all Old Testament denunciations of same-sex sexual behavior must be viewed as breaches of religious, not moral, law. They are sins of uncleanness. Jesus has done away with religious law by fulfilling them³⁹, thus they are no longer applicable. Let us see whether this argument holds up.

1.) Old Testament

Lev 18:22-25

22 "Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable.

23 "Do not have sexual relations with an animal and defile yourself with it. A woman must not present herself to an animal to have sexual relations with it; that is a perversion.

24 "Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. 25 Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants.

These verses clearly state that pagan peoples defiled themselves with same-sex sex. This defiling occurred even though they had no God-given religious laws, so this could not have violated religious laws. Therefore, homosexual sin is against moral law or natural law.

Lev 20:13

"If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.

In the patriarchal society of the OT, the physical penetration of a male by another male 'reduced' the submissive male to a female status. The male, meant to be dominant, is subdued. Backers of same-sex sex argue that the Levitical law expresses a patriarchal prejudice. The submissive role, it is theorized, is incorrect in the patriarchal view. It is the improper role of male sexual submission that is the affront, not the same-sex sex.

However, one must consider that same-sex sex, as has been shown, breaches a moral law. Moral laws reflect the nature of God and the created order and are not captive to

³⁹ Mark 7:19; Romans 6:14 (and see Romans 6:15)

cultural peculiarities. Thus, even if the law is applied in a patriarchal system, it is not patriarchally derived.

Advocates of same-sex sex also object to the punishment prescribed in Leviticus for same-sex sex. Punishment varies throughout Scripture and history. Nearly everyone would object to the severity of the punishment prescribed for adultery, but that does not lead us to condone adultery. Simply objecting to the type of punishment for this behavior does not change the consistent scriptural witness to the sinful nature of the behavior.

As previously noted, advocates for same-sex sex claim that all denunciations of homosexual behavior in the Old Testament are limited to a moral sin: rape. They claim the denunciations concerning the visitors to Lot's home at Sodom or attempted same-sex rape scene in Judges⁴⁰ are not directly applicable to consensual, loving, same-sex sex within a long-term, committed relationship. However, both Old and New Testament teaching make it clear that this is not the case. Therefore, any same-sex sex is moral sin.

2.) New Testament, Levitical Law, Paul, and Jesus

Jesus affirms sexual relations between a man and woman who are married to each other⁴¹ as does the Apostle Paul.⁴² But before shifting to a New Testament study, it will be helpful to consider some of the New Testament Greek terms used in the texts when discussing homosexuality. At least three words are employed in the New Testament to refer to same-sex sex. One is *arsenokoites* (ἀρσενοκοίτης), the second is *malakos* (μαλακός), and third is *pornos* (πόρνος), as well as the variations of each.

Arsenokoites is a sodomite, a man who has sex with another man, a male who lies in bed with another male, a homosexual.⁴³ This person may or may not be a male prostitute.

⁴⁰ See Judges discussion later in this paper.

⁴¹ Matthew 19:4-6; also Mark 10:6-9.

⁴² Ephesians 5:31.

⁴³ Zodhiates, Spiros, Gen. Ed., The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament. 733. AMG Publishing, Nashville, TN. 1993. (p. 258) (e.g. 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10 and c.f. Lev. 18:22; Romans 1:27).

Malakos refers to a homosexual who is not a prostitute.⁴⁴

Pornos and related words include a wide range of sexual sins as understood by the writers. It includes male prostitution, debauchery, fornication, sex outside of marriage, whoring, and homosexuality. It is used generally to refer to a sexually immoral person.⁴⁵

By analyzing the use of the original Greek words employed by the New Testament authors, we see that in addition to prostitution and male prostitution, same-sex sex is also sinful.

Romans 1:24-32

²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

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.

²⁸ Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ 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, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹ they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. ³² Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Homosexual practices were widespread across the Roman Empire. These practices were often associated with religious rites, initiation rites, or amusements of soldiers

⁴⁴ Zodhiates, Spiros, Gen. Ed., The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament. 3120 (p. 940)

⁴⁵ Zodhiates, Spiros, Gen. Ed., The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament. 4202-4205 (pp.1201-1202) (e.g. 1 Corinthians 6:13, 18; 7:2; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:19; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; Revelation 9:21).

when opposite-gender companions were not accessible. Paul is clear that this behavior is not acceptable to God.

