

A scriptural, theological and historical analysis of Matthew Vines's argument for the biblical support for same-sex marriages

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ABSTRACT

This thesis offers a critical assessment of Matthew Vines's views about gay marriage. Vines is one of the leading voices of our time promoting "gay Christianity." His reasoning supporting gay Christian thought is becoming increasingly influential among Christians in the United States. Many have praised the arguments in his book entitled *God and the gay Christian: The Biblical case in support of same-sex relationships*, and it has become one of the tools that gay Christians use to support their views. From the perspective of a hermeneutic of congruent biblical theology, this study finds that Vines's assertion that the Bible does not exclude loving same-sex relationships is not supported by biblical, theological and historical evidence. Vines argues that the contemporary understanding of sexual orientation did not exist in the ancient world, thus, the biblical writers had no knowledge of people who had fixed same-sex orientations. This fact, he asserts, demonstrates that the Bible's prohibitions on homosexual practice do not apply to same-sex orientated people. He also argues that gay Christians are forced into celibacy and that forced celibacy harms gay Christians. With all of this in mind, Vines believes that the biblical passages prohibiting homosexual practice should be reinterpreted.

Vines also argues that cultural patriarchy, and gender hierarchy are the reasons why the Bible prohibits same-sex relationships. This thesis established that from a biblical standpoint, his arguments fail. The prohibitions of homosexual practice are considered a violation of God's design for sexual relations that are rooted in creation. Sexual difference is essential to biblical marriage, as men and women were designed to fulfill different roles, which are based on biological sex. The marriage union is designed to reflect Christ's relationship with the church, and sexual union is essential to that reflection. Vines argues that two people of the same sex can fulfil the roles of Christ and the church, but this is theologically inaccurate. Biological men were uniquely designed to symbolize Christ's sacrificial love to the church. Biological women were uniquely designed to symbolize the church's submissiveness to Christ. These are gender roles that are specifically tied to biological sex. The Bible does not separate gender function from biological sex. The answer for gay Christians is not reinterpretation of the Bible. The answer for gay Christians, is submission the Word of God, receiving the grace that God gives every believer to live a holy life.

Keywords: Matthew Vines, celibacy, gay christian, God and the gay christian: the biblical support for same-sex relationships, gay marriage, homosexuality, the bible and homosexuality, gay, lesbian, religion, gay christianity, queer theology, queer, ethics, christian ethics, bisexuality, bisexual, patriarchy, Ephesians 5, marriage, submission, gender, gender roles, LGBTQ, LGBTQ inclusion, sin, sexual orientation, Greek, Rome, sexual orientation in the ancient world, sex, sexual identity, old testament, old testament law, obedience, paul, New Testament, apostle Paul, Romans, Romans 1, Romans 1:26-27, Leviticus 18:22, Leviticus 20:13, progressive christianity, christian, christianity, Jesus, God, Bible, church.

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

1.1 Background and problem statement

1.1.1 Background

The subject of gay Christianity is personal for me. Not only have I discipled people who have struggled with their sexuality, but I also struggled with my sexuality in the past. Years ago, I was attracted to persons of the same sex. After I became a Christian, I realized that my lifestyle was not biblical. I began to confess my sins and accept the identity that Christ had given me. After several years, my same-sex attraction faded. During this time, I realized that there was growing acceptance of what many call “gay Christianity,” the belief that someone can be a committed Christian and a practicing homosexual. Adherents to “gay Christianity” believe that the Bible not only supports same-sex relationships but that these are part of God’s design for humanity. The acceptance of “gay Christianity” is growing in the American Church. Here are some statistics that highlight this trend:

- Between 2006 and 2012 the share of congregations allowing an openly gay or lesbian couple to become fully-fledged members grew from 37% to 48% (Masci, 2014).
- The number of congregations that allowed openly gay and lesbian members to assume any lay leadership position also increased from 18% in 2006 to 26% in 2012 (Masci, 2014).
- The percentage of adults in the United States who holds the view that society should accept homosexuality has grown from 51% in 2006 to 62% in 2014 (Masci, 2014).
- A majority of U.S. Christians (54%) now says that homosexuality should be accepted rather than discouraged (Murphy, 2015).

- Based on polling in 2019, a majority of Americans (61%) supports same-sex marriage, while 31% oppose it (Pew Research Center, 2019).
- About two-thirds of mainline Protestants (66%) now support same-sex marriage, as do a similar share of Catholics at 61% (Pew Research Center, 2019).
- Most major religious denominations support same-sex marriage equality: the percentages are protestants at 79%, Hispanic Roman Catholics at 78%, religious non-Christians at 72%; Hispanic protestants at 68%; White Catholics at 67%; Black Protestants at 57% and other Christian denominations at 56% (NBC News, 2020).
- More than half of LGBTQ Americans identify themselves as Christian believers (Cruz, 2015).
- Even in South Africa, the Christian landscape is changing, and the acceptance of homosexual practice is slowly becoming more common (Kotze & Loubser, 2018).

Matthews Vines is one of the leading voices of our time promoting “gay Christianity.” Vines' pattern of reasoning supporting gay Christian thought is becoming increasingly influential among Christians in the United States. Many have praised the arguments in his book entitled *God and the gay Christian: The Biblical case in support of same-sex relationships*, and it has become one of the tools that gay Christians use to support their views. His arguments are also used by ordinary Christians seeking to reconcile their LGBTQ sexuality with the Bible. Personally, I have had many conversations with same-sex attracted Christians who use this book. Vines' reach in the Christian church is far and wide. Several sources consider him to be an expert in his biblical arguments supporting gay relationships. He was even given the opportunity as guest speaker for an event held by Google promoting the arguments in his book (Talks at Google, 2015). Vines is well-known in Christian churches in the United States. His arguments are widely referenced, especially those concerning sexual orientation.

At the crux of Vines' argument is the claim that the “Christian tradition does not address sexual orientation nor loving-same-sex relationships” (The Reformation

Project, 2021). He continues that the Bible's condemnation of same-sex relationships only concerns those practiced in excessive lust, in accordance with the perspective in the Greco-Roman world of same-sex relationships during the time of Paul (Vines, 2014:104). He argues that homosexuality in the Old Testament was condemned due to the patriarchal society of the ancient Near Eastern world. Men acting as women in a sexual manner was seen as immoral (Vines, 2014:88-89). Therefore, since the Bible does not explicitly address same-sex orientation, Scriptures condemning homosexuality should be reinterpreted to exclude loving same-sex relationships (Vines, 2014:106).

His widespread influence can be demonstrated by the following examples:

- His book is used by The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) which is the largest LGBTQ advocacy group in the United States (HRC, 2021). The HRC currently develops programmes and policy suggestions to make churches more LGBTQ inclusive.
- Vines was also featured in the *New York Times* (NYT) because of the arguments in his book (2012). The NYT is one of the most well-known newspapers in the United States.
- He also wrote an opinion piece in *Time Magazine* detailing the arguments found in his book for the biblical support of same-sex relationships. *Time Magazine* is arguably the most influential magazine in the United States.
- His work is used by LGBT advocacy groups across the United States that promote LGBTQ families and counselling and their inclusion in Christian theology. The groups and related materials include the following: The Architecture of Family, The Coming Out Guide for LGBTQ Christians by Amber Cantorna, Resonance Counseling Center, Compassionate Christianity, a non-profit organisation that promotes LGBTQ inclusion in Christianity, Beloved Arise, a Christian organization for LGBTQ Youth, the Disciples LGBTQ Alliance, and this list goes on.
- He started an organization called The Reformation Project which trains church leaders on creating LGBTQ affirming churches and an LGBTQ biblical worldview.

- He created a video course called *The Biblical Case for LGBTQ Inclusion*, which trains people to use moral logic to argue for LGBTQ sexual practices and identities from the Bible (The Reformation Project, 2021).

The importance of addressing Vines' arguments cannot be overstated. Gay Christian thought is growing rapidly within the United States. Vines is particularly important because, as illustrated above, the arguments he presents in his book are used widely among gay affirming denominations and secular organizations advocating for changing the church's stance on homosexual practice.

1.1.2 Problem statement

The main research question of this study can be formulated as follows: Can the assertion that Vines makes in his book *God and The Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support for Same-Sex Relationships* that same-sex relationships can fit the biblical meaning of marriage, be supported by biblical, theological and historical evidence?

1.2 Overarching research question

Is Matthew Vines' assertion that The Bible does not exclude loving same-sex relationships supported by biblical, theological and historical evidence?

To answer this question, the following derivative questions will be addressed:

- Is Vines' assertion that the Apostle Paul and the Greco-Roman world around him had no concept of fixed sexual orientation supported by historical evidence? (Vines, 2014:34).
- Is Vines' claim that life-long celibacy is a spiritual gift supported by scriptural evidence? (Vines, 2014:49).
- Is Vines' assertion that same-sex relationships can fit the symbolism of Christ's marriage to the church as shown in Ephesians 5:22-23 supported by scriptural and theological evidence? (Vines, 2014:143).

- Is Vines' claim that the condemnation of homosexual practice in the Bible is due to societal patriarchy supported by scripture and theological evidence? (Vines, 2014:93).

1.3 Aims and objectives

1.3.1 Aim

The aim of this research project is to evaluate Vines's view on same-sex relationships as presented in his book *God and the gay Christian: Biblical support for same-sex relationships*, and to determine whether his pattern of reasoning about same-sex relationships complies with the Bible's definition of marriage. Matthew Vines's argument for the biblical support of same-sex relationships is part of a growing field that challenges orthodox Christian ethics. This study fits into the bigger picture of Christian ethics because it addresses one of the fundamental areas of Christian ethics: sexuality. One of the primary characteristics of Christian ethics is its reliance on Scripture, as the foundational source of authority. Christian ethics distinctly understands that Scripture guides the development of the believer's thinking about living a life in accordance with God's will (Leiderbach & Lenow, 2021: 19). Christian ethics maintains that Scripture guides the thinking of the Christian in two particular ways: revealed reality and revealed morality (Leiderbach & Lenow, 2021: 19). The revealed morality within Scripture is essential to addressing the approval of gay relationships in the Church. Revealed morality in Scripture provides the moral norms, rules, and boundaries by which people should live.

As ethics concerns what is morally right and wrong, *Christian* ethics concerns what are morally right and wrong for the Christian. Vines often argues that modern Christians do not follow the morals of the ancient world, because times have changed and people have more knowledge. However, ethics for the Christian is not about what people choose to do, ethics for the Christian entails what *ought* to be done (Geisler, 2010: 261). Thus, what revisionists like Matthew Vines seek to do is change how Scriptures concerning homosexual practice are interpreted. Reinterpreting the scriptures on homosexual practice redefines

Christian ethics concerning sexuality. Therefore, the approach for this study is to address Matthew Vines' work from the angle of biblical theology and the hermeneutical congruence of his work with biblical theology and the wholeness of Scripture. Since the reinterpretation of Scripture is used to support gay marriage in the Church, it is paramount that Matthew Vines' arguments, which are widely used, are addressed from a biblical theological approach.

1.3.2 Objectives

- To examine Vines' argument that the concept of fixed sexual orientation was not known to the first-century church, thus neither the Bible nor the Christian tradition contain any guidance on how to address same-sex orientation (Vines, 2014:43). This will be done by (1) examining historical evidence concerning the Greco-Roman world's understanding of sexual orientation; (2) assessing Vines' claim that homosexual practice was condemned in the Greco-Roman world because it was seen primarily as an act of excessive lust (Vines, 2014:31); (3) examining the early church's understanding of homosexual practice; and (4) examining the theological principle of the sinful nature as a means to demonstrate that the Bible indirectly addresses sexual orientation.
- To examine Vines' claim that celibacy is a spiritual gift (Vines, 2014:47-48) by (1) addressing the biblical concept of spiritual gifts; (2) examining the biblical concept of celibacy according to Paul; (3) assessing the early church's belief concerning celibacy; (4) examining the reported testimonies of other same-sex attracted and professing gay Christians who have chosen celibacy.
- To examine Vines' assertion that same-sex couples can fit the Bible's symbolism of Christ's relationship with the church in Ephesians 5:22-23 (Vines, 2014:137) by (1) examining the theological concept of Christ being the bridegroom and the Church being the bride; (2) examining the

importance (or lack thereof) of gender in the symbolism of Christ's relationship with the Church his bride.

1.4 Central theoretical argument

The central theoretical argument of this study is that Vines' pattern of reasoning about the biblical justification of same-sex marriages can be questioned from a theological-ethical perspective on marriage and sexuality flowing from a hermeneutic of congruent biblical theology.

1.5 Division of chapters

Chapter 1: Introduction: background of the study, problem-statement, aims and hypothesis.

Chapter 2: The phenomenon of homosexuality in Paul's Context.

Chapter 3: The gift of celibacy and same-sex attracted people.

Chapter 4: The Old Testament, culture, and Christian obedience

Chapter 5: Homosexual Marriage and Ephesians 5.

1.6 Methodology

In order to study and evaluate the argument of Vines, a relevant literature analysis will be conducted to (1) determine past and present viewpoints of from "gay Christian" scholars concerning biblical marriage; (2) examine the Greco-Roman cultural attitudes and understandings of sexual orientation in the first several hundred years of the Church; (3) examine the biblical and historical evidence for the Church's belief concerning celibacy; (4) determine the theological understanding of Christ' relationship with the Church as reflected in biblical marriage, and (5) evaluate the Old Testament understanding of homosexual practice.

CHAPTER 2

THE PHENOMENON OF HOMOSEXUALITY IN PAUL'S CONTEXT

2.1 Introduction

One of the principle arguments Vines presents in his defence of the biblical support of same-sex marriages is new information about homosexuality, namely the presence of same-sex orientation. He explains that, for the larger part of human history, homosexuality was seen as simply an act of excess sexual desire and not a fixed sexual orientation (Vines, 2014:31). According to Vines (Reformation Project, 2021) the Christian tradition does not address the concept of sexual orientation, and this requires the Church to rethink its traditional interpretations of Scripture about homosexual practice. The present chapter will examine several of Vines's claims that the concept of sexual orientation was not known to the early church, and the idea that that neither the Bible nor the Christian tradition give any guidance on how to address same-sex orientation (Vines, 2014:43). An assessment of Vines' perspective will be accomplished by (1) examining historical evidence concerning the Greco-Roman world's understanding of sexual orientation; (2) assessing Vines's claim that homosexual practice was condemned in the Greco-Roman world because it was seen primarily as an act of excessive lust (Vines, 2014:31); (3) examining the early church's understanding of homosexual practice; and (4) examining the theological principle of the sinful nature.

2.2 What are sexuality and sexual orientation?

Before any discussion on the biblical view on sexuality can commence, it is necessary to establish what sexuality and sexual orientation are. Sexuality is the comprehensive nature of an embodied self as a sexual being, including one's attractions, desires, and gender (Liederbach & Lenow, 2021:571). Sexual orientation is a part of one's sexuality. It is defined as an internal mechanism that directs a person's sexual and romantic disposition toward females, males, or both, to varying degrees (Savin-Williams, 2014). It can also be viewed as one's

sense of identity based on those attractions and related behaviours and membership in a community of others who share those attractions (American Psychological Association, 2021). Dr. Mark Yarhouse of the Sexual and Gender Identity Institute (SGI) distinguishes between same-sex attraction, orientation and a gay identity. Same-sex attraction is an uncontrollable experience of attraction to the same sex (Yarhouse, 2010:41). Orientation entails experiencing sexual attraction persistently enough that someone feels their attraction is fixed toward a certain sex. In this case, same-sex (homosexual) orientation would mean that one feels they have a fixed sexual attraction toward people of the same sex. In many cases, people take on a gay identity in response to their orientation or same-sex attraction. A gay identity, or LGBTQ identity, is a socio-cultural label that people use to describe themselves and their sexuality (Yarhouse, 2010:41-42). The origins of one's sexual orientation are unclear. It is debated whether or not one's sexual orientation is an environmental occurrence or is naturally inborn.

2.3 Sexual orientation in the ancient Greco-Roman world

As indicated, Vines argues that, for most of human history, including the first century in which the New Testament was written, homosexuality was not seen as a sexual orientation, but as normal sexual desire pursued to excess (Vines, 2014:31). He argues that the concept of sexual orientation did not exist in the ancient world (Vines, 2014:102). It was generally believed that everyone had the same basic appetite for sex and that sexual preference could vary (Vines 2014:34). Vines (2014:34) explains that, if a man was attracted to another man in the ancient world, it would have been seen as a preferential choice, not a fixed sexual orientation. People would not assume a homosexual man was incapable of being attracted to women (Vines, 2014:34). Since then the modern world has acquired new information, as indicated. It is necessary to rethink traditional interpretations of biblical passages concerning homosexuality. Vines's argument is clarified on his organisational website *The Reformation Project*: "in the ancient world, same-sex attraction and behaviour were widely considered to be vices of excess that might tempt anyone—like gluttony or drunkenness. Same-sex

attraction was not understood as the sexual orientation of a small minority of people” (2021).