The Apostle Paul points out specifically the giving up of natural relations to seemingly prefer unnatural same-sex sexual behavior. Paul uses the term “natural” in the sense that something works as it is designed to in the natural order of creation. Thomas Aquinas further develops this line of thought as “Natural Law,” which is evident in Roman Catholic tradition. The understanding of natural relations is discussed in more detail elsewhere in this paper.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

⁹ Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ 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.

Describing the character of a pre-Christ person, Paul explicitly includes homosexual behavior. He celebrates that a person surrenders that choice and its resulting behavior when they come to Christ (v. 11), that is, when they are justified and renewed by Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Paul teaches that homosexual behavior is an aspect of the “old” that is gone when we become new creations in Christ Jesus.⁴⁶

1 Timothy 1:9-11

⁹ 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, ¹⁰ for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine ¹¹ that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

Paul reminds Timothy that God's laws, such as those in Leviticus, are given so people will recognize the sinfulness of any number of their behaviors. Recognizing sinful behavior leads to repentance. One of the sins listed from which a person needs to repent is homosexual behavior.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:17

⁴⁷ See Romans 3:20, 6:14, 7:7-9.

3.) Prostitution

Deuteronomy 23:17; 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7.

Dt 23:17 No Israelite man or woman is to become a shrine prostitute.

1 Kings 14:24 There were even male shrine prostitutes in the land; the people engaged in all the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites.

1 Kings 15:12 He expelled the male shrine prostitutes from the land and got rid of all the idols his ancestors had made.

1 Kings 22:46 He rid the land of the rest of the male shrine prostitutes who remained there even after the reign of his father Asa.

2 Kings 23:7 He also tore down the quarters of the male shrine prostitutes that were in the temple of the LORD, the quarters where women did weaving for Asherah.

Leaders identify sinful behavior and call for repentance as part of reform and renewal. The authors here clearly show that same-sex prostitution, especially associated with pagan Canaanite worship rites, is sinful. The rebellion against God identified in these texts includes idolatry, prostitution, and homosexual behavior. They are separate and several sins; any one of them is sinful in and of itself. Additionally, since homosexual practice is classified as sin, any reference to sexual immorality includes homosexual practice even when homosexuality is not explicitly listed.

4.) Science and the Authors of Scripture

Ignorance is not stupidity or lack of intellectual capabilities. Instead, ignorance is a lack of adequate information. Some posit that New Testament writers lacked sufficient information regarding homosexuality. Same-sex sex advocates cite science to support the proposition that sexual orientation is determined.⁴⁸ The argument goes that had the writers of Scripture benefited from modern science, they would not have written Scripture as they did. This argument raises the question of who authors Scripture and how it is inspired. Does Scripture represent the self-revelation of God's will, or is it simply human authors' best attempt to record their understanding of God and to document current science or social norms?

Recent and future scientific discoveries are not a surprise to God. As God reveals his moral will to the authors of Scripture, God is revealing timeless truth. God is well

⁴⁸ Elsewhere in this discussion, I address the growing doubt that homosexuality is primarily determined by genetics.

aware of the science when he makes a revelation to human authors even when the human authors are themselves ignorant of the scientific information.

3. Incorrect Teaching of Scripture

Here I present a series of propositions made by LGBTQI+ advocates resulting from an incorrect analysis of Scripture.

a. *David and Jonathan were gay* –

After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself.⁴⁹

The Hebrew word (אַהֶב , *'ahab*) translated 'love' in English has wide usage and is the most common word for love found in the Old Testament. It is the word used to describe God's love for his people, love between friends, love between a husband and wife, and parents' love for their children.⁵⁰ It conveys a desire to be with someone and affection for that person. It accurately describes how best friends feel toward each other.