Historical evidence does not support Vines’s claim that the ancient world only thought of homosexuality in terms of preferences and behaviour and not sexual orientation. A limited concept of sexual orientation did exist in the ancient Greco-Roman world (Sprinkle, 2015:504). For example, Plato’s *Symposium* of the late fourth century BCE holds one of the earliest acknowledgments of sexual orientation (Hubbard, 2003:164; Wilson, 1997:141). A character named Aristophanes in Plato’s work gives a speech on the beginning of humanity’s existence, and humanity’s search for love due to his or her sexual orientation (Plato, 2009). In this myth, Aristophanes explains that humanity was made with double the body parts than he or she has now. This means that men and women had two genitals, two arms, two legs and so on. Humanity was originally male, female and androgynous. When Zeus saw that humanity was becoming powerful and threatening, he cut humanity in half. Thus, same-sex orientation is an inherent trait deriving from the once male or female person searching for the other half of themselves (Hubbard, 2003:164). Some people were not believed to simply make a sexual choice out of preference, but they had an inborn desire to have a relationship with someone of the same sex, based on the search for their other half.

In *Nicomachean Ethics* (4th century BC), Aristotle mentions that some people are born with homoerotic desires and others develop them out of habit (Hubbard, 2003:260; Pakaluk, 2005; Sprinkle, 2014:523). In the pseudo-Aristotelian work *Problems*, it is explained that men who desire to be penetrated are born with a defect. Men acquire this defect when semen is abnormally secreted into the anus and this creates a desire in a man to be penetrated (Hubbard, 2003:262, Sprinkle, 2014:523). Second-century Greek physician Soranus presumed that homoerotic desires were shaped primarily by nature and believed the source of homoerotic desires was the spirit or mind (Sprinkle, 2014:523). Phaedrus, who lived during the reign of Tiberius, wrote *Fable*, which explains that same-sex desires come from the mixing of male and female genitals by a drunken God named

Prometheus (Hubbard, 2003:390). First century Jewish philosophers Philo and Hippocrates (4th century BCE) grappled with the inborn roots of sexual orientation (Sprinkle, 2014:524). These are just a few examples of a concept of sexual orientation in antiquity.

Bernadette Brooten's research provides crucial evidence for the awareness of sexual orientation in the ancient world through the practice of astrology. Astrology was a practice enjoyed by the everyday person and the elite in the Roman world, which makes astrological literature helpful when it comes to analysing the social perspective of same-sex relationships (Brooten, 1996:116). Astrology was widely practiced in different areas of ancient life in the Greco-Roman world such as philosophy, religion, scientific discourse and medicine to name a few (Brooten, 1996:116). With the introduction of the Julian calendar in the first century, astrology became accessible to the masses (Brooten, 1996:116). Brooten documents the work of Dorotheos of Sidon, a Greek astrologer and a contemporary of the Apostle Paul (Brooten, 1996: 119). Brooten (1996:119) points out that Dorotheos's work has been referenced as "extraordinarily influential" in medieval and ancient astrology. Dorotheos believed that the position of the planets and the moon influenced someone's sexual orientation (Brooten, 1996:120). For example, he explained that, when Venus and the Moon are in a certain location, a woman will be a Lesbian or a man will be homosexual (Brooten, 1996:120). The position of Venus influenced same-sex orientation in men and women.

Manetho, another first century astrologer, also linked same-sex orientation in women to the alignment of Mercury, Saturn and Venus at birth (Brooten, 1996 123). Second-century astronomer and astrologer Claudius Ptolemy also asserted that the position of the Moon, Venus, Sun and Mars at the time of one's birth indicated sexual inclinations (Brooten, 1996:125). Similar views were expressed by other astrologers of the second to fourth century such as Hermes Trismegistos and Firmicus Maternus (Brooten, 1996:130-137).

There is therefore ample evidence for some kind of concept of sexual orientation in the ancient world, especially during the time at which New Testament letters were written. There was the idea within the ancient world, as the evidence shows, that one's sexual behaviour was considered by some to be an inborn issue. Sexual practice was not just an act, but some grappled with the idea the sexual acts were based in the nature of a man or a woman. This evidence contradicts the claims of Vines and others that the ancient world had no concept of sexual orientation. Even though some sources describe far-fetched reasons for same-sex orientation, the point is not whether these origins of sexual orientation are true. The point is that there were people in the ancient world who were able to conceive of the concept of a sexual orientation, even if in limited and fanciful ways.

Vines comments that there are a "handful sources non affirming Christians use" to support the claim that the idea of sexual orientation is not a contemporary concept (Vines, 2014:40). He continues: "We don't need to get caught in the weeds of ancient texts" (Vines, 2014:40). In other words, Vines admits that there are ancient sources that refute his claim that the concept of sexual orientation did not exist in the ancient world. Instead of addressing those sources, he attempts to dismiss them because "we don't need to get caught in the weeds of ancient texts." The only text he briefly addresses is Plato's *Symposium*, and he only gives a brief comment about it in his endnotes (Vines, 2014:190-191). In this brief comment he cites Kirk Ormand who explains that Plato's *Symposium* does not describe normal sexual orientations. Plato was describing what was deviant and transgressive (Vines, 2014:190). Some men were womanisers, some women adulteresses and some men engaged in pederastic relationships according to Aristophanes (Hubbard, 2013:190, Johnson and Ryan, 2005:112). Vines's brief rebuttal misses the point. Aristophanes explains that men and women have an innate love for those of the same sex, because they are trying to reunite with their true selves and be restored (Hubbard, 2013:190). How they expressed that sexual orientation, or how deviant those expressions were, do not change that the motivating factor of those sexual actions was innate, that is, a sexual orientation. However, these sexual relationships occur, according to Aristophanes because

humanity is trying to find his or her other half, and ultimately seeks relationships with people of the same sex because their nature inclines them to do so. At the beginning of Aristophanes' speech, he makes clear that he is referring to human nature when he explains the myth about the sexual journey of humanity, and not merely sexual preference (Hubbard, 2003:188).

Outside of his brief engagement on Plato's *Symposium*, Vines does not address any other source, including those named above, which makes his claim historically inaccurate. What he does say is that "the sources he provided makes any non affirming objections to his claim that sexual orientation was unknown, implausible" (Vines, 2014:40). Vines commits confirmation bias by only addressing the evidence that supports his claim concerning sexual orientation in the ancient world and ignoring the evidence that refutes his claim.

Ultimately, whether or not the biblical writers in the ancient world were aware of any kind of concept of sexual orientation is irrelevant to the Bible's prohibition of homosexual practice. Homosexual practice is consistently forbidden in Scripture, regardless of the circumstance. The scriptures do not provide a way in which homosexual practice would be acceptable. Furthermore, the theological principle of God's omniscience indicates that he would know about sexual orientation, and still inspired the biblical writers to write the prohibitions of homosexual practice. This will be explored further in the chapter. Let it suffice for the moment to have established the historical inaccuracy of Vines's claim that the ancient world had no concept of sexual orientation.

2.4 Romans 1:26-27 and the excessive-passion argument

Since it has been established that there was some kind of concept of sexual orientation in the ancient world, even if limited, it is necessary to address Vines's argument concerning Romans 1:26-27. The claim that the ancient world had no concept of sexual orientation is the basis of Vines's argument for the reinterpretation of Scripture, especially Romans 1:26-27. According his logic, as outlined above, since there was no concept of sexual orientation in the ancient world, it follows that neither the Bible nor the Christian tradition gave any

guidance on how to address homosexual practice for people who were same-sex oriented. This is why the Scriptures should be reinterpreted to exclude loving same-sex relationships from homosexual practices that are prohibited. Vines argues that the New Testament writers would not have had a concept of sexual orientation on their minds when writing their letters to the early church.

Romans 1:26-27 is the clearest condemnation of homosexual practice in the Bible, which makes these passages of Scripture vital in the debate over permitting same-sex marriage in the Church. Vines states the significance of these passages of Scripture by writing that they are the most significant biblical passages in the debate over same-sex relationships (Vines, 2014:96). However, he explains that Romans 1:26-27 is not of central importance to the book in totality, and that the main point of these passages of Scriptures is to show that idolatry was the reason that God gave people over to their lustful same-sex relationships (Vines, 2014:96). Vines's assertions neglect the purpose of Romans and the immediate context of Romans 1:26-27. One of the reasons Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans was to give a clear explanation of the gospel (Lea & Black, 2003:395). A true message of the gospel includes explaining the sinfulness of humanity, which is what Paul does, particularly in Romans 1:18-32. Christ died and paid the penalty for those sins and more. Christ's redemptive work enabled Paul to say in Romans 8:1 that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, and he has set believers free from sin and death (Rom. 8:1-2). Romans 1:26-27 is of vital importance, because this vice list gives readers a clear example of the fruits of the life that rejects God's order. Paul sees homosexual practice, as well as the other sins listed in Romans 1:26-27, as serious violations of God's order and holiness. Yet Vines attempts to minimise this by asserting Romans 1:26-27 is not of central importance. Vines undercuts his argument by taking considerable effort to reinterpret these passages.

His overall argument on Romans 1:26-27 is that Paul does not refer to loving same-sex relationships when he addresses homosexual practice. He writes against excessive sexual desire, not loving same-sex relationships (Vines, 2014:105). Vines attempts to support that view in several ways, all of which will

be addressed here: (1) the inability of gay people to choose heterosexual attraction (Vines, 2014:103); (2) loving same-sex relationships were so rare that the dominant perspective of same-sex relationships was restricted to excessive sexual desire (Vines, 2014:104-105); and (3) Paul's use of the terms *natural* and *unnatural* in Romans 1:26-27 refer to patriarchy and cultural customs, not anatomical difference (Vines, 2014:111).

2.4.1 The question of choice in sexual attraction

In *God and The Gay Christian*, Vines presents the vice list of Romans 1:18-32 as choices people are able to make. He believes that people are able to make the opposite virtuous choice (Vines, 2014:103). For example, he claims that, instead of "worshiping idols, we can choose to worship God. Rather than succumbing to greed, we can give generously" (Vines, 2014:103). Since gay people have no opposite choice to make, because they have no opposite-sex attraction to follow, it follows that Paul is talking about something fundamentally different from what we view as homosexual practice today. Again, this is another way to contend that Paul had no concept of sexual orientation. As previously established, there however did exist some parallel concept of sexual orientation in the ancient world.

One cannot be certain that Paul knew of that concept: however, one cannot say with surety that he did not know. It is likely, given his travels and education, that he did have a limited concept of it, because it was part of the sexual spectrum in the ancient world. However, whether or not Paul was keenly aware of sexual orientation, would not have mattered from his theological perspective, and this will be discussed later in the chapter. For now, it is necessary to point out that Vines presents a false equivalence in this portion of his argument: "For Paul, the same-sex relations fit into the same pattern: Rather than following same-sex attractions, we can follow opposite sex attractions." This is not what Paul is getting at when he presents the vice list. Whether or not someone is incapable of making the right choice is not in view here.

What Paul is explaining is that people have chosen to do the sinful things listed because of the depravity of their hearts which have rejected the truth about God.

Paul is not presenting choices people should make. He is simply saying people do sinful things in their depravity. Paul would not have made the case that, because someone is incapable of making righteous choice, the sinful choice should be excused. In fact, Paul would argue that being in Christ would make you capable, and never incapable (Rom. 6:22, 8:12). Furthermore, there are many testimonies of professing “gay Christians” that have made the choice not to act on their sexual attractions out of their devotion to and love for Jesus. Vines overgeneralises the experience of gay people who desire to live biblically. There are many who can and do make the choice not to act on their same-sex desires. People cannot choose their sexual orientation, but the testimonies of other same-sex-attracted people show that one can choose what to do with them. For Paul, the concept of sexual orientation would not have mattered, even if he did know about it. Homosexual practice was sinful, no matter the circumstance.

2.4.2 Homosexual practice as excess sexual desire

Vines argues that the most common forms of same-sex behaviour in the Greco-Roman world were pederasty, prostitution, and sex between masters and slaves, and that same-sex relationships were primarily seen as manifestations of excessive sexual desire (Vines, 2014:103-106). Vines believes that Paul's perception of same-sex relationships would have aligned with that cultural view, and his audience would have understood it the same.

It is historically accurate that homosexual practice was viewed as a form of excessive passion in the ancient world. According to Plato, erotic love was an “indwelling tyrant” that could be destructive (Von Ehrenkrook, 2011:153). One of Plato's characters in his literary work *Laws* explains that homosexual practice came from an inability to control pleasure (Hubbard, 2013:252). Greek orator Dio Chrysostom, who lived in the first century, wrote also that same-sex relationships were the result of men who had ravenous sexual appetites, such as those who became addicted to drinking (Brownson, 2013:115).

Even though historical evidence demonstrates a perception of homosexual practice as a manifestation of excessive sexual desire in the ancient world, there

were other perceptions of same-sex relationships that contradict Vines's generalisation. Vines neglects the historical evidence for the presence of other known same-sex relationships in the ancient world that were not considered to be excessive. Other forms of same-sex relationships did exist: they could have been a part of Paul's cultural context and awareness as well. Paul was well-travelled, and an educated Roman citizen (Acts 22:22-29). As Ferguson noted, "Paul was spiritually a Jew, legally a Roman citizen and intellectually a Greek" (Ferguson, 2013:36). He would have been familiar with Greek literature and philosophy that addressed homoerotic practices (Brown, 2014:161). By the time he wrote his epistle to the Romans, Paul had been in Greece for three months on his third missionary journey (Black, 2003:391). On his second missionary journey he travelled to Macedonia, Greece and he visited Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens and Corinth (Lea & Black, 2003:348). He had been greatly exposed to gentile pagan culture.

Athens and Corinth were known for their idolatry and sexual perversion. Luke records that when Paul visited Athens he was "greatly distressed" to see that the city was full of idols. Paul was not only confronted with the prominence of idolatry in Athens but the various philosophical ideas of the Epicureans and the Stoics. Athens was also a university town in Paul's day (Metzger & Coogan, 1993:65). When he travelled to Corinth, Paul remained there for eighteen months during his second missionary journey (Lea & Black, 2003:348). Corinth had a temple dedicated to the worship of the goddess Aphrodite. The temple was constructed out of rock, located eighteen hundred feet above Corinth (Lea & Black, 2003:403). One thousand prostitutes offered their bodies in the temple (Lea & Black, 2003:403). By the time Paul visited the city, the temple was in ruins, but immorality was still prominent in Corinth (Lea & Black, 2003:403). Corinth was so widely known for its immorality that one ancient proverb about the city said that "not for every man is the voyage to Corinth" and the word *korinthiazesthai* was coined after the city (Lea & Black, 2003:403). *Korinthiazesthai* means "to practice fornication" (Lea & Black, 2003:403). As Hughes (1991:42) explains, Paul emphasises homosexual practice because it was all around him, and Corinth was the sin capital of Asia. Many highborn Greeks had homosexual relationships,

alongside their wives and fourteen of the first fifteen Roman emperors were homosexual (Hughes, 1991:42).

There were various kinds of sexual perversion with which Paul would have been confronted, including other forms of same-sex relationships that were not necessarily a product of excess sexual desire. For instance, it was publicly known that Emperor Hadrian (first and early second century) was explicitly homosexual though he was married (Hubbard, 2003:443). The marriage was childless and lacked intimacy. In spite of his marriage, Hadrian had a relationship with a young lover named Antinous. When Antinous died, it was said that Hadrian's grief was deep, and he wept like a woman at the loss of his Antinous (Sprinkle, 2014:526). Hadrian had statues erected in Antinous's honour, created cults in his honour, consecrated Antinous as a god and identified a new star in the sky as the embodiment of Antinous's soul (Dunstan, 2002:98; Hubbard, 2003:443). Hadrian and Antinous were perceived to have a real and profound love for each one another, and they were seemingly inseparable (Dunstan, 2002:95).

In his article "Romans 1 and homosexuality: A Critical Review of James Brownson's Bible, Gender, Sexuality," Sprinkle (2014) provides several documented accounts of same-sex relations that were non-pederastic, and that do not fit Vines's excessive desire perception of same-sex relationships. He documents at least eight of these same-sex relationships, of which two were between women, that existed around the time of the Apostle Paul and after. For example, Sprinkle (2014:527) notes the lesbian relationship between Berenike and Mesopotamia. In the second century Iamblichus wrote about a lesbian marriage between the Egyptian princess Berenike and a woman named Mesopotamia. Berenike had fallen madly in love with Mesopotamia and married her (Brooten, 1996:51). Sprinkle (2014) also cites the relationships between Emperor Galba and his long-time lover Icelus in the first century. Galba's sexual desires were strongly inclined toward men, especially men who were experienced and strong (Hubbard, 2003:422). Upon the announcement of Nero's death, Galba received his lover Icelus publicly with intense kisses, had him shaved and took him aside (Hubbard, 2003:422; Sprinkle, 2014:527). Third century emperor

Elagabalus was known for his hedonism and sexual depravity. As Sprinkle (2014:527) explains, he was known to dress up as a woman and play the role of a woman in sex at brothels. Later on in his life, Elagabalus fell deeply in love with his male charioteer name Hierocles (Chrystal, 2019:94; Hubbard, 2003:495; Sprinkle, 2014:527). Among the evidence he provides, Sprinkle also lists Lucian of Samosata who addresses the lesbian marriage of Megilla and Demonassa (Sprinkle, 2014:527).

The point here is that there are documented examples of same-sex relationships, male and female, in the ancient world and around the time of Paul that do not fit Vines's view that Paul would have only seen homosexual practice as a manifestation of excessive sexual desire. Furthermore, by the first century evidence of pederasty becomes rare, showing a decline in the practice of those relationships (Smith, 1996:233). There was an array of sexual practices and beliefs concerning sexuality. It is reasonable to assume that Paul had other and all homosexual practice in mind when writing Romans 1:26-27 (Smith 1996:223). This is also supported by the fact that nothing in Romans 1:26-27 demonstrates that a specific type of homosexual practice was in question. Since the culture around him consisted of varying types of sexual relationships and various views, one cannot concretely conclude that he knew of only one kind of relationship and not others. Paul's cultural context and historical evidence contradict Vines's assumption.

When Vines argues that Paul would have seen homosexual practice as a manifestation of excessive sexual desire in the culture around him, he also neglects Paul's Jewish background. Paul's Jewish and theological perspective would have the primary influence on his moral outlook, and not cultural standards. Paul was a professed persecutor of the church, a Hebrew from the tribe of Benjamin and Pharisee in regard to his knowledge and adherence to Mosaic law (Phil. 3:5-6). Paul's self-characterisation as a Pharisee is important with a view to interpreting Romans 1:26-27. The Pharisees were a sect in Judaism and were concerned with purity by keeping the Levitical law; they were resistant to Hellenistic culture (Scott, 1995:206). Paul's history as a Pharisee gives insight

into how he would view the world and his relationship to the culture around him. Though not a Pharisee anymore, Paul would have still been concerned with not following after the world's pattern of morality. This is why he admonishes Christians not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of the mind (Rom. 12:2). Additionally, Paul's reference for sexual ethics would have come from the teachings of Jesus and from the Old Testament Scriptures, given his Jewish background (Fesko, 2018:39). Homosexual practice was forbidden under Mosaic law, and Jesus only reaffirmed the proper context for sexual relationships when he explained that marriage should be between one man and woman (Lev. 18:22, 20:13; Matt 19:3-6; Mar. 10:6-9). There were no exceptions to this. Vines places too much emphasis on the Hellenistic culture around Paul without acknowledging the theological worldview that Paul would have had. A Hellenistic view of the inferiority of women and sexual relationships would not have been the primary influence on his moral judgments; it would have been the Scriptures and his knowledge about God's natural order. Paul sees all homosexual practice as a grievous sin, not because the culture has a negative view of homosexual practice, but because the Scriptures do.

2.4.3 The question of the natural and unnatural

It has been established that there were different views of homosexual practice that Paul would have been exposed to, and that those views would not have been the ultimate influence on his perception of homosexual practice. In order to further establish Paul's theological view, it is necessary to address Vines's perception of Paul's use of the words *natural* and *unnatural*. Within Vines's excess-passion argument for Romans 1:26-27 resides the issue of how Paul defined *natural* and *unnatural* sexual practice. Over the years, scholars have provided varying reasons for what Paul was trying to demonstrate when he deemed homosexual acts unnatural in Romans 1:26-27. For example, John Boswell argued that Paul was not referring to all forms of homosexual practice when he called them unnatural. Paul was only referencing homoerotic relationships that were committed by people who were not naturally homosexual (Boswell, 1981:109). Others argue that what Paul calls unnatural are noncoital sexual practices and a

reversal of sex roles (Moore, 2003:98). Scroggs argues that, when Paul condemned homosexual practice, he had pederasty in mind, since that was the primary form of homosexual relationships during the apostle's time (Kuhn, 2006:315). Vines believes that Paul's use of the words *natural* and *unnatural* are rooted in the cultural patriarchal views of gender roles and the cultural understandings of honour and shame of the first century (Vines, 2014:108).

Romans 1:26-27 reads:

For this reason God gave them up to dishonourable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

Historically, it is true that homosexual practice in the Greco-Roman world was seen as unnatural because men and women took on the roles of the opposite sex, and these relationships could not produce children. The ideas of femininity and masculinity in the Roman world were not simply biological. Masculinity itself was a fragile state of existence to be sought after (Ehrenkrook, 2011:148). Thus, Roman men were taught to dominate, even in sexual practice (Cantarella, 1992:98). For example, Romans generally discouraged the Greek practice of pederasty. A Roman boy's manhood was important and allowing adult men to sexually subject free adolescent boys put their virility in jeopardy (Cantarella & Cuilleánáin 1992:100). Vines points to this by citing Josephus, Philo and Plato in order to demonstrate that the words *natural* and *unnatural* were used as boundary markers between what did and did not conform to gender roles in the Greco-Roman culture of patriarchy (Vines, 2014: 109). He also explains that women were seen as inferior, and relationships between two equal partners, such as same-sex relationships, would have been striking in contrast to the strict hierarchy in that culture (Vines, 2014:111). This is an historically accurate view. Men who were penetrated took on the female role in sex, therefore becoming like a woman who was inferior in society. As stated, masculinity was of great

importance, and the less masculine a man was, the more feminine he was perceived to be and vice versa (Brooten, 1996:116). The challenge for men in the ancient world was to establish their virility and avoid being perceived as feminine, because one's manhood was always open to scrutiny (Ehrenkrook, 2011:147, 149). Aristotle saw the "male" to be the perfectly formed human while a female was a defective male (Ehrenkrook, 2011:148). Even lesbian relationships were frowned upon because they were nonphallic and women were often characterised as masculine for seemingly attempting to take on a male sexual role (Brooten, 1996:236), while, again, homoerotic relationships were not procreative (Vines, 2014:108).

Vines attempts to further support his cultural argument by comparing the use of the words natural and unnatural in 1 Corinthians 11:3-10 with that in Romans 1:26-27. He explains that Paul uses the same words in Romans 1:26-27 as in 1 Corinthians 11 in order to address what was natural, and equates that to what is custom. The custom of women covering their heads during prayer and men having long hair speaks to cultural views of honour and shame (Vines, 2014:112). Wearing veils was a social custom for women in the ancient world that the Corinthian women were violating, and Paul deemed that a culturally shameful violation. Vines uses the works of Cicero and Seneca to support this view. Cicero and Seneca both believed certain activities such as drinking on an empty stomach, hot baths and walking backwards as "against nature." These were cultural practices that Cicero and Seneca considered abnormal, and they were labelled as unnatural. Thus, Vines believes that the same line of thinking is found in Romans 1:26-27 when Paul describes homosexual acts as contrary to nature. Paul was making a reference to the violation of social customs, rooted in honour and shame, that have no basis for the modern Christian today. Vines believes the ideas of honour and shame are why Paul deems homosexual practice unnatural in Romans 1, and he quotes Brownson writing that: "What is degrading and shameless about the behavior described in Romans 1:26-27 is that it is driven by excessive, self-seeking lust, that it knows no boundaries or restraints, and that it violates established gender roles of that time and culture, understood in term of masculine rationality and honor" (Vines, 2014:113). With all of this in mind, Vines

believes that Paul's meaning for unnatural and natural indicates what was customary concerning gender roles and what was considered culturally appropriate. Vines argues that Paul's views of what were natural and unnatural sexual relations described in Romans 1:26-27 are rooted in the cultural perspective of Paul's day.

What Vines continues to neglect is Paul's theological perspective, which was grounded in creation. In Romans 1:26-27, Paul was emphasising the grave sinfulness of homosexual practice, as it was a major sign of man falling away from God's natural order of things. Schreiner (2018) points out that Paul likely focuses on homosexual practice first because it illustrates that which is unnatural in the sexual sphere. Idolatry is unnatural in the sense that it is a perversion of God's order as reflected in the worshiping of corrupt animals and human beings instead of the incorruptible God (Schreiner, 2018:118; Fesko, 2018:38). Men and women were designed to have sexual relations with the opposite sex, therefore, homosexual practice is a distortion of God's natural plan for sexual relations, as demonstrated when he created man and woman (Schreiner, 2018:118). Paul expressed the same principle in 1 Thessalonians, several years before he wrote his epistle to the Roman church (1 Thess. 4:5), and then to the Corinthians church (1 Cor. 10:6-8). Paul's sexual ethics are rooted in creation, just as those of Jesus in Matthew 19:3-6 and Mark 10:6-9 (Witherington, 2016:273).

Paul describes homosexual practice as "contrary to nature." His use of the phrase "contrary to nature" in Greek is *παρὰ φύσιν* (*para physin*). Again, Vines emphasises that Paul deemed homosexual practice sinful and unnatural because it defied gender norms. The phrase "their women" in verse 26, he suggests, reiterates the hierarchical status of men and women in Greco-Roman society (Vines, 2014:109). It is true that women were often viewed as inferior and subordinate. The penetrated man in sex was seen as taking on the role of a woman, as indicated. Not only was this against cultural norms, but this was also seen as demoralising and shameful. The word *physin* in Greek had various meanings depending on which philosopher used it (Zondervan & Verbrugge, 2017). *Physin* denotes source, origin, commencement and the lineage of children

(Schmidt, 2017:569; Zondervan & Verbrugge, 2017). *Physin* can also signify a condition or nature and alongside ethos, customs or reason, it means human nature (Burer & Miller, 2008; Zondervan & Verbrugge, 2017). *Physin* can also denote the bodily physique of an individual, creation or nature.

In order to understand what Paul meant by “contrary to nature,” Paul’s theological perspective must be considered. Paul had a Jewish upbringing, even after becoming a follower of Jesus Christ, and his scriptural references would have been those of the Old Testament. The Torah clearly condemned homosexual practice and referred to it as an abomination in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. Furthermore, something considered “contrary to nature” in Paul’s theological view is rooted in God’s creation order. In fact, the Greek word for natural “relations” (*kresis*) in Romans 1:27 speaks to the state of humanity’s natural design (DeYoung, 2015:53). As Hays says, the understanding of “nature” in Romans 1:26-27 appeals to an intuitive conception of what ought to be of the world as designed by God (Hays, 1986:194). Those who engage in sexual practices that are considered *para physin* (against nature) are defying the creator and demonstrating their own alienation from him (Hays, 1986:194). Palestinian and Hellenistic Judaism consistently condemned homosexual practice (Kuhn, 2006:317).

2.4.4 The question of honour and shame: 1 Corinthians 11

Putting the uses of “nature” in its proper context in 1 Corinthians 11:14 shows the error of Vines’s argument in comparing the use of “nature” in Romans 1:26-27 and 1 Corinthians 11:14. Branson Parler provides invaluable insight into what Paul deemed as “contrary to nature” around the cultural and theological significance. As Parler explains, Romans 1:26-27 is often connected to 1 Corinthians 11:14 in attempts to define Paul’s use of the word “nature” in cultural terms; thus, context is important (Parler, 2016:117). Parler (2017:118) explains that Paul’s rhetorical question, though odd for the contemporary western eye, carries unstated assumptions that the first century Corinthians would have understood because the apostle and his audience shared a significant sense of the same context. There is evidence in the Greco-Roman world that hair was an

indicator of sexual difference grounded in nature, not in custom. Musonius Rufus remarked that men who shave the beard are acting improperly because it erases nature's design of distinction for men (Keener, 2005:94; Parler, 2016:120).

Epictetus also believed hair on man's chin was a sexual distinction that God had given (Parler, 2016:121). Epictetus argues that God providence was evident in nature, and the beard was evidence of that (Parler, 2016:121). Epictetus also believed appearance highlighted sexual difference, noting that men were naturally more hairy than women (Parler, 2016:121). When Epictetus criticised those who failed to uphold what nature taught about sexual difference, he mentioned the city of Corinth, pointing to the fact that people in Corinth were known for blurring the lines between male and female (Parler, 2016:122). Seneca also connected physiology with proper behaviours for men and women. He believed that women suffered certain diseases because they had become to act in more manly ways. Seneca saw physiology as a way to guide ethical behaviour (Parler, 2016:123). These stoic philosophers give insight into how some in the Greco-Roman worlds connected hair with sexual difference. Hair was a marker of sexual difference and not custom. There were different paradigms that ancient thinkers used to describe the way things were. From a modern perspective, these paradigms would seem inadequate, but as Parler explains, when viewed in their proper time in history, the paradigms made sense. For example, from an ancient scientific paradigm, ancient writers described women as being cold and hot, and this is why women had less body hair than men (Brooten, 1996:124; Parler, 2015:125). If one replaces the term heat with testosterone, we see that the differences between their paradigms and ours may not be as great as we initially think. This approach should be taken when assessing what some ancient writers were asserting with their use of the phrase "against nature" or "contrary to nature" (Parler, 2016:126) The healthy and proper functioning of the body was seen as according to nature (*kata physin*). Disease was seen as "against nature (*para physin*)" (Parler, 2016:126).

Hippocrates and Aristotle linked the reproductive process with hair. Parler further explains ancient thought on what was considered contrary to nature by explaining

ancient thinking. Hippocrates believed semen production was caused by body and facial hair in a man. Hippocrates' paradigm asserts that hair sucks on body moisture, including semen in the body. Hair was likened to glands, and he wrote they were intended to fulfil the same function by nature (Parler, 2016:129). One key source of moisture is semen. As the moisture from the semen increasingly passes from the head through the body at puberty, especially during sexual intercourse, the chin and other areas of the male body become increasingly hairy. Increase in body and facial hair was believed to be caused by semen (Parler, 2016:127-128). Aristotle held a similar perspective concerning body hair and semen and believed that a sign of a man being sterile was the inability to grow a beard (Parler, 2015:128).

Hippocrates wrote that a woman's body was like one large gland, designed to absorb semen, and a woman's long hair increased the suction power of her uterus (Martin, 2004:79; Parler, 2016:130). Pseudo-Phyoclidides described women's long hair as fitting for voluptuous women, but not for males (Martin, 2004:79). A woman's hair was seen as part of the female genitalia. Another example of this is an ancient fertility test. A doctor would place a scented suppository in a woman's uterus and examine her mouth the next day to see if he could detect the scent (Martin, 2004:79-80). A woman was deemed sterile if the doctor could not detect the scent, because this indicated the channels from her uterus to her head were blocked (Martin, 2004:80). The suction power of her hair was too weak to draw up the semen through her body (Martin, 200:80). A final example of the woman's hair seen in sexual terms comes from the custom of not veiling prepubescent girls. They were not required to wear a veil because their hair was not a functioning genital and was the same as the hair of a young boy (Martin, 2004:82). The hair became a functioning part of a women's genitalia at puberty, at which time she began to wear a veil (Martin, 2004:82). In summary, hair was not seen only in terms of gender customs, but also as an indicator of sexual and procreative difference. Paul's audience would have been aware of the connection between hair and sexuality.