To love another as oneself, as Jonathon loved David, does not imply homosexual, erotic love. The second part of the Greatest Commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself.⁵¹ The "love neighbor" command of the Greatest Commandment is based on Leviticus 19:18. In that verse, the Hebrew word translated "love" is also *'ahab*, as is found in 1 Samuel 18:1. No one could credibly suggest that Jesus quotes Leviticus 19, he advocates that his followers have sexual relationships with their neighbors regardless of marital status or sex. To suggest that David and Jonathan's love was sexually expressed is like suggesting "love neighbor" means to have sex with neighbors. David and Jonathon's relationship was a close, personal, nonsexual relationship between two men.

Among all else we learn about David, we find that he was sexually aroused by women, by merely looking at them.⁵²

b. *"Eunuch" is a synonym for "homosexual"*.

For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live

⁴⁹ 1 Samuel 18:1.

⁵⁰ Wilson, page 260. Vine, page 141.

⁵¹ Matthew 22:39.

⁵² 2 Samuel 11.

*like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.*⁵³

Some would like to interpret Matthew 19:12 as though 'eunuch' means 'homosexual.' The rationale, if true, might reinforce some theories proposed to explain how a person becomes gay. For example, perhaps they were born gay, were made that way by experiences, or choose to live a gay lifestyle for the sake of the Kingdom of God. The conclusion to draw from this text would be that all are expected to accept same-sex sex practices.

Eunuchs are, in fact, men who had been voluntarily castrated to lessen sexual temptation and who practice strict celibacy.⁵⁴ Some were castrated to prevent paternity as they served in a king's harem. Finally, there are congenital disabilities called *Penile agenesis* and *testicular agenesis*, by which a male is born without a penis or testicles. These three causes and the choice to be celibate are intended in Matthew 19:12. There is nothing here to condone a homosexual lifestyle.

c. Levitical laws regarding homosexual behavior apply only to idolatry.

Some claim that since the Levitical laws of chapters 18 and 19 are in part a response to homosexual religious rites of Molech and Chemosh worshippers, the bans apply only in the idolatrous worship context and not in committed, faithful, non-cultic same-sex relations. This proposition overlaps somewhat with the previous discussion establishing that homosexual practice breaks religious law and moral law.

First, the bans in Leviticus 18 and 19 are applied both specifically and broadly. They condemn gay practices generally (moral law) and specifically in the cultic worship arena (religious law). Other biblical authors demonstrate that the meaning of the condemnation was general, not limited to shrine worship.

Second, even if the condemnation were applicable only to shrine worship, it does not give any positive affirmation to non-idolatrous same-sex sex.

Third, why implement same-sex shrine worship in the first place? Why is it an abomination to God? Misusing sex in the worship of another god not only rejects God

⁵³ Matthew 19:12.

⁵⁴ Tenney, Merrill (Gen. Ed.) Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible. Vol. 2. *Eunuch*. Zondervan, 1982.

as God but also rebelliously rejects his plan, purpose, and design for sexual relationships in the form he created and his covenant requires.

d. Same-sex behavior is natural for some; thus, turning from homosexuality is turning from their natural desires.

Someone who self-identifies as innately gay would understand themselves to be 'naturally' gay. Those condemned in Romans 1:26-27 for same-sex practices had turned from the natural (heterosexual) ways. What if one feels their natural way is homosexuality? If they force themselves to be heterosexual, have they not then turned from their natural way?

This argument is an interesting play on words and suppositions. It does, however, ignore the context of the teaching (to the church in Rome where the dominant culture generally condoned homosexual practice) and the biblical writings and tradition that "natural" means the ways one is physically designed to function and reproduce. Thus, while an unbidden desire may be spontaneous, it is not, therefore, natural.

Further, some would say that Paul was condemning homosexuality only in the context of Roman pagan religious rites (religious law) rather than universally admonishing those who engage in same-sex relationships (moral law). See the related discussion on the application of the Levitical admonishments addressed elsewhere in this paper.

Reasonable study of cultural context, sentence structure, paragraph statements, and biblical context does not support interpreting "natural" as a reference to any sexual relationship other than between a man and a woman. Any other conclusion reflects questionable exegesis while also demonstrating the perils of eisegesis.

e. There is nothing wrong with committed, faithful same-sex relationships.