1 Corinthians 11:2-16 deals with the issues in public worship that the church was experiencing, and Corinthian women refused to cover their heads in worship as a form of defiance of the cultural custom (Lea & Black, 2003:412). As seen in the text, Paul is addressing a social custom and uses that to demonstrate a theological principle. Paul opens chapter 11 with a theological premise. Within these passages of Scripture, the relationship between man and woman is described as rooted in the headship of the Father over the Son (v. 3). The Son is not subordinate to the Father, and neither is the woman subordinate to the man. As Schreiner points out, using the word “subordination” to describe the Father’s relationship with the Son is unhelpful because it implies inferiority, and this was the root ancient controversy regarding the Son’s relationship to the Father (Schreiner, 2018:227). Paul is addressing an issue within the Corinthian church concerning women wearing head coverings during worship. Paul instructed women to cover their head during worship, and for men to be uncovered during worship, which aligned with the cultural customs of that time (Lea & Black, 2003:413). Paul addresses the cultural issues of head coverings to make a theological point about God’s design for male and female relationships.

Scholars debate the nature of the head covering that caused shame if not properly worn. There are those that argue Paul is referring to shaven heads. Others believe that Paul is referring to the custom of wearing a veil. Whatever the type of head covering it was, whether long hair or a veil, the absence of this type of covering for women could signify that she was sexually available or the blurring of male and female relationships and sexual distinctions (Garland, 2003:404; Lee, 2014:511; Schreiner, 2018: 231; Oropeza, 2017:146). Beale and Carson (2007:731) observe that some Corinthians began to believe that all distinctions between men and women were to be avoided in worship because of Christ, as centred on Galatians 3:28. Though it may be unclear what the nature of the head covering was, Paul’s point was that women should adorn themselves in a particular way (Beale & Carson, 2007:731; Schreiner, 2018:231). Refusing to cover their heads sent a cultural message that a woman was not rightly relating to male leadership, and this would be offensive to others (Schreiner, 2018:231).

It also sent a cultural message that a woman was not honouring her sexual difference.

This sheds light on Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, where he points to an authority structure between men and women and husbands and wives, while underscoring the ontological equality of men and women (Beale & Carson, 2007:731). In verses 3-5 Paul expresses the structure of authority: God, husband (man), wife (woman). Paul explains that a wife dishonours her head (husband) when her head is uncovered. Verses seven through nine say a woman was created for the man, which points to Genesis, reaffirming that woman was divinely designed by God to be man's suitable helper (Gen. 2:18). Paul writes: "Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her as a covering." He is not appealing solely to social custom, but to sexual distinction between men and women that should be kept through properly relating to one another (1 Cor. 11:13-15). Nature provides sexual distinction which should guide how men and women relate to one another and comport themselves. When read in tandem with Romans 1:26-27, it is clear that physiology and sexual ethics are at play, especially when the Stoic, Hippocratic and Aristotelian outlooks are considered. Paul was not simply appealing to social custom but to nature. Paul was appealing to God's design for male and female relationships as set out in the Scriptures, and he used social customs to drive home his point.

2.4.5 Understanding Romans 1:18-32

The immediate context of Romans 1:26-27 is that God's holy wrath is righteously revealed against gentiles because of their sin (Rom. 1:21-24, 3:9). All have failed to worship God as he desires (Schreiner, 2018:103). Romans 1:18-32 is directed to gentile believers (Schreiner, 2018:105) and he rebukes the Jews in chapter 2. He explains that people began to reject God because they suppressed the truth about him (Rom. 1:18). The suppression of the truth about God, which was revealed in nature, caused them to create their own ideas about what God was like. Idols were created and worshipped instead of the one true God (Rom. 1:21-

23). The truth that people rejected in Romans 1 was that Yahweh is the one true God and that he should be honoured, worshipped and obeyed as God (Schreiner, 2018:113).

For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things (Rom. 1:21-23).

The issue with idolatry is that, when people cease to worship and glorify God, they lose the standard for their humanity. Their worldview is distorted and they no longer see themselves in the proper way in which God created them. The standard of living and morality are gone, and man ultimately becomes a god unto himself, doing whatever he pleases. God allowed the gentiles to reap the fruits of their rejection of him, and some of that fruit was the degrading and sexually improper use of their bodies (Rom. 1:24). Here, Paul directly connects man's perverted view of God to their perverted view of themselves. Paul's argument is that a perverted understanding of God, denying God's true nature, results in a perverted understanding of oneself, denying one's own true nature as male or female (Fesko, 2018:40; Loader, 2014:4; Moo & Elwell, 2014:42; Schreiner *et al.*, 2018: 117). Paul bases his argument in creation, stating that God's divine nature and glory can be seen in the created world around us: thus, no man has an excuse not to worship him as God (Rom. 1:18:20). God has a created order, and that order was distorted by the darkening hearts and consequent idolatry of the gentile (Loader, 2014:4).

God as creator, and humanity as creation, is an important aspect of Paul's theology. The apostle lived in a cultural context that would have seen Paul's concept of God and creation as radical. The Greco-Roman world around Paul had no concept of a transcendent creator (Ware, 2019:23). The divinities worshipped were either identified with the cosmos, products of the cosmos or coexisted alongside an independent and eternal material realm (Ware, 2019:23).

Yahweh was a different kind of God that the culture around him knew nothing of (Acts 17:23). Paul believed in a transcendent God who had a created order for the world, and that created world had a purpose, which was to give glory and worship to him (Acts 17:24-27). Paul saw creation as sacred, because it came into being at the direct will of the holy God, and this is why creation was a central part of his theology (Ware, 2019:23; Witherington, 2016:274). God had an order and will for everything that existed. God abandoned people to fulfil their shameful desires, because their hearts became darkened and their ways of thinking became vain and foolish.

Romans 1:21 is crucial to addressing Vines's sexual orientation argument. Paul explains that human desires and passions became perverted in their rejection of God. When Paul wrote that their thinking became futile, he was saying that people had become morally wicked in their thinking (ματαιώνω). The hearts of the people also became darkened. When Paul refers to the heart (καρδία), he references the core of who someone is, their human nature. The Greek word καρδία denotes selfhood, in the sense of centre of personhood, character, cognition, emotion and volition, focusing on the cognitive aspect of the heart (Danker, 2009:187). Not only did people become foolish in their thinking, but their personhood (nature) became more depraved along with their intellect. In verse 22, Paul explains that the increasing depravity of man led to idolatry. People began to turn earthly images of men and creatures into their version of the image of God. People began to create idols instead of worshiping God as he was. The progressing depravity led to idolatry and the resulting sins as named in Romans 1:26-31. The root of the sins listed in Romans 1:26-31 is an increasingly depraved human nature that comes from rejecting the truth about God.

Romans 1:24--32 is a vice list that consists of qualities and actions that are sinful (Klein *et al.*, 2017:554). Klein *et al.* (2017) explain that one of the principles of vice lists is that the first and last in the list were the most important. This is crucial, considering that homosexual practice among men and women were listed first in Romans 1:26-27. Paul saw homosexual practice as a major indication of a life that has rejected the lordship of the almighty God. Paul's condemnation of

homosexual practice was in stark contradiction to the Greco-Roman world around him that condoned homosexual practice under certain circumstances, such as between master and slave. Sexual morality was a major distinction between the Jewish (and early Christian) people and the pagan, Hellenistic cultures. Sexual morality was a primary marker of those in covenant relationship with God (Gorman, 2016:179; Alexander, 2012:246-247).

Romans 1:24 is important, because Paul emphasises the troubled state of human nature that has rejected God. He writes that *“God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves..”* Paul is saying that God allowed people to do what their hearts strongly desired to do. The things that the people desired to do were impure and they also desired to do things that dishonoured their bodies. In the Greek, the word Paul uses for “impure” is *ἀκαθαρσία*. The meaning of the word *ἀκαθαρσία* is impurity, not in a ceremonial sense, but as centred on moral depravity and immorality (Danker, 2009:12; Schmidt, 2017:20).

Not only were the gentiles becoming more sinful in their thinking and in their nature, but the things they desired to do were just as depraved. Paul connects a perverted understanding of God to the perverted understanding of oneself and a perverted use of one’s body. Man’s desires were not simply excessive, but man’s desires became misdirected and perverted because of their rejection of God which led to idolatry (Loader, 2014:5). Loader (2014:5) points out that, when Paul wrote about “the dishonoring of their bodies” in Romans 1:24, he was referring not only to the societal norms of men and women in sexual practice, but the violation of Yahweh’s ordained sexual norms (Loader, 2014:5). Whether or not someone was same-sex oriented would not have influenced Paul’s sexual ethics, because the orientation was a part of the darkened human nature. This darkened human nature produced a sexual practice that was against God’s design and will.

Paul would have seen same-sex orientation as part of the depravity and impurity that came from the heart that rejected God. As previously stated, Paul was dealing with the increasing depravity of human nature that resulted from a heart

that rejected God and became idolatrous. The apostle was not simply calling the acts sinful, but he called the state of the human heart that produced those acts sinful. Vines asserts that same-sex behaviour “condemned as excess does not translate to homosexuality condemned as an orientation - or as a loving expression of that orientation.” However, this is theologically inconsistent with what Paul writes in Romans 1. The heart that produces the acts is sinful along with how the act is produced. Homosexual acts, however practiced, are sinful. Vines believes that the biblical view on same-sex relationships should be revisited because Paul only addresses people who are capable of around being attracted to the opposite sex (Vines, 2014:103). Being in a loving committed same-sex relationship, does not and would not change Paul’s theological perspective. Paul would have seen the sexual orientation as sinful, in the sense that it is a distortion of how God created one’s sexual desires, and he sees all homosexual acts as sinful.

2.5 The early church and homosexual practice

Sexual purity was one of the distinguishing marks of the Christian community in contrast with the pagan world around it. Greco-Roman culture consisted of a variety of sexual practices that were contrary to Christian sexual ethics.

In their book *Unchanging witness: The consistent Christian teaching on homosexuality in scripture and tradition*, Fortson and Grams give a detailed and documented account of the early Church’s beliefs on homosexual practice and orientation. They identify nineteen Christian writings in the first and second centuries that explicitly condemn homosexual practice, including one that explicitly addresses sexual orientation in negative terms. Most of these documents were written by the early church fathers and apologists. This list also includes the *Didache*, the Epistle of Barnabas and the Apocalypse of Peter. Second century works such as the *Didache* and the *Epistle of Barnabas* explicitly condemn pederasty which was a common form homosexual practice in the ancient world (Fortson & Grams, 2016:43). *The apocalypse of Peter* mentions men who defile themselves by acting like women and by having sex with other men (Forston & Grams, 2016:44).

Polycarp is one of the most well-known church fathers who explicitly condemned homosexual practice in his letter to the Philippian church. He was bishop of Smyrna, modern-day Turkey, and lived in the first and second century. Polycarp has been noted as one of the most pious Christian leaders in church history who emphasised righteous living and was said to have been saturated with the language of the New Testament (Ferguson, 2013:56-57). Polycarp not only knew the apostles and others who walked with Jesus, but was appointed by the apostle John into the bishopric (Habermas & Licona, 2004:54-55). Irenaeus mentions seeing Polycarp and hearing him speak. Irenaeus spoke about Polycarp's conversations with the apostle John as well as the first-hand accounts of Jesus's miracles that were fully aligned with the Scriptures (Habermas & Licona, 2004:54-55). Polycarp also witnessed the life of Paul (Habermas & Licona, 2004:54-55). He was eventually martyred for his faith in his late eighties.

Polycarp is important because it is historically documented that he received his teaching from the apostles and that his teachings dovetailed with the New Testament manuscripts and those of the apostles. He was acquainted with the apostle Paul and his teachings, as indicated. Thus, when he wrote to the Philippian church that Paul established (Hartog, 2019:56), he would have been writing in step with Paul's theology. In his letter to the Philippian church, Polycarp addresses heresy and righteousness. His use of the Pauline epistles is widely accepted, including 1 Corinthians (Hartog, 2019:177). This is important when examining Vines because it shows the level of credibility Polycarp had in his theology, along with the other church fathers who reaffirmed Scripture and thus shaped Christian tradition. In his letter to the Philippian church, Polycarp admonished them to live lives worthy of God's glory, living life by the Spirit, as the flesh continues to wage war against the Spirit (Fortson & Grams, 2016:44). He quotes 1 Corinthians 6:9 by writing that "neither fornicators nor male prostitutes nor homosexuals will inherit the kingdom of God," nor those who do other perverse things, and the Christians should stay away from those things (Fortson & Grams, 2016:44). Polycarp was advising the early Philippian church in the way that had already been set by Scripture. He was in agreement with virtually every other church father and apostles when it came to his view that homosexual

practice (of any kind) was sinful. Sexual orientation would not have had an influence on whether or not homosexual practice was sinful according to Polycarp and the New Testament Scriptures he followed.

Early third-century church father Hippolytus is also worth noting. In his work *The refutation of all heresies*, Hippolytus addresses the practice of astrology. As previously explained, there was a belief within the Greco-Roman world that the arrangement of the stars determined one's sexual orientation (Brooten, 1996:119-121). Hippolytus condemned the practice of astrology and called the sexual orientations they were perceived to produce as "unnatural lusts" (Fortson & Grams, 2016:47). This is important because it reiterates that there was a limited concept of sexual orientation in the ancient world, and there existed that same recognition among some Christians. The homosexual act and the sentiment that produces it were both considered unnatural and sinful. Other church fathers of the second and third century deemed homosexual practice to be sinful: Cyprian, Methodius of Olympus, Novatian, Athenagoras, Aristides, Justin, Theophilus, Tatian and Origen.

The sinfulness of homosexual practice was a consistent message in the fourth and fifth centuries and beyond. Fortson and Grams (2016) identify seven works from the fourth and fifth centuries by the church fathers Augustine, Basil, Chrysostom and Ambrosiaster that equally condemn homosexual practice. The earliest church council to address homosexual practice was the Spanish Council of Elvira which forbid communion be given to "defilers of boys" (Fortson & Grams, 2016:50). Homosexual practice was also condemned by the Council of Ancyra which decreed that penance was required for those who committed homosexual acts (Fortson & Grams, 2016:50). In late antiquity, several books were produced by the church in order to guide and regulate its life. One of those manuals was *The constitutions of the holy apostles* in the late fourth century. Homosexual practice was deemed wicked, impious and against nature, and it was held that it explicitly transgressed the command from Leviticus 18:22 (Fortson & Grams, 2016:50).

It is clear that the first several centuries of the early church unanimously condemned homosexual practice. Sources that explicitly mention the concept of sexual orientation may be limited in the early Church, but this does not change the immorality of homosexual practice. Biblically, it is clear that all forms of homosexual practice are sinful, no matter the circumstance or one's orientation. Homosexual practice has been consistently and predominately condemned within the Christian church up until the twentieth century, which saw the rise of the gay Christian movement. Thus, Vines errs in his assertion that the Christian tradition gives no guidance on how to approach the issue of sexual orientation, as has been thoroughly demonstrated here. Christian tradition and the Bible give clear explicit guidance on homosexual practice: do not do it. Homosexual practice is consistently prohibited in the Old and New Testament and by the Church.

2.6 Does the presence of same-sex orientation make homosexual practice Biblically permissible?

Vines reiterates throughout his book that same-sex sexual orientation is a persistent and, in most cases, an unchanging sexual attraction that many people have. He recounts the failure of conversion therapy and the failure of organisations such as Exodus International that attempt to change one's sexual orientation. In the first chapter of his book, entitled "Reclaiming our light," he explains that the Bible lies at the heart of the debate concerning the approval of same-sex relationships (Vines, 2014:2). He says the failure of the ex-gay movements and the inability to change people's sexual orientation has caused evangelicals to grapple with the reality of sexual orientation and their beliefs about the Bible's authority (Vines, 2014:2).

The heart of this issue is whether or not the presence of a fixed (unchanging) same-sex orientation should change how Scriptures on homosexuality are interpreted. (Vines, 2014:28). While Vines admits that "the permanence of sexual orientation does not settle the moral questions at issue," he attempts to alter the clear meaning of Scripture because of sexual orientation. He argues that the attraction is part of who people are and one could choose to act on their sexual orientation in lustful ways or express it in the context of a loving, monogamous

relationship (Vines, 2014:29). His argument here is that, since sexual orientation cannot be changed, it warrants a reinterpretation of Scripture. There are two primary issues with Vines's perspective: (1) believing because the attraction is natural that it should be followed, and (2) that the biblical response is to change one's orientation.

Simply because something is natural and unchanging does not make that thing inherently good, but this seems to be what Vines suggests when he argues that:

"Same-sex attraction is natural to me. It is not something I chose or something I can change. And while I could act on my sexual orientation in lustful ways, I could also express it in the context of a committed, monogamous relationship. But based on the traditional interpretation of Scripture, I am uniquely excluded from the possibility of romantic love and intimacy" (Vines, 2014:29).

Then he goes on to tell the story of a young man who became crippled with depression, anguish and loneliness, because he could not freely love another young man, since he had committed himself to life-long celibacy in view of the Bible's stance on homosexual practice (Vines, 2014:29-30). There is no question that many same-sex-attracted people have to navigate through the hardship of their sexual attraction while desiring to remain faithful to Scripture. However, the difficulty of that journey does not warrant the reinterpretation of Scripture. As demonstrated, Scripture does not make exceptions for homosexual practice, no matter how difficult the journey is for the same-sex-attracted person. Vines is basing his moral perspective on homosexual practice on experience and not on the Scriptures.

The other major flaw in Vines's argument is the underlying assumption that the biblical response to addressing sexual orientation is to change it and, if it cannot be changed, then the Bible should be reinterpreted. The biblical response to same-sex orientation is not that one should seek to change it, but that one should become reborn and submit that attraction to Jesus on a daily basis, denying flesh. It is true that people in the church have believed that the changing of one's sexual orientation is the ideal solution to dealing with homosexual practice and same-

sex attraction, but this is not scripturally accurate, and Vines uses that misconstrued narrative to make the core argument in his book: “Christians who affirm the full authority of Scripture can also affirm committed, monogamous same-sex relationships” (Vines, 2014:3). If the altering of same-sex orientation was the biblical answer, Vines would have a point. However, his core argument is wrong, because the full authority of Scripture rejects same-sex relationships. The answer is not the changing of one’s sexual orientation, but centring one’s life on the finished work of Jesus in spite of that same-sex orientation. In other words, the same-sex orientation may not change: however, how one lives in spite of that orientation is what matters.

Finally, the theological principle of God’s omniscience indicates that he knows the complexities of human nature and the profound sinfulness of human nature. Scripture is clear that nothing is hidden from God (Heb. 4:13). God knows all thoughts and outward acts (Ps. 139). The Bible explicitly states that Jesus knows human nature (John 2:24). In fact, the reason people can have confidence when they ask for mercy is because Jesus understands the sin struggles of humanity (Heb. 4:14-16). God created humanity and knew the struggles that would come with every individual. This, even if the biblical writers were unaware of sexual orientation, God was aware, and still inspired them to write the prohibitions of homosexual practice.

2.7 Conclusion

Vines argues that the traditional interpretations of Scripture on homosexual practice should be reinterpreted. He asserts that the ancient world had no knowledge of sexual orientation and that the Christian tradition does not address sexual orientation. The reinterpretation that Vines supports is one that prohibits excessively lustful same-sex relationships, not loving monogamous same-sex ones. This perspective is based on his belief that the ancient world primarily viewed homosexual practice as a manifestation of unbridled or excessive sexual desire, and this would also be the reason, according to him, why Paul condemns homosexual practice in Romans 1:26-27. Historical, theological and biblical evidence do not support any of Vines’s claims.

Historical evidence shows that there was limited knowledge of sexual orientation in the ancient world. Further evidence also shows that there were various types of same-sex relationships known in the ancient world. Thus, the ancient world carried a variety of sexual relationships and perspectives about homosexual practice. Romans 1 26:27 is the clearest condemnation of male and female homosexual practice in the Bible. All homosexual practice is prohibited according to the Scriptures, no matter one's sexual orientation. The biblical way to deal with same-sex attraction is to submit one's desires to Jesus who enables the Christian to live a holy life.

CHAPTER 3

THE GIFT OF CELIBACY AND SAME-SEX-ATTRACTED PEOPLE

Vines argues that the traditional interpretation of Scripture denies gay Christians the possibility of marriage. Non-affirming Christians believe that “gay people’s sexualities are completely broken, so that mandatory lifelong celibacy is the only option for them (Vines, 2014:43). His main argument is that Christians have considered celibacy as a spiritual gift and calling, not something that should be forced onto someone (Vines, 2014:44). He concludes that Christians can embrace gay relationships and maintain a traditional view of celibacy or can change their understanding of celibacy and keep a traditional view - while both cannot be done (Vines, 2014:44). Vines believes Christians can embrace gay relationships while maintaining the scriptural belief that celibacy is a spiritual gift. Thus, he argues that the traditional view of Scripture concerning same-sex relationships causes gay Christians harm because it forces them into lifelong celibacy, denying them the possibility of romantic love and marriage.

This chapter will seek to examine Vines’s claim that celibacy is a spiritual gift and should not be forced on gay Christians (Vines 2014:47-48) by (1) addressing the biblical concept of spiritual gifts; (2) examining the biblical concept of celibacy according to Paul; (3) assessing the early church’s belief concerning celibacy; (4) examining the reported testimonies of other same-sex-attracted and professing gay Christians who have chosen celibacy.

3.1 What is celibacy?

According to the *Evangelical theological dictionary*, celibacy is the state of being unmarried for purposes of religious devotional and ethical purity (Elwell, 2001:217). As regards gay Christians, one might find different views of celibacy (Yarhouse *et al.*, 2017:5). Some gay Christians view celibacy as refraining from all sexual relationships and remain unmarried. There are others who define celibacy as refraining from sexual relationships with the same sex. AW Sipe, a former Benedictine monk and mental health counsellor, wrote extensively on

celibacy and the Catholic Church. In his assessment of celibacy, he wrote that it was not simply running from sex (Sipe, 2003:30). He wrote that it “is a freely chosen dynamic state, usually vowed, that involves an honest and sustained attempt to live without direct sexual gratification in order to serve others productively for a spiritual motive.” Vines believes the purpose of celibacy is to affirm the basic goodness of sex and marriage by pointing to the relationship they prefigure: the union of Christ and the church (Vines, 2014:57). For the purposes of this study, celibacy will simply be termed as “a decision to remain sexually inactive.”

Vines believes the purpose of celibacy is to affirm the basic goodness of sex and marriage by pointing to the relationship they prefigure: the union of Christ and the church (Vines, 2014:57). He points out that God’s creation is good and celibacy is a rejection of that good creation which involves sexuality (Vines, 2014:57). However, the Scriptures do not speak to the purpose of celibacy as an affirmation of the basic goodness of sex, marriage and Christ’s union with the Church. When the Bible does explicitly mention the practice of celibacy, it is in the context of leading an undistracted pure and holy life before God. Celibacy is a way in which someone can fully devote their life for God’s use (Matthew 19:10-12; 1 Cor. 7). It has nothing to do with affirming the basic goodness of sex. In fact, if the basic goodness of sex was affirmed, it would be the within the confines of marital union between man and woman. It has already been established that homosexual practice is consistently and unequivocally prohibited in any form: the goodness of sex would not include same-sex practice. Christians have no need to rethink their view of celibacy or biblical marriage, because celibacy is not about the goodness of sex itself but about one’s choice to be devoted to God. If a same-sex-attracted person does choose celibacy, they are affirming their commitment the goodness of God’s intention for sexual relations between man and woman, which glorifies him. They are choosing not to follow their attraction that would lead them to have unbiblical sexual relations with someone of the same sex. Celibacy is not mandated, but it is chosen by those who wish to live holy and consecrated lives before God in sexual purity.

3.2 Is celibacy a spiritual gift?

Vines believes celibacy is a gift and calling that many do not possess (Vines, 2014:17, 147). He believes that not everyone is called to marriage and there are those who are not called to celibacy. For those who do not sense a call to celibacy, “God’s gift of sexual love should be affirmed” (Vines, 2014:147). Vines points to the words of Jesus in Matthew 19 and the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 reiterating that only some people are able to be celibate. In order to address Vines’s position, it is necessary to establish what a spiritual gift is and consequently whether or not celibacy is a spiritual gift.

3.2.1 What is a spiritual gift?

Paul uses *charisma* (χαρίσμα) in the New Testament when he refers to what is commonly known as “spiritual gifts.” By itself, *charisma* does not denote a “spiritual gift.” When used with the Greek adjective *pneumatikon* (πνευματικόν), which means “pertaining to the Spirit” (Romans 1:11), the concept of spiritual gifts is produced (Hawthorne *et al.*, 1996:5). The range of the word *charisma* includes a free gift, a gift of grace, spiritual endowment, deliverance and a divine gift (Abbott-Smith, 200:480; Garland, 2003; 451; Schmidt, 2017:572). *Charisma* can also denote “that which results from the activity of generosity,” always in connection with divine generosity bestowed on believers, and it can also refer to corporate welfare (Danler, 2009:381). *Charisma* is used throughout the New Testament. For instance, Paul uses it to refer to the spiritual gifts that God graciously gives the Church in order to equip and strengthen it (Rom. 1:11, 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-11, 28, 1 Peter 4:10). It is also used by Paul in Romans 6:23 and 4:15-17 to refer to God’s gift of Jesus and eternal life to those who are believers. Romans 11:29 also uses *charisma* to describe God’s gift of salvation and the calling of Israel as God’s chosen people. Garland (2013:451) points out there are a variety of gifts in the New Testament and they fall into three broad categories: “grace-gifts” (χαρίσματα), “services” (διακονίαι, diakonai), and “workings” (ἐνεργήματα, energēmata).

Nowhere in the New Testament is there a mention of “the gift of celibacy” in the same breath as others such as “the gift of prophecy,” which Paul describes as a demonstration of the Spirit (φανέρωσις τοῦ πνεύματος) in 1 Corinthians 12:4-10. However, Paul does seem to speak of people being gifted to be celibate (Brown, 2015:222; Turner, 2008:464). There are two passages of Scripture that Vines points to in order to show that celibacy is a spiritual gift that everyone does not possess: Matthew 19:1-12 and 1 Corinthians 7:1-7. Those passages of Scripture will be examined in order to assess the merit of Vines’s view and provide a clear understanding of the gift of celibacy.

3.2.2 Matthew 19:1-12

In reference to Matthew 19:1-12, Vines makes several assertions that will be examined. Vines begins with the story of Jesus and Pharisees’ questions about divorce. Within this exchange, Jesus says:

Not everyone can accept this saying, but only those it has been given to. For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother’s womb, there are eunuchs who were made by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves that way because of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can (Matt. 19:11-12).

First, Vines uses Jesus’ descriptions of the eunuchs to demonstrate that Jesus did not include “what we would call gay men” into that description (Vines, 2014:48). As he repeatedly asserts, Jesus was not referring to same-sex oriented men, because that concept was not known in the ancient world. Jesus is therefore referring to three categories of men who do not marry: those who are impotent or sterile, those who have been castrated and those who pursue the calling of celibacy, none of which applies to same-sex oriented men (Vines, 2014:48). Even though Jesus does not explicitly refer to homosexual practice or sexual orientation, that does not mean celibacy is not suitable to its case. There are other categories of people whom Jesus does not refer to, who might choose celibacy such as the widow or someone who is asexual. Simply because Jesus does not specifically mention same-sex oriented people does not exclude this passage of

Scripture from applying to them. The fact that Jesus does not limit the spectrum of those who might choose celibacy shows that anyone can choose to make that choice. Not to mention that Jesus was God in flesh (Joh. 14:19); he was fully man and fully God. Thus, if anyone knew the dimensions of the human heart and personality, it would be Jesus. The point here is that Jesus would have known the brokenness of human nature, as discussed in chapter 2. He would have been aware that some not only committed homosexual acts but were also bent towards same-sex sexual attraction within their nature (Joh 2:24). Jesus has a better understanding of human nature and the depth of human sexuality than those in contemporary time. Suggesting that Jesus would not have been aware of sexual orientation is theologically inconsistent with the Scriptures that demonstrate Jesus' awareness of human nature as God in flesh.

Second, Vines continues by explaining that the strict guidelines Jesus placed on divorce influenced some of his disciples who were listening to choose celibacy (Vines, 2014:48). Jesus said celibacy could be accepted only by those to whom it was given (Vines, 2014:48). Vines concludes that, according to Jesus, celibacy should be entered into only by those to whom it (the gift of celibacy) is given.

It is difficult to determine what Jesus is referring to when he states the following in verse 11: "Not everyone can accept this saying, but only those it has been given to." He is either referring to his teaching about marriage (vv. 8– 9) or the disciples' exclamation that it is better not to marry (v. 10) (Reeves *et al.*, 2017:376). In context, as most scholars agree, Jesus was referring to his disciples' assumption about remaining unmarried because he goes on to explain the reasons why some remain celibate (Quarles, 2017:223; Reeves *et al.*, 2017:376). The word "accept," sometimes translated as "received" in verse 11, in the Greek means "have room for" or "of securing space within one's mind for divine instruction" (Danker, 2009:386; Yuan, 2018:107). Jesus is referring to making room in one's mind: that not everyone can grasp what his statement means (Yuan, 2018:107). "This saying," that Jesus is referring to in verse 11 is the statement the disciples make in verse 10 namely that it is better not to marry. The word *better* in verse 10 is translated as "advantageous" or "profitable"

(Danker, 2009:336; Yuan, 2018:107). When Jesus states that not everyone can accept this saying, but only those it has been given to, he was stating that not everyone can grasp that it is advantageous not to marry, but only those to whom the understanding has been given (Yuan, 2018:107). As Yuan explains (2018:107), Jesus was not stating that singleness was comparatively better than being married. He was relaying that, in light of the kingdom of heaven, singleness was just as beneficial as marriage (Yuan, 2018:107).

The point Jesus was making was that there were only two choices for people to make: either marry or be celibate. Jesus was saying it was not acceptable to become celibate like a eunuch because the stipulations for divorce were too strict (Reeves *et al.*, 2017:377). He was explaining that the only reason to live like a eunuch was for the sake of the Kingdom, unless there was some physical defect incurred by force or accident (Reeves *et al.*, 2017:376). Jesus says: “Let anyone accept this who can” (v. 12). He is explaining that deciding to be celibate is not a choice for everyone, but only for those who can accept that way of life (Reeves *et al.*, 2017:376).

When Vines writes that celibacy is a gift, quoting Jesus’ saying that “those to whom it has been given,” he misuses the text. Vines does not deal with the context of Matthew 19:1-12. Jesus never mentions a gift of celibacy, nor is he referring to a gift of celibacy when he makes the statement in verse 11 cited above. Jesus is referring to the understanding about the advantages of being celibate (Yuan, 2018:107). As Yuan succinctly says, Jesus is saying the following: “Let the one who is able to understand this saying, it’s advantageous not to marry, understand it” (Yuan, 2018:108). When Jesus says that those who can, should accept celibacy,” he is not referring to people who have a gift to be celibate as opposed to those who do not. What is being “accepted” or “received” is not a gift of celibacy, but the gift is the understanding that singleness is good (Yuan, 2018:108). Again, Vines misrepresents Jesus’ statement. Jesus is not referring to a gift of celibacy. He is referring to the proper understanding that singleness is advantageous.

Third, even if Jesus was referring to a gift of celibacy in Matthew 19:10-11, it would not support the conclusion that homosexual relationships would be biblically acceptable for same-sex-attracted people who do not have the gift. Jesus upholds heterosexual marriage in Matthew 19:1-12. In Matthew 19:1-12, the Pharisees question Jesus about the subject of divorce. Jesus explains that Moses granted the bill of divorce due to the hardened hearts of the people; they were unwilling to obey God's permanent intention for marriage (Reeves *et al.*, 2017:375). Moses established the divorce bill in the Law in order to protect women from men who might attempt to frivolously divorce them and marry another: for instance, when a woman had been a faithful wife, she should not be a victim of divorce (Reeves *et al.*, 2017:376).

Jesus reiterates the Torah and design for marriage that the Torah depicts (Reeves *et al.*, 2017:375-376). He reiterates that marriage was designed to be a permanent relationship between man and woman, as he appeals to Genesis 1:1, Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24:

"Haven't you read," He replied, "that He who created[a] them in the beginning made them male and female" and He also said: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined 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, man must not separate (Matt. 19:4-6).

Vines uses Matthew 19 for his celibacy argument to support his overarching argument that homosexual practice should be accepted. Yet, Matthew 19 actually reinforces the traditional biblical interpretation of marriage, which does not include same-sex relationships. When Jesus says - "Haven't you read?" - bringing in the references from Genesis, he responds with a more authoritative statement (Osborne *et al.*, 2010:751). According to Jewish hermeneutics, the older the reference used in the Torah, the more authoritative one's statement becomes. Jesus's reference of Genesis as regards the permanence and design for marriage outweighs the Pharisees' quote from the divorce text in Deuteronomy 24:1 (Osborne *et al.*, 2010:751). Jesus explains the permanence of the marriage

between man (male) and woman (female) as God's plan from the very beginning of creation. Jesus demonstrates that a correct answer to divorce is rooted in the correct understanding of the nature of marriage, which goes to the very beginning of creation, where God created the marriage union between one man and one woman (DeYoung, 2015:31).