People in committed, faithful same-sex relationships do not seem to be mentioned at all in Scripture. Some posit that this sort of relationship was either unheard of or accepted because they are not mentioned. Had this "noble" sort of homosexual bond been known, it is proposed, Biblical authors would have affirmed them. But to the contrary, same-sex marriages were known to the New Testament authors, and they roundly rejected such marriages.

The New Testament authors did know of same-sex marriage. It was practiced by the upper classes and Roman leaders, including the Caesars.⁵⁵ The New Testament writers are commenting on the prevailing practices of culture. They draw distinctions between followers of the cultural norm and the moral behavior of followers of Jesus.

f. If not explicitly condemned in Scripture, then same-sex sex is not a sin.

While ignoring the above reasoning, some propose that same-sex sex was not expressly and directly rejected and, thus, is approved. Often, this is followed with the claim that Scripture does not condemn same-sex sex, and since it is not condemned, it is blessed. A positive argument in favor of same-sex sex based on an absence of condemnation is at best weak and ignores the facts.

For instance, internet pornography is not mentioned in the Bible. That does not mean God approves of internet pornography. Murder using a firearm is not mentioned. That does not mean that murder is not a sin when committed using a gun. Stealing using identity theft is not mentioned, yet it is a sin.

Just because same-sex marriage is not explicitly condemned cannot lead one to logically conclude that it is not a sexual sin or that homosexual practices wrapped in 'marriage' are acceptable to God. This is especially true when every mention of any type of homosexual practice throughout Scripture is negative.

g. The revelation and authority of Scripture is not final.

Others claim that Scripture is authoritative regarding norms of life but subject to further revelation that may contradict prior revelations. This additional revelation occurs because 1. social and physical sciences continue to inform people, 2. subsequently discovered information removes human ignorance and transforms prior understanding, 3. revelation is the transformation of tradition to synchronize with today's comprehension, and 4. once culturally transformed and re-revealed, Scripture is again authoritative. Following this rationale, one might conclude that, due to subsequent revelations, same-sex orientation is a good, blessed, God-given gift the Church should accept and celebrate.

⁵⁵ www.umich.edu/classics/news/newsletter/winter2004/weddings.html (August 10, 2015) (Classic Studies Newsletter, Vol. X, Winter 2004); Renner, Rick. *Dressed to Kill*. (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House 2014) pp. 35-36.; Coffin, Judith et.al. *Western Civilizations Their History & Their Culture*. (2011). W W Norton & Co. (166).

This argument brings us back to how we apply The Quadrilateral, whether one accepts the authority of Scripture as the primary means of revelation and what it means to say that Scripture is primary. The canonical texts are final, complete, and authoritative revelations of Godself and God's will for his people. The scientific evidence ultimately will not conflict with God's revelation. Therefore, we can affirm both Scripture and science.

Several attempts are made to reinterpret the plain meaning of biblical texts. However, the overwhelming witness of biblical authors over thousands of years and spanning innumerable cultures consistently testify that God's revelation affirms sexual relations only within the marriage of a biological male and female.

Further, there have been no scientific discoveries that overturn traditional moral judgment about same-sex sex. The arguments for condoning same-sex sex are based on validating a strong inclination that some people experience to have sex with persons of the same sex. This argument is no more a discovery than some people struggle with strong proclivities to commit adultery.

We have seen that the unambiguous witness of Scripture testifies that homosexual behavior is sinful. Now let's investigate the Jewish and Christian traditions' teaching on homosexuality.

C. Tradition

While serving on a seminary presidential search committee, I met and worked with some of the school's most influential alumni and denominational leaders. Most of them were at least a generation older and much more experienced than me. The collective wisdom and knowledge of that group were astounding. Serving with them was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to gain the wisdom they shared. When we value the understanding and experience of the faithful who have striven to follow Jesus before us, we are blessed in ways that enrich our faith.

1. Rabbinical tradition

Judeo-Christian tradition addresses same-sex sexual behavior. For example, rabbinical teachings of the fourth and fifth centuries discuss the topic. Through those discussions, rabbinical teaching consistently holds that God punishes, not blesses,

homosexual behavior. Further, they teach that homosexuality was a major cause of the destruction of the earth by the flood in Genesis 6-9.⁵⁶

Fifth-century Hebrew rabbis taught that one of the sins leading to the flood was homosexual and bestial *marriages*.