Vines is silent concerning Jesus' clear description of the marriage union between male and female in Matthew 19:4-6. Providing no explanation of Jesus' clear description, he pivots back to his previous point that the understandings of sexuality were different in biblical times than today. Vines has no explanation for Jesus' clear description of marriage between male and female in Matthew 19:4, he simply ignores it. As established in chapter 2, there was limited knowledge of sexual orientation in the ancient world. However, this has no bearing on Jesus' definition of the proper marriage union. He states that *from the beginning*, God created male and female to come together in marriage. Sexual orientation would not have been a factor.

Not only do Jesus' words affirm heterosexual marriage, but they also show that celibacy is a choice. Celibacy is described as a state of life that many are born into or they automatically enter due to castration or a physical defect. In the case of castration, or a physical defect, celibacy could be considered involuntary or forced, but castration or a physical defect is not the focus of this discussion. For the same-sex-attracted person, celibacy can be chosen by those who can accept that way of life (Matthew 19:10-11). Jesus' third description of the eunuch, who makes the choice for the kingdom, applies to this discussion.

Celibacy is a way of life that is chosen for the sake of (because of) the kingdom. There are people who choose not to marry or engage in sexual relationships because of their devotion to God. St. Jerome even commented that one who made the choice to live celibate for the Kingdom, made a spiritual decision (Jerome, 2008:217). This echoes Jesus's words in Matthew 16:24 that, if someone desires to be a disciple of Jesus, they themselves must make the choice to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow him.

Jesus is again calling disciples to the humble and sacrificial life when he describes the one who makes themselves a eunuch for the sake of the kingdom. Eunuchs were looked down upon in the first-century world. They were not allowed to enter the temple according to Deuteronomy 23:1 (Reeves *et al.*, 2017:377). Eunuchs were seen as men without honour because the loss of the male genitalia was seen as a loss of honour (Reeves *et al.*, 2017:377). Male virility was stressed in the Greco-Roman world in the first century. In the Old Testament, becoming a eunuch was also the sign of a divine curse and a punishment from God (Isa. 39:7). The Greek word *eunouchos* (eunuch) not only referred to castrated men, but also plants and animals that could not bear offspring or seed (Yuan, 2018:106). Eunuch is also a metaphor for those involuntarily celibate and those who choose to be celibate (Yuan, 2018:107). When Jesus described those who remain celibate for the kingdom as eunuchs, he was emphasizing the humility that a disciple had to have to follow Jesus. Celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom was never a command, and never was it forced. Whenever Jesus called people to become his disciples and to “take the low roads” (Matt. 16:24, 18:2, 19:12) it was always the choice of the prospective disciple to follow or not (Reeves *et al.*, 2017:377).

Celibacy, or any other sacrifice one makes to follow Jesus, is a choice. One makes the choice to follow the standard the Scriptures lay before him or her to be a follower of Jesus Christ. 1 John 5:3 explains that God’s commands are not burdensome. This word *burdensome* in the Greek denotes “heavy in weight” or “heavy with difficulty” (Abbott-Smith, 2000:75-76; Danker, 2009:68). What God commands is not too heavy to bear, because those who have been born of God are able to overcome the world because of God (1 John 5:3-4). Furthermore, God gives his Holy Spirit to help the believer in their weakness and need.

3.2.2.1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 7 is also used by Vines and others to further the argument that celibacy is a spiritual gift that many do not possess, thus concluding that homosexual practice should be biblically accepted for same-sex oriented people. However, Vines engages in the same misinterpretation of 1 Corinthians 7 as he

does Matthew 19:1-12. He reiterates in his section concerning 1 Corinthians 7 that Paul calls celibacy a gift, then describes the experiences of his friend Stephen who was gay and was damaged by his efforts to be celibate.

At the beginning of 1 Corinthians 7, Paul discusses several principles about marriage. Within this text, he explains that part of the reason marriage is good is because it helps people avoid sexual immorality (1 Cor. 7:1-5). Then, in verses six through seven, Paul writes these words that have become the basis for the belief that celibacy is a spiritual gift: "I say the following as a concession, not as a command. I wish that all people were just like me. But each has his own gift from God, one person in this way and another in that way" (1 Cor. 7:6-7).

Marriage and singlehood are both valuable states of life for the believer. A marriage can provide a picture to the world of the relationship that Christ has with the Church. The single life can provide the celibate person the opportunity to be fully devoted to ministry and pleasing the Lord. The Bible speaks of both in positive terms. For Paul, the single and celibate life is better for some people because their attention is not divided between the Lord and a spouse (1 Cor. 7:32-35). The question here is what Paul means when he writes: "Each has his own gift from God." Was Paul referring to the spiritual gifts of the spirit, or was he referring to something else?

1 Corinthians is the second of four letters that Paul wrote to the Corinthian church. The apostle wrote this epistle from Ephesus during his third missionary journey around 56 AD (Lea & Black, 2003:408). Paul wrote this letter in order to address doctrine and moral issues within the church. Chapter 7 concerns Paul's advice on marriage. The Greco-Roman culture varied in its sexual practices and sexual liberties, and this could also be said specifically of the city of Corinth. As explained in the previous chapter, Corinth was known for its sexual activity and idolatry. It embodied a hedonistic culture and some believed that sex could not be fully enjoyed within the marriage union (Um, 2015:77). Therefore, some in the church became overly ascetic, believing that couples should refrain from sex in marriage (Collins, 2013:122; Schreiner *et al.*, 2018:13; Lim & Menzies, 1991:53, 113; Um,

2015:79). This is why Paul begins with explaining that sex in marriage is good. If couples decide to abstain this should be mutually agreed upon for a certain period of time in order to guard against the lack of self-control. Paul explains that marriage and celibacy were both acceptable, while those who were celibate had the advantage of living undistracted lives before God (1 Cor. 7:32-35).

Where Paul specifically mentions some kind of gift of celibacy occurs in the beginning of 1 Corinthians 7:7-9:

I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion (1 Cor. 7:7-9).

Paul begins chapter 7 in verse 1 by indicating that he is responding to a belief within the church: "it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman" (Collins, 2013:122, Schreiner *et al.*, 2018:131). He responds, writing that married people should have sexual relations with one another, and that the bodies of the husband and wife belong to one another (1 Cor. 7:1-6). He ends in verse eight by stating that it is good for the widow and the unmarried to stay unmarried but, if they cannot practice self-control, they should marry to avoid burning with sexual passion.

In verse six, Paul writes that married couples should not deprive each other from sex unless mutually agreed upon, so that Satan could not tempt either spouse because they lack self-control. Then, in verse 7, Paul states: "I say this as a concession, not as a command. I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that" (1 Cor. 7:6-7). Paul encourages sex in marriage as a concession and not as a command (1 Cor. 7:6). He prefers that people would be single as he is, but he realises that everyone had different gifts (1 Cor. 7:7). Though Paul prefers celibacy for people, he never says it is mandatory, because some people are not gifted for celibacy (Oropeza, 2017:92, Schreiner *et al.*, 2018:134, 137; Elwell, 2001:218). It is from

this point that Vines contends everyone does not have the gift of celibacy, therefore, celibacy should not be forced upon gay Christians.

Celibacy as a spiritual gift is a common belief shared by many (Turner, 2008:463). As indicated, the word in the Greek that Paul uses for “gift” is *charisma* (1 Cor. 7:7):

I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own **gift** from God; one has this gift, another has that.

θέλω [a]δὲ πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἶναι ὡς καὶ ἐμαυτόν· ἀλλὰ ἕκαστος ἴδιον [b]ἔχει **χάρισμα** (*charisma*) ἐκ θεοῦ, [c]ὁ μὲν οὕτως, [d]ὁ δὲ οὕτως.

The way in which Paul uses the word “gift” in 1 Corinthians 7 and in the other passages of Scripture which display the gifts of the Spirit (Rom. 12:3-8; Eph. 4:7-13; 1 Cor. 12:8-10) is critical when it comes to understanding the difference between the gifts of the spirit and that of being celibate, which Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 7. While the spiritual gifts are given to equip and the building up the church, the gifting of celibacy that Paul mentions is geared toward the sustaining of the believer in living a holy life. However, there is a need for clarity about the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 19 concerning celibacy in 1 Corinthians 7. Jesus does not refer to celibacy as a gift in Matthew 19:1-12: it is a chosen way of life. According to Paul, celibacy is a gift that seemingly only some possess. Their perspectives seem diametrically opposed. The reconciling of the perceived tension in the text between Paul and Jesus is the answer to how one should view the “gift of celibacy.”

In 1 Corinthians 12:4, Paul uses the Greek word *χαρισμά* (*charisma*) to refer to the gifts of the spirit which God gives the church: “Now there are different gifts (*charisma*), but the same Spirit.” Then he goes on to say that there are different manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit (φανέρωσις τοῦ πνεύματος) in verse 7. This means that not every person will have the same spiritual gift. This word, *χαρισμά* (*charisma*), is the same word Paul uses to describe celibacy in 1 Corinthians 7:7. When he is discussing celibacy, Paul even goes on to say that

one person is given a certain gift, and then a different kind of gift is given to another. Thus, it would seem Vines has a point. If God gifts some people with celibacy and others he does not, then it would seem some people are not meant to be celibate. They would not be able to bear it because God has not given them the gift. It would seem that Vines' perspective is correct. It would seem unjust to place celibacy as the only option for same-sex oriented Christians because every 'gay Christian' may not have the gift of celibacy.

However, Romans 12 presents another picture of the gifts that is often overlooked. In Romans 12:5-8. Paul provides a diverse list of gifts that he says are given by grace to every believer:

In the same way we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. According to the grace (*charisma*) given to us, we have different gifts: If prophecy, use it according to the standard of one's faith; if service, in service; if teaching, in teaching; if exhorting, in exhortation; giving, with generosity; leading, with diligence; showing mercy, with cheerfulness.

Some of the gifts listed are those he considers gifts of the Spirit. These are manifestations of the Spirit to execute certain acts such as healing, performing miracles and interpretation of tongues, as laid out in 1 Corinthians 12:7-8. The other gifts listed in Romans 12:5-8 are not what would be defined as manifestations of the Spirit, such as service and generous giving. Yet, these *charismata* are behaviours that reflect Christian character. Christian character in any form is only produced by the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, Paul speaks of the *charismata* in Romans 12:6 with no mention of the Spirit (Hawthorne *et al.*, 1996:50). The differences in Paul's use of *charisma* in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 are important when it comes to understanding how Paul uses the word *charisma* in 1 Corinthians 7:7. The different usages demonstrate that *charisma* does not necessarily refer to manifestations of the Spirit in visible ways such as tongues or prophecy that all may or may not possess as portrayed in 1 Corinthians 12 (Hawthorne *et al.*, 1996:50). Hawthorne shows a transition from the use of *charisma* as a manifestation of the gifts in 1 Corinthians 7 to Christian

behaviour in Romans 12 (Hawthorne *et al.*, 1996:50). The grace to express Christian ethical character is in view.

This sheds light on 1 Corinthians 7:6-7. Paul is not referring to the manifestations of the Spirit that people are given, such as the ability to speak in tongues. He is referring to the grace that God gives to a believer to live out a godly life, producing Godly practices and character. *Charisma* is a gift of grace (Marshall, 2008:101). If a person chooses celibacy for the kingdom, as Jesus explained some do in Matthew 19:12, God gives them the grace to live out that choice for the kingdom. We know this because the Apostle Peter assured the early church that God gives everyone what is required to live a godly life (2 Pet. 3:1). Paul does not refer to people as being “called to celibacy.” When Paul uses the word “calling,” in 1 Corinthians 7, he is referring to salvation, not celibacy (Yuan, 2018:114). People are not “called to celibacy,” but they can choose it. When both Jesus’s words, and Paul’s words concerning celibacy are considered, the “gift” of celibacy that Paul refers to is the grace that God gives to the believer who decides to choose that way of life for the sake of the kingdom.

3.3 Is celibacy damaging to gay Christians?

Since it has been biblically established that celibacy is not forced, it is necessary to address Vines’s claim that celibacy is harmful for gay Christians. Vines paints a dark and discouraging picture of celibacy for same-sex-attracted Christians. He writes that the challenge of mandatory celibacy goes far beyond a gay Christian’s mere capacity to live it out (Vines, 2014:50). Forced celibacy corrodes gay Christians’ capacity in general for relationships (Vines, 2014:50). Furthermore, forcing gay Christians to be celibate causes them to loathe their bodies, devalue themselves and view all their sexual desires as temptations to sin (Vines, 2014:50). Vines attempts to provide biblical support for his belief by referencing 1 Timothy 4:1-5, and he concludes that forced abstention from marriage is wrong because it creates hostility toward God’s creation (Vines, 2014:50). The problem with Vines’s assertions about the harmfulness of celibacy is that he neglects the complexities of mental and emotional struggles, and he does not address the testimonies of gay Christians who do not fit his model of despair. He also uses 1

Timothy 4:1-5 out of context. Moreover, celibacy does not create hostility toward God's creation.

3.3.1 The complexities of mental and emotional health issues

Copious research concerning the prevalence of suicide ideation and mental health issues illuminate the hard reality many LGBTQ people face. LGBTQ individuals are nearly twice as likely to report suicidal ideation and have higher rates of suicide attempts in comparison to those who are heterosexual (Lytle *et al.*, 2015:39-40; Sutter and Perrin, 2016:98). Several research studies show that, in comparison to heterosexual individuals, gay and lesbian people suffer from low wellbeing and a greater extent of mental health issues such as suicide and substance abuse (Meyer, 2013:674; Semlyen, 2016:2). In fact, LGBTQ people have been victims of human rights abuses and prejudice all over the world (Meyer, 2013:680).

Some researchers refer to the *minority stress theory* in order to gauge the mental health and affects of social stigma that LGBTQ people face. This theory attempts to assess the excess stress to which individuals from stigmatised social categories are exposed as a result of their social position, often a minority one (Meyer, 2013:675). Meyer explains that the term *minority stress* is not commonly used, but a minority stress model is inferred from several sociological and social psychological theories that discuss the adverse effects of social conditions, such as prejudice and stigma, on the lives of affected individuals and groups (Meyer, 2013:675). Minority stress theory suggests that disparities in mental health between heterosexual populations and LGBTQ populations are due to the difference in exposure to stigma and prejudice (Meyer, 2013:675). These disparities are more prevalent among LGBTQ people because they are more likely to be exposed to stigma and prejudice than heterosexuals in our society (Meyer, 2013:675). Thus, LGBTQ people will experience greater stress and negative health consequences (Meyer, 2013:675).

Based on the minority stress theory, Barnes and Meyer (2012:506) assess the effects of non-affirming religious affiliations on LGBTQ people and internalised

homophobia as stressors. Internalised homophobia refers to the LGBTQ person's internalisation of society's negative attitudes and beliefs about homosexuality and directing these attitudes towards one's self (Barnes & Meyer, 2012:506). Internalised homophobia has been linked to several mental health and emotional issues such as sexual risk-taking, suicidal ideation, anxiety, depression, lower well-being and overall self-esteem (Barnes & Meyer, 2012:506). Barnes and Meyer (2012) explain that non-affirming religious environments and religious teaching can create stressors that cultivate internal homophobia. In their study of LGBTQ people in non-affirming religious settings, Barnes and Meyer found that (1) participants who attended in non-affirming religious settings had significantly higher internalised homophobia than those who attended affirming settings or those who never attended affirming settings and (2) both non-affirming religious affiliation and frequency of attendance in non-affirming settings were unrelated to self-esteem, demonstrating that the patterns regarding non-affirming religious exposures and internalised homophobia are specific to one's sense of oneself as a gay, lesbian or bisexual person - while they are not specific to global self-esteem (Barnes & Meyer, 2012:509). Internalised homophobia refers to specific self-esteem which is the positive or negative way in which someone regards the LGBTQ aspect of their identity (Barnes & Meyer, 2012:507). Global self-esteem is an individual's positive or negative attitude toward the self as a whole (Barnes & Meyer, 2012:507). Barnes and Meyer conclude that an LGBTQ person's participation in non-affirming religious environments is associated with higher levels of internalised homophobia. Internalised homophobia can be a critical predictor of depression in homosexual men (Rosser *et al.*, 2008:198).

Another study found that general anxiety disorder (GAD) symptoms were most prevalent among gay and lesbian people who frequented conservative non-affirming churches (Hamblin & Gross, 2013:823). Religious affiliation with churches who do not accept homosexual practice has been repeatedly linked to mental health issues among gay and lesbian people (Subhi & Geelan, 2012:1397-1398). A wealth of psychological research points not only to higher levels of mental health issues among LGBTQ people, but psychologists link some of those mental health troubles to non-affirming religious affiliation. These

findings would seem to bolster Vines's belief. It would seem that the Church should reassess its traditional belief concerning homosexual practice if people are truly suffering from mental hardship due to the church's stance.

What must be understood about mental health is that the reasons for mental health issues are complex and cannot be deduced to one factor or reason. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) mental illnesses are conditions that affect a person's thinking, feeling, mood or behaviour, such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder or schizophrenia. Such conditions may be occasional or long-lasting (chronic) and affect someone's ability to relate to others and function each day (CDC, 2018). Furthermore, mental health issues are common in the US. The CDC reports that one in five Americans will experience mental health issues in a given year, and more than 50% will be diagnosed with a mental illness or disorder at some point in their lifetime (CDC, 2018). As previously stated, the causes for mental health issues and disorders are complex: they cannot be reduced to one single factor. For example, neurologist Dr Helen Mayberg was involved in research that singled out a region of the brain that, if overactive, could be linked to depression (APA, 2012). This area of the brain interacts with other areas that influence mood, emotion and thinking (APA, 2012). Dr Mayberg demonstrated that deep-brain stimulation of the area could alleviate symptoms in people with treatment-resistant depression (Icahn School of Medicine, 2021; APA, 2012). She nonetheless noted that it would be difficult to reduce one single cause of mental health issues such as viewing depression purely in neurological terms. Depression, like other mental illnesses, according to Dr Mayberg, are often catchall categories that include many different underlying malfunctions (APA, 2012). In other words, mental illnesses are complex and are linked with complex factors, influences and causes (APA, 2012). There can be environmental, chemical and genetic factors that cause mental illness, such as sexual assault, childhood abuse, drug use, alcohol use, use of prescribed medication, disruptions in brain chemistry and neurotransmitters, isolation and more (CDC, 2018; Mayo Clinic, 2019). While some religious spaces may be hostile to LGBTQ people, mental health issues should not be reduced to

religious environments. Vines does not account for the complexities and different factors that influence one's mental health.

3.3.2 Research on the experiences of gay and celibate Christians

Dr Mark Yarhouse, a Christian psychologist who has done considerable research concerning gay Christians and their religious experiences found that, in a study of the lives of eight gay celibate Christians, seven believed God had a positive view of them in light of their same-sex attraction (Yarhouse *et al.*, 2017:55). One participant commented that “[Initially] I saw my same-sex attraction as being something that was fundamentally noxious to God as opposed to something that He accepted me in my brokenness and moved me on toward holiness” (Yarhouse *et al.*, 2017:55).

All eight participants were asked about their views on celibacy as same-sex-attracted Christians and they all made a commitment to celibacy, yet three of those participants said it could change in light of new revelation or a changing situation (Yarhouse *et al.*, 2017:56). When asked about the benefits and risks of celibacy, four participants indicated that freedom to do whatever God desires and live without restrictions in serving God were commonly perceived benefits of being a celibate (Yarhouse *et al.*, 2017:56). The second most common benefit mentioned by three of them was emotional stability and safety. The former was defined as being able to avoid the emotional highs and lows of romantic relationships (Yarhouse *et al.*, 2017:56).

The prospect of life-long celibacy was also discussed and loneliness was the primary drawback mentioned by five of them (Yarhouse *et al.*, 2017:56). The participants talked about desiring the love and intimacy that marriage can provide. Though it would be difficult, life-long celibacy did not seem unbearable to some of the participants. One commented: “In terms of celibacy loneliness can be a major issue, and it is something that can definitely be discouraging. As hospitable as you can be there's a sense in which you might not find a person who you can share a life with” (Yarhouse *et al.*, 2017:56). Another participant shared the following: “some loneliness although I keep busy right now to kind of avoid that.

I think there is a real richness in life when you are connected with somebody else on a deeper level and I feel like in some ways I am not able to experience that richness.” Another participant said : “my experience is that it is not unbearable on a day-to-day basis so long as you have good community and I think there’s a lot of both opportunities and challenges in any human life.” Similarly, another commented: “it definitely feels overwhelming sometimes and it’s something that without good close friends and good community at church I just don’t know if I am going to be in it for the long haul" (Yarhouse *et al.*, 2017:56).

The participants were also asked about their relational health and hopes. Six answered, and most said they saw themselves as having the capacity to establish healthy and fulfilling relationships with others (Yarhouse *et al.*, 2017:5). Even though this study focused on a small sample of celibate gay Christians, it sheds light on the real experiences of gay celibate Christians.

In an empirical analysis concerning the emotional health of celibate gay Christians, Dr Yarhouse and Dr Zaporozhets present findings from several studies conducted to evaluate the emotional and spiritual state of celibate gay Christians in their 2019 book *Costly obedience: What we can learn from from the lives of celibate gay Christians*. In one study, 300 celibate gay Christians completed the DASS-21. The depression, anxiety and stress scale (DASS-21) measures the level of one’s depression, anxiety and stress from low to severe. The findings from this study showed that almost 80% (79.1) of participants fell in the normal range of depression (Yarhouse & Zaporozhets, 2019:90, eBook). The study also found that 93% percent fell into the normal range for anxiety and 94% into the normal range for stress (Yarhouse & Zaporozhets, 2019:90, eBook).

As a final note, celibacy is not always life-long commitment for gay celibate Christians. There are those who enter into mixed orientation marriages. A mixed orientation marriage is one between a gay or bisexual individual and a heterosexual spouse (Hernandez *et al.*, 2011:307). These marriages can be complex and require more research. The few studies on MOMs show hardships and successes. Hernandez, Schwenke and Wilson (2011) provide a review of the

studies done on MOMs from 1988-2008 in the *Journal of marital and family therapy*.

An honest picture of celibacy for same-sex-attracted Christians involves acknowledging the highs and lows of their experiences. It also involves acknowledging the complexities of emotional and mental health. Though it is difficult in many aspects, there are positive experiences. This also emphasises the need for a solid Christian community to support celibate same-sex-attracted Christians. Reinterpretation of Scripture on homosexual practice is not needed here. What is needed is a strong Christian community that pushes gay Christians towards holiness and supports them on their journey.

3.4 It's not good for man to be alone

Loneliness is a real struggle for many people, no matter their sexual orientation. Vines, however, believes the experience of loneliness for gay Christians is a damaging reality that warrants a reinterpretation of Scripture. Vines believes that, just as it was not good for Adam to be alone because he experienced loneliness, so it is for the gay Christian. His argument will be examined here. Vines describes a situation in which Adam was lonely: "Now, Adam was not alone in only a romantic sense. He also lacked any human friendship or community, which would have made his loneliness all the more profound. But God didn't respond by giving Adam a group of friends. He gave Adam a spouse" (Vines, 2014:45). Vines believes that God provided a spouse to Adam to mend his loneliness, and believes the same should be done for gay Christians.

Theologically, this is problematic for several reasons. First, in the Genesis account of Eve's creation, Adam never says he is lonely. It was Yahweh who said "it was not good for man to be alone." Adam had a perfect relationship with Yahweh himself. Adam had never sinned: thus, he was holy and unblemished. Nothing hindered his relationship with God. Adam had the perfect relationship with the perfect God. Adam had the perfect companion and relationship which lacked nothing. Adam's state of being alone was not an indication of weakness or lacking on a relational level.

Second, God says it was not good for Adam to be alone. The Scripture does not indicate that God said this to Adam. God intentionally formed Eve from Adam's rib, which shows God's divine will that the biological woman be the perfect partner for man, and that she has the sameness and differences from Adam. Her differences are important and divinely intended. Genesis 2:18-25 is a divine internal thought process of God, leading to a subsequent act of creation, which was Eve (Carr, 2021:112). Adam was alone, being the alone human, but he was not lonely in the sense that he lacked adequate intimacy. He was already in a perfect relationship with God. This theological reality is only strengthened when one studies what Yahweh meant by it was not good that man be alone. The word translated *alone* does not speak of being alone in the sense of loneliness, or lacking an adequate relationship. In the Hebrew, the word translated *alone* is *lebaddô* (לְבַדּוֹ), which indicates solitude or separation, or "by itself", and does not mean lacking intimacy of relationships (Brown-Driver-Briggs, 2017:94; Longman *et al.*, 2009:101). Another example of this usage is found several times in the Old Testament, signifying separation, not lacking companionship (Gen. 26:1, 42:38, 43:32; Ex. 26:9). For example, *lebaddôis* is used to describe when Abraham "separated seven ewe lambs from the flock" as part of the oath he made to Abimelech (Gen. 21:28). Another example is found in the story of Jacob. Jacob is described as *lebaddô* once he had sent his family ahead of him to meet Esau and wrestled with God (Gen. 32:24) *Lebaddô* does not indicate that Adam lacked true intimacy. It indicates that Adam was literally by himself without a partner. Adam needed a partner and helper to fulfil the assignment to be fruitful and multiply. He could not do that by himself as a separate individual: he needed a partner to share in the work. This is important, because Vines writes that the creation of Eve emphasises his need for relationship and not that of procreation (Vines, 2014:45). It would have been impossible for Adam to fulfil God's assignment to procreate without Eve. Her companionship and intimacy were important and needed as a partner. However, her biological sex allowed her to be the complete complement needed to fit Adam's separateness in order to fulfil the assignment.

Loneliness is a sincere burden for many same-sex-attracted but also for others. Without God, we can never know true intimacy or security. Vines's characterisation that Adam was lonely seems to suggest that Adam was lacking the intimacy he needed, but this, again, is not a correct reading of the Scriptures. While loneliness is a real burden for many people, marriage is not the avenue in which true intimacy is fulfilled. Many people still experience loneliness even in marriage. This is because true intimacy can only be fulfilled through a relationship with God. This is difficult for people to experience and live out because every individual is marred by a sinful nature that is a war with holiness which enables us to have a proper relationship with God. Nevertheless, this does not mean the truth of Scripture should be reinterpreted to justify what the Bible deems sinful in order to fulfil a perceived need like companionship and intimacy.

So far, it has been established that celibacy is a voluntary decision that some gay Christians may make out of their devotion to God. Celibacy is not a manifestation of a gift of the Spirit that only some people can obtain. Anyone who makes the choice to be celibate will receive the free grace of God to live out that life. Celibacy has its highs and lows, but with a strong Christian community and the Holy Spirit people can live rich and fulfilled lives as celibate and single Christians.

3.5 Celibacy in the early Western Church

3.5.1 Celibacy in first-century Judaism

The first *mitzvah* (command) according to Jewish tradition resides in Genesis 1:28: "And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" The first commandment given to man was to be fruitful and multiply, that is, having sex in marriage. Obedience to Genesis 1:28 was considered obligatory in first-century Judaism, though the precise nature of the obligation has been disputed (Collins, 2013:56). For example, early disciples of the great Rabbi Hillel in the first century BC believed Genesis 1:28 was correctly followed if a man fathered a daughter and a son. Disciples of Rabbi Shammuel in the same period believed

that the *mitzvah* of Genesis 1:28 was satisfied if a man fathered two sons (Collins, 2013:56). The idea of celibacy, especially in light of Genesis 1:28, would have been seen as a diminishing of the image of God and incompatible with the holiness that the Torah espoused (Collins, 2013:56).

Rabbinic literature saw marriage not only as a commandment from Yahweh, but marriage was the best way a man could carry on his life. The celibate man was regarded as “without peace, without blessing, without goodness and without joy” (Collins, 2013:56). The unmarried man was seen to be without goodness because it was “not good that man should be alone,” according to the Torah (Collins, 2013:56). A man would also be seen as incomplete because of the Torah’s detailing that reads: “Male and female He created them” (Collins, 2013: 56). Rabbinic history generally looks negatively on celibacy, because the Torah instructs men to be fruitful and multiply.

First-century Jewish philosophers likewise attest to the goodness of marriage. Philo of Alexandria was a Jewish philosopher and a contemporary of Jesus who believed that the purpose of sexual union between man and woman was procreation (Collins, 2013:67). Philo warned against excessive sexual passion, but believed that sex within marriage was good (Collins, 2013:67). Celibacy was acceptable to Philo, if a man had already been married and had children (Collins, 2013:67-68). First-century Jewish historian Flavius Joseph also believed marriage to be a normal part of Jewish life for procreation (Collins, 2013:69).

Though Rabbinic history generally looked negatively on celibacy, there were those in the Jewish community who practiced celibacy. The Essenes were a small Jewish sect that practiced celibacy in the first century (Lea & Black, 2003:58). They were a monastic-like group that practiced celibacy, yet there were also those who did marry (Collins, 2013:65). The Essenes, who lived in the dessert of Qumran, were celibate, in contrast to those who were city dwellers. Scholars vary in their beliefs for the reasons for celibacy among the Essenes. There are those who believe they practiced celibacy to guard against semen pollution. It was their desire to keep sexual activity distanced from holy spaces, such as the Temple,

so that those activities would not pollute those holy places (Collins, 2013:65). Other reasons include always being ready for eschatological war and considering marriage or sexual relations as cultic activities (Collins, 2013:65).

3.5.2 Celibacy in the early Church

Celibacy and marriage have both been praised within the history of Christianity, contrasting Jewish tradition which generally held marriage in high regard. Jesus and his inner circle of disciples were celibate. They were not celibate only in the sense of abstaining from sexual activity, but there were those, like Peter, who were married and gave up the typical married life for the Kingdom (Heid, 2000:18). Celibacy has been viewed as a higher state of consecration and giftedness as well. In the infancy of Christianity, marriage and celibacy were not major subjects in early Christian literature after The New Testament writings. Marriage was the norm in the early Church, even though celibacy existed. From the reign of emperor Nero until the time of Constantine in the fourth century, Christians experienced persecution for their faith. The Edict of Milan in 313 AD extended the free exercise of religion to “Christians and all others” (Ferguson, 2013:182). Constantine made certain changes to the law such as outlawing crucifixion and concubinage and repealed former Roman laws on celibacy (Davis, 1990:30).

The second century saw the growing influence of asceticism in the early church. Asceticism influenced the rise of celibacy and it became more practiced and venerated. Virginity was prized in women and some men castrated themselves in order to control their sexual desires (Kaatz, 2013:21). Jesus' description of eunuchs in Matthew 19 became the reason some believed that voluntary castration, celibacy and asceticism were needed for the consecrated Christian life (Kaatz, 2013:24). The words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 moved many Christian women to deny sexual activity in order to be fully devoted to their faith (Kaatz, 2013:23).

The rise of encratism made celibacy more appealing to many in the early Church as well. Encratism is a form of asceticism that espouses hostility to the human

body and marriage (Ferguson, 2013:102-103; Heid, 2018:64). One of the beliefs within encratism was that human reproduction was evil and a hindrance to a higher life (Ferguson, 2013:102). Thus, celibacy became attractive to those seeking to live pious lives. Encratism attracted many Christians and became substantially influential in the early churches of Asia Minor and Syria (Heid, 2018:64). The growing presence of ascetic movements pushed the early church fathers to define and clarify church doctrine, especially concerning the human body, sexuality, and ultimately sin (Heid, 2018:66).

The early Church fathers also upheld the goodness of marriage and celibacy. Clement of Rome held marriage in high regard, and also the practice of celibacy, writing that some of the apostles, though married, remained continent even in marriage (Heid, 2018:71-74). Second-century church father Tertullian also addresses celibacy. Vines quotes Tertullian on his beliefs that “hostile attacks” against marriage were “a polluted thing, to the disparagement of the Creator” (Vines, 2014:52). He goes on to quote Tertullian on Christians who forbid marriage, saying that they “devalue[d] the body and also denied the resurrection” by forbidding marriage (Vines, 2014:52). The point Vines is trying to make is that Tertullian upheld the goodness of marriage because he believed in the goodness of God's creation (Vines, 2014:53). Vines argues that marriage and sex are good parts of God's creation, and forcing gay Christians into celibacy teaches them to hate their bodies and their sexuality (Vines, 2014:53-54). The problem with Vines's cursory presentation of Tertullian's statements on marriage is that he does not adequately explain the context of the statements, which have nothing to do with the context of homosexual practice; nor does Vines address Tertullian's view of homosexual practice, which contradicts the trajectory his argument. When Tertullian made those statements, he was addressing the heretical views of Marcion, a second-century heretic, and one of his views was that sex was abhorrent (Ferguson, 2013:8). Marcion rejected the sanctity of marriage and believed only virgins, those celibate and the unmarried could be baptised (Roberts *et al.*, 1885:296). In fact, Tertullian's full statement must be taken into consideration, and not the cursory attempt presented by Vines. In regards to marriage and celibacy, the full quote of the short statement Vines presented is:

For we do not reject marriage, but simply refrain from it.' Nor do we prescribe sanctity" as the rule, but only recommend it, observing it as a good, yea, even the better state, if each man uses it carefully according to his ability; but at the same time earnestly vindicating marriage, whenever hostile attacks are made against it is a polluted thing, to the disparagement of the Creator (Roberts *et al.*, 1885:294).