*"The generation of the Flood was not blotted out of the world until they had begun writing nuptial hymns for marriages between males or between man and beast."*⁵⁷

The implication here is that the people at the time of the flood were participating in homosexual marriages (nuptials) for which they were writing wedding songs. These marriages and same-sex sex were among the sins precipitating destruction by flood. Same-sex marriage is not new to our present day. Same-sex marriage is rejected in the rabbinical tradition. Ironically, God's covenantal sign after the flood, the rainbow, has been usurped as the icon of the LGBTQI+ movement.

Rabbinical tradition also teaches that Ham molested Noah while Noah lay passed out in a drunken stupor.⁵⁸ Although the account found at Genesis 9:22 does not explicitly mention any sexual molestation, several commentators agree that the textual presentation outlines a "more sinister" deed.⁵⁹

Ham passes homosexual sin to his son, Canaan. As a result, he is cursed by God.⁶⁰ Canaan, banished from Noah's family, colonizes the Promised Land (then known as Canaan) and introduces pagan worship involving homosexual rituals. Canaan and his descendants establish Sodom and Gomorrah. Ham homosexually molests his father. Ham's descendants settle Sodom and Gomorrah. God destroys Sodom and Gomorrah for several reasons, including those cities' homosexual practices.⁶¹ Ham and Canaan's sins were the same that led to the destruction of their legacy. They initiated religious rights that included homosexual acts and incorporated those acts into worship. Both

⁵⁶ Talmud, Genesis Rabbah 26:5:4.

⁵⁷ Talmud, Genesis Rabbah 26:5:4.

⁵⁸ Via, Dan Otto, and Robert A. J. Gagnon. *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views*. Fortress Press, 2004. Pp.56-7.

⁵⁹ John H. Sailhammer. Genesis. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank Gaebelin, Gen. ed. Grand Rapids, Zondervan. 1990. p. 96.

⁶⁰ Genesis 9:22, 24-25.

⁶¹ Genesis 19.

the same-sex behaviors and their inclusion in worship are detestable to God. The laws in Leviticus 18:21-28 are partly in response to Canaan's evil apostasy.

Later, Solomon reintroduces Canaanite homosexual rituals. He built temples to Molech and Chemosh where people performed child sacrifice, fertility rites, and homosexual religious rites. Solomon's rebellion against God leads to God dividing the kingdom.⁶²

Josiah is a good king because he destroys the Sodomites (descendants of Canaan) and the practices established by Solomon 300 years before.⁶³ Later, homosexuality is used to corrupt Hebrew male youth in Antiochus IV Epiphanes's plot to turn the Jews away from God.⁶⁴ Jerusalem will be called, under the rule of the anti-Christ, 'Sodom,' representing homosexuality.⁶⁵

From earliest history, homosexual practice represents rebellion against the authority and divine design of God. It is antithetical to God's moral will.

Further, rabbinical teaching about the pre-Moses era dating from the eighth century states:

These are the thirty commandments which the sons of Noah took upon themselves but they observe three of them, namely, (i) they do not draw up a kethubah [marriage contract] document for males, (ii) they do not weigh flesh of the [human] dead in the market, and (iii) they respect the Torah.⁶⁶

First, no homosexual marriage. Second, no cannibalism. Third, respect the Torah.

This quotation serves as evidence that same-sex marriage was known and practiced when this document was written, and, further, at that time, the Rabbis attribute the practice to the era of Noah. Whether there is any historical truth to that attribution, it seems that the rabbis did not believe that same-sex marriage was a recent invention.

⁶² 1 Kings 11:5-13.

⁶³ 2 Kings 23:5-13, 7, 25.

⁶⁴ Daniel 11:21-39; 1 Maccabees 1:14-16.

⁶⁵ Revelation 11:7-8.

⁶⁶ Babylonian Talmud, Chullin 92a-b. Did you catch the facial error in this quote? The quote is from a copy of the Talmud dating between 700 and 800 AD. It states that before Moses, God gave his people thirty laws. They were only able to keep three of them, however. The problem is that prior to Moses, there is no Torah. Thus, the third, to respect the Torah, is impossible. This quote is included as evidence that in the sixth and seventh centuries, the Jewish community identified same-sex marriage as against the law of God. Further, they viewed the ban as an ancient one.

Clearly, the rabbis understood that homosexual practices were unacceptable to God even before the giving of the Ten Commandments.

The Christian tradition also addresses same-sex sex. I will now briefly present a few sources within that tradition.

2. Christian tradition

Many Church leaders wrote rules and guidelines to control all sorts of sin.

Homosexuality is one of the sins addressed.

Basil of Caesarea (c. 320-379) urged monks to avoid eye contact with other men when they met to avoid the alluring gaze. The rule was intended to prevent homosexual temptation and lust among the monks, leading them to break their vow of celibacy.⁶⁷

John Chrysostom (c. 349-407) condemned the practice of homosexuality as unnatural because it caused one to lose or debase one's sexual identity and nature. Therefore, same-sex sex is contrary to God's design.⁶⁸

Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225 -1274) writes that an act must serve the purpose for which it was designed to be natural. Male and female sexual relations are given to propagate the species. Propagation is impossible in a same-sex sex. Same-sex sex is, thus, unnatural. Since not natural, they are lustful.⁶⁹

Same-sex sex is condemned both in Scripture and Judeo-Christian tradition.

Nevertheless, a popular proposition is that people experience love in same-sex relations and, thus, homosexuality is blessed by God. I will now address the experiential source within The Quadrilateral.

D. Experience

Years ago, a friend and I were asked to work a rock concert in Dallas. One of our responsibilities was to keep fans off the stage. As the show progressed, the atmosphere grew dense with acrid-smelling bluish smoke. While enrapt fans experienced virtual flights around the arena, no actual attempts to reach the stage

⁶⁷ Harrison, Roland Kenneth. *Encyclopedia of Biblical and Christian Ethics*. T. Nelson, 1987. P. 183.

⁶⁸ Harrison, Roland Kenneth. *Encyclopedia of Biblical and Christian Ethics*. T. Nelson, 1987. P. 183.

⁶⁹ Harrison, Roland Kenneth. *Encyclopedia of Biblical and Christian Ethics*. T. Nelson, 1987. P. 183.

occurred. The smells, sights, people, music, and sensations were real, but little reality or truth was in the air.

It takes more than powerful or moving experiences to demonstrate veracity or truth. Powerful, moving experiences standing on their own or as primary sources do not lead to truthful conclusions regarding human sexuality. However, experiences may help us grasp the fullness of a truth.

Albert Outler is recognized as one of the foremost authorities on John Wesley. He taught, wrote, and lectured extensively on Wesley's life and theology. He regarded Wesley as one who synthesized grace emanating through the Holy Spirit into a practical, experiential, evangelistic, and missional framework. Wesley's uniqueness is grounded in his experience of four successive conversions.⁷⁰

In 1725 and 1727, the first two conversions moved him to a seriousness toward God and then to a "spontaneous illumination of God's surpassing glory."⁷¹ The third conversion experience was the Aldersgate experience on May 24, 1738. Outler describes this conversion as an experience of existential grace spirituality based on assurance and trust.⁷² The fourth conversion occurred as Wesley began open-air preaching in 1739. The experience of witnessing the transforming power of justification by grace through faith transformed and empowered his spirituality, faith, and self-confidence.⁷³ These are all examples of Christian experience as envisioned in The Quadrilateral.

Wesley's four spiritually transforming experiences served to bring to life the reality and truth of Scripture. They did not negate or alter Scripture but instead reinforced biblical truth. Thus, his experiences are interpreted through scriptural norms.⁷⁴ Reversing the authority and power, some advocates of same-sex sex inclusion interpret Scripture through their personally experienced norms, making Scripture conform to experience.

Without a doubt, personal experience is the trickiest of the four parts of The Quadrilateral. Humans have a remarkable ability to justify to themselves their own

⁷⁰ Parrott, Bob W. (ed.) *The Albert Outler: The Preacher* Vol. 1 Anderson, Indiana Bristol House 1995 p.260.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* p. 260.

⁷² *Ibid.* p. 261.

⁷³ *Ibid.* p. 261.

⁷⁴ *Book of Discipline UMC 2016.* United Methodist Pub House, 2017. Para 105.

experiences. Because tradition and reason, and to some extent Scripture, are external to oneself, they serve as external checks. Experience, however, by its very nature, is subjective and, thus, is least able to inform or correct us.⁷⁵

Several testimonies of present-day church leaders who “converted” to a progressive view of same-sex sex practices have included accounts of transforming experiences. These experiences often include a loved one, family member, or friend who has professed their love for a same-sex partner or decided to pursue the seemingly innate same-sex attraction with which they wrestled. These are authentic, genuine, profound, and moving testimonies. Yet do they reflect the “experience” meant by The Quadrilateral or the type of conversion Wesley experienced?

The answer is that these are different sorts of experiences. We know they are different because they lead to the renunciation of biblical teaching and truth rather than its discovery and reaffirmation. These experiences do not, therefore, emanate from the same Spirit that inspired the Scripture. All experience may be real, but not all experience is equally valid for discovering or determining truth.

A concern in the present discussion engaged by the Church is that all experiences are weighed equally and uncritically. Personal experiences are being granted an outsized influence. “The experiential tale is wagging the hermeneutical dog.”⁷⁶ The result is the bending of Scripture, tradition, and reason to justify any number of experiences. In effect, individual, subjective experiences become primary in determining lasting, universal moral truth. Such is an unworkable construct. This is not what Wesley intended and is not an accurate application of experience within The Wesleyan Quadrilateral.

IV. Conclusion

Arguments favoring LGBTQI+ lifestyle and practice are not based on proper teaching of Scripture. Attempts to construct a favorable case on Judeo-Christian tradition are similarly fatally flawed. An objective, reasoned application of the principles of The Quadrilateral likewise does not find support for LGBTQI+ behavior in reason or

⁷⁵ Noah Clayton Croy. Discussion with Keith Cressman. May 16, 2020.

⁷⁶ Noah Clayton Croy. Discussion with Keith Cressman. May 16, 2020.

experience. Of noted concern is the growing acceptance of all individual, subjective experiences as equally valuable in searching for moral truth.

In conclusion, all persons are loved and valued by God, but the practice of same-sex sex is sinful, regardless of whether it occurs within the context of "marriage." It is difficult to ponder the Church blessing any sinful behavior and at the same time remaining faithful to God.

Closing Thoughts

Does time heal all things? A friend undergoing surgery to relieve severe pain shared with me that healing and recovery involve pain and discipline. He resolved to face the pain and discipline of recovery to allow the healing to proceed.

The United Methodist Church has been suffering injury for nearly half a century. Unfortunately, time has neither cured the causes nor healed the wounds. Now it appears we will experience the pain and discipline of healing.

Our wounds divide us, our visions of unity divide us, our expectations for the outcome of healing divide us. So we come to a place of death from which some will emerge more robust, more faithful, and freer to serve the Resurrected Jesus Christ.

Christians, we view all of life in the light of the Resurrection and new beginnings. A hymn by Natalie Sleeth entitled *Hymn of Promise* expresses this trust. Here is the third verse:

*In our end is our beginning; in our time, infinity;
in our doubt there is believing; in our life, eternity.
In our death, a resurrection; at the last, a victory,
unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.*⁷⁷

The reality of the Resurrection is that new life is healing, and that new life is in Jesus Christ. So, toward new beginnings in the Church and in life, I first offer you Jesus Christ. He came to earth from heaven, lived among people, died to overcome our death, and is resurrected to restore our lives. He is with us and will come again in

⁷⁷ The United Methodist Hymnal. United Methodist Pub House. 1989. P. 707.

glory. His discipline and pain bring healing and hope to those who choose to follow him.

Second, I offer you this discussion. By applying the wisdom of the Church through the years (tradition), the work of the Holy Spirit in transformation (experience), and the Spirit-guided mind (reason) to Scripture, this paper is offered with the hope that you will experience healing.

I pray this discussion challenged and encouraged you and bolstered your confidence that the ways of Jesus Christ are paths of blessing, healing, and eternal life. So may we walk the path of Jesus' discipline and pain so that we will experience his peace, healing, and resurrection.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Romans 12:21