Tertullian goes on to criticise the Marconian belief that marriage is evil and can lead to sexual excess and impurity. Tertullian believed that marriage and sanctity (celibacy) were both good, but celibacy could be a better state if used properly (Roberts *et al.*, 1885:294). One of Tertullian's main arguments against Marion's stance on marriage was that it contradicted Marcionism itself. Tertullian found it to be contradiction to reject marriage, yet desire the salvation of man, because man could not be born without sexual relations, which ideally come from the marital union.

Marcionism promoted an unbiblical view of marriage and celibacy, and Tertullian wrote against that. It is likely Tertullian would have viewed Vines's assessment of sexuality at odds with the Christians faith. Tertullian wrote that God blessed marriage and it was an honourable state for procreation (Roberts, 1885:294). Tertullian upheld the goodness of marriage within the confines of God's natural order: male and female union. In *The Chaplet*, he explains that one of the ways in which one can discern what is proper Christian practice is by looking at God's natural law (Tertullian, 1959:226, Roberts *et al.*, 1885:95-96). Thus, Vines's argument fails when Tertullian's theology is considered. Tertullian did eventually become a Montanist and was deemed a heretic. Yet even his Montanist views on life would have promoted celibacy. However, his views on upholding the goodness of marriage would have never supported homosexual practice. In fact, Tertullian explicitly called homosexual practice shameful (Forston & Grams 2016:45). He believed that the only teaching that should be accepted by the Church should be that of the apostles themselves, or teachings that the apostles attested to, and homosexual practice would have been consistently condemned (Hall, 2002:28-29). Celibacy and marriage were both acceptable to Tertullian.

Second century church father Irenaeus, whom Vines also quotes, was one of the early church fathers who upheld the goodness of marriage in refutation of encratism (Ferguson, 2013:125; Hall, 2009:125). Irenaeus held to apostolic authority, as seen in his work *Against heresies*, which Vines uses for his quote. The problem here is that Irenaeus would not have seen the goodness of creation as a means to ultimately justify homosexual practice and discourage celibacy. Irenaeus agreed with Paul that homosexual practice was a sinful fruit of the carnal nature, as indeed documented in *Against heresies* (Robertson *et al.*, 1885:536-537).

Vines also quotes Jerome, Ignatius and Augustine in order to show that they upheld the goodness of marriage (Vines, 2014:52-53). Where people did attempt to condemn marriage, those attempts were criticised. Vines argues that the early church fathers upheld the goodness of marriage because it showed the goodness of God's creation. This gets to Vines's core belief concerning celibacy: that requiring celibacy from gay Christians makes them reject and loathe their sexuality and bodies, the very things that God created and considered good (Vines 2014:53-57). He also uses Augustine to substantiate his position that the Church did not support forced celibacy and gay Christians should not be helped to maintain that requirement. Ambrose and Augustine both saw homosexual practice as sin and viewed celibacy as noble (Fortson & Grams, 48-49).

Augustine is an interesting source here. He struggled with being promiscuous and even had a relationship with a concubine for several years. Augustine describes in his writings his struggle with lust and sexual promiscuity. These sexual struggles gave him a deep understanding of sinful nature and the need for the grace of God (Liftin, 2007:216-222; Hall, 2002:136-138). Later in his life he became celibate and lived a monastic life. In Augustine's eyes marriage and celibacy are both valuable, however celibacy is an honourable and holy way to live in order to produce self-restraint and sexual purity (Hunter, 2018:190). Augustine did write that celibacy was a gift. Augustine saw his sexual lust as a form a slavery (Liftin, 2007:218), which he could be freed from by the grace of God. He chose celibacy and started a small monastic community because he

believed that this was the best way for him to live a pure life as a Christian (Brown, 1988). Augustine saw celibacy as a gift, yet he made the choice to be celibate. He would have supported the choice of celibacy by a gay Christian. He explicitly condemned homosexual practice (Fortson & Grams 2016:48-49). He would have viewed the gay Christian's choice of celibacy as an honourable path to take to live a holy life, renouncing the bondage of sexual struggle. Augustine would have rejected the argument that celibacy is a gift that only certain people have so that homosexual practice should be allowed within the Christian faith. He would have seen this as an egregious misuse of the Scriptures to which he held strict adherence (Fortson & Grams, 2016:313-314).

Irenaeus also railed against the Encratite prohibition of marriage. However, Irenaeus, believing in the goodness of creation, would not have supported homosexual practice as part of the affirmation of the goodness of God's creation. Vines neglects Irenaeus's theological position in order to support his argument that the upholding the goodness of marriage entails upholding the goodness of creation and ultimately the goodness of sexuality and the support of homosexual practice.

Marriage and celibacy have both been valued by the early church, yet celibacy, in the eyes of many, was considered a higher and pious Christian state. Celibacy was a gift, but it was a gifted state that anyone could choose to adopt in order to live a godly life, if desired. As regards homosexual practice, the early fathers would indubitably supported celibacy in contrast to affirming homosexual practice in the church.

3.5.3 Clerical Celibacy

Clerical celibacy in the Catholic Church has been a controversial topic for centuries. Though it goes beyond the scope of this work, it will be briefly discussed as part of the history of the church's grappling with celibacy. There is an ongoing debate about mandated celibacy of clergy in the early church. From a scriptural standpoint, there was no mandate in the early church for church leaders to be celibate; in fact, the writings of the New Testament point to clergy

that would be married (1 Tim. 3:-1-3, Titus 1:6-9; Heid, 2000:18). By the 4th century, voluntary castration, a form of celibacy chosen by some, was discussed at the Council of Nicaea. Third-century church father Origen voluntarily castrated himself out of his devotion to the faith and became widely known for it, ultimately becoming a leader in the church (Kaatz, 2013:23). It was determined at the Council of Nicaea that men who voluntarily castrated themselves, should not be clergy (Kaatz, 2013:24). However, the practice of voluntary castration continued even after this decision.

It was also in the fourth century that attitudes toward clergy and marriage began to shift. At the Council of Elvira in the early fourth century, church fathers established that all clergy be celibate: "Bishops, presbyters, and deacons, and all other clerics having a position in the ministry, are ordered to abstain completely from their wives and not have children. Whoever, in fact, does not do this shall be expelled from the dignity of the clerical state" (Kaatz, 2013:84). Men in clergy who were already married had to abstain from sexual relations with their wives. The Council of Carthage in 390 AD solidified the mandated celibacy of Catholic clergy (Heid, 2000:243-245).

The issue at hand in Vines's theology is not clerical celibacy: it is celibacy of same-sex-attracted Christians, no matter who they are. This is important because Vines utilises the writing of Calvin and Luther, who were writing against clerical celibacy, to bolster his view. These authors railed against celibacy, and Vines rightly admits they were referring to clerical celibacy which was a major issue for the Reformation. Yet, mandated clerical celibacy is different from the average gay Christian making the decision to live sexually pure by choosing celibacy. Vines conflates two fundamentally different circumstances. Even when the theology of Luther and Calvin are considered, the trajectory of their arguments against celibacy would still reject Vines's support of homosexual practice.

Celibacy was a pious practice that reformers saw as a hindrance to true repentance and acceptance of salvation through grace (11-113). On the rare instances where he does mention homosexual practice, John Calvin considers it

a sin. Vines quotes Luther as follows: “you are foolish if you do not take a wife when passion stirs and you remain continent to the danger of your soul.” He uses this to demonstrate that Luther did not think celibacy should be forced. This quote was a part of Luther’s writing on monastic vows. Luther saw monastic vows and clerical celibacy as ineffective ways to deal with the issue of lust, with which all people struggle (Roberts, 2007:115-116). Marriage was a way in which to deal with that lust. He believed that, to make a vow of celibacy, was to depend on one’s own strength and not God’s (Roberts, 2007:116). Promising to never be sexually active is a vow that Luther believes is not within the ability of humanity (Roberts, 2007:115-116, Whitford, 2012:189). However, Luther did not mandate marriage for everyone, either. He believed that vows of celibacy were a choice that one made, not because they were necessary, but because they were optional (Roberts, 2007:116). Martin believed that celibacy should be a voluntary commitment, and not many could make that decision.

Luther explicitly saw homosexual practice as sin (Fortson & Grams 2016:79). For someone who had a same-sex orientation, he would not have questioned the biblical mandate of marriage and sex be between one man and one woman. He would have pointed to the celibate life or possibly even a heterosexual marriage for the same-sex-attracted person. Luther did argue that celibacy could not be forced, but he did believe it was a viable choice for some people. Homosexual practice would never have been accepted by Luther.

The early Church honoured the importance of marriage and defined it as a union between man and woman. Marriage between man and woman was the proper and only union for procreation, and it was the primary purpose of marriage. Celibacy was perceived as a higher and more pious calling, which eventually led to the mandate of celibacy for Catholic clergy. Clerical celibacy deals with vocation, but this is not the issue at hand in Vines’s argument, as indicated. The issue at hand entails the Christian person’s choice to practice celibacy out of devotion to God in order live a holy life before him, rejecting homosexual practice. Throughout the history of the Church, homosexual practice has been recognised as sin. Celibacy would be a viable option for those seeking to live a sexually pure

life and not monogamous homosexual marriage. The history of the Church does not affirm that.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter examined Vines's claim that celibacy is an unbiblical mandate forced upon gay Christians that ultimately cause them harm. Vines argues that celibacy is forced upon gay Christians and it is not fair because some may not have the gift of celibacy. The gift of celibacy is only given to certain people. It was established in this chapter that Vines's view on the gift of celibacy is not in accordance with Scripture. An examination of 1 Corinthians 7 and Jesus's words in Matthew 19 showed that celibacy is a choice that God will give to someone the grace to live out if they choose it for the Kingdom.

Vines also argues that celibacy is damaging to gay Christians, causing them emotional and mental pain. As has been demonstrated in this chapter, that is not the experience of all gay Christians, and Vines neglects the testimonies and research that do not share his belief. Moreover, emotional and mental health issues are complex and religious experience can be one of the many factors that affect it. Celibacy can be a difficult road for many people, but it can also be a rich experience that is strengthened by Christian community. Finally, Christian tradition has generally upheld the goodness of marriage, and celibacy. Even though the early church fathers differed in their particular views, they all unanimously rejected homosexual practice. Upholding the goodness of marriage and celibacy would never include same-sex relationships.

CHAPTER 4

THE OLD TESTAMENT, CULTURE AND CHRISTIAN OBEDIENCE

One of the primary arguments Vines makes is that Christians are not required to follow the Old Testament law's prohibitions against homosexual practice. He argues that the coming of Christ has freed Christians from the requirements of the law. He also argues that the Levitical prohibitions are rooted in the patriarchal culture of the time, which denigrated women and equated anal sex with feminising men. This chapter will examine Vines's claim that the condemnation of homosexual practice in the Bible was due to "culturally-bound concerns about patriarchal gender roles, which the New Testament points Christians beyond" (Reformation Project 2021) by (1) exploring the Old Testament culture concerning homosexual practice; (2) examining the purpose and establishment of the Old Testament law; and (3) examining the New Testament understanding of the Old Testament law as it pertains to Christian obedience.

4.1 Understanding Old Testament law

The Israelites were Yahweh's chosen people, with whom God established a covenant. Initially, Yahweh made a covenant with Abraham, which can be found in Genesis 12. God promised to make Abraham's descendants numerous, giving them land, and ultimately, the world would be blessed through his lineage, which foreshadowed the coming of Christ (Gen. 12:1-3, 15:1-21). The Israelites were a people that God chose simply because he loved them and he had sworn an oath to their forefathers (Deut. 7:7-8).

The Old Testament laws were initially spoken by Yahweh himself, with Moses acting as the communicator of those laws to the Israelites (Exodus 20:18-26). This indicates that the authority of the Old Testament law, often referred to as the Mosaic law, was the standard of living that God set for the Israelites who would adhere to that covenant (Erickson, 2013:906). God first spoke the decalogue (ten commandments) to the Israelites who, in return, asked that Moses be the spokesperson between them and God, because they were frightened by him (Ex.

20). The rest of the law was spoken by God to Moses, and then Moses gave it to the Israelites. It was not simply a set of rules that the Israelites had to follow, but instead gave the Israelites a way to live that would allow them to enjoy their covenant relationship with God and stay distinctly different from the other pagan nations around them.

To the modern reader, the word “law” sounds like a list of codes and rules enforced by an authority with specific penalties for each violation (Klein *et al.*, 2017:443). The Old Testament law is similar to a national policy designed to teach the Israelite nation fundamental values needed to live in God’s presence (Klein *et al.*, 2017:443).

For the modern reader, this Old Testament law is best understood in covenantal framework, as Yahweh’s personal demands are not an abstract system of morals or technical legal code (Klein *et al.*, 2017:443). The Old Testament law should be interpreted relationally, meaning that the Israelites obey God’s commands in order to maintain their covenant relationship with him (Klein *et al.*, 2017:443). The Old Testament law provided foundational ethical principles that guided the Israelites in maintaining a relationship with Yahweh, and those ethical principles reflected the nature of God and his holiness (Klein *et al.*, 2017:444).

There is a crucial point concerning the nature of the Old Covenant. The Israelites were saved and redeemed from Egyptian bondage through grace and no work of their own warranted God saving them or choosing them as his covenant people. The Israelites did not keep the law, because it guaranteed their salvation; God had already saved them (Erickson, 2013:906; Schreiner, 2015:250). The covenant was established by grace and the law was the standard by which the people lived in adherence to the covenant God had with Abraham (Erickson, 2013:906). The law was the written expression of God’s will for the corporate and individual lives of the Israelites (Longman & Dillard, 2006:75). If salvation was based on adherence to the law, none of the Israelites would have been saved, because they could not keep the law (Erickson, 2013:907). The law rests on the principles of loving others and loving God unwaveringly (Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18).

Even though the law was the external way in which the covenant was certified between God and His people, it was insufficient when it came to setting them right with God (Erickson, 2013:906). Circumcision of the heart was needed and this points to the coming work of Jesus and the establishment of the new covenant. Following the Torah was not done so that the Israelites could attain redemption; God had already done that. Following the Torah was done out of loyalty to Yahweh because he redeemed the Israelites (Brown, 2015:59). During the intertestamental period, there was a shift. Observance of the law became viewed as that which God uses to pass judgement on humanity, bring salvation and bring the Kingdom (Erickson, 2013:906-907).

Jesus said the Old Testament law could be summed up in two commands: love God and love others (Deut. 6:4-7; Matt. 22:34-40; Mk 12:28-34; Gal. 5:13-15). The basis of the Old Testament law was to govern the Israelites in how to love God and others. The prohibition of homosexual practice was a way in which God commanded the Israelites to love one another properly. The sexual practices that were prohibited were designed to show the Israelites how to properly relate to one another sexually. Violating those commands violated God's order for human sexual relations and violated the way in which he designed people to love and relate to one another. The law also displayed the sinfulness of man (Rom. 5:20,7:1-12). The Old Testament law showed how sinful every human was because of their inability to uphold the law. In other words, in all their striving, every Israelite, and by default every human being, was not able to love God and others properly. They failed to do so by violating God's law.

The question that many grapple with is how the Old Testament law applies to Christians, if at all. Vines repeatedly states that the Old Testament law is not binding for Christians which frees them from the prohibitions of homosexual practice. The placement of the Old Testament law in the life of the believer is crucial to understanding the role of the Old Testament homosexual prohibitions of and how they apply to Christians today. The role of the Old Testament law in life of the Christian will first be examined in this chapter, before addressing the

specific homosexual prohibitions in Leviticus, because that will determine whether or not those prohibitions should be followed by Christians.

4.2 Should Christians obey Old Testament law?

In order to show that the Old Testament law is no longer binding for Christians, Vines argues that (1) Christ's atoning work makes the law obsolete; (2) there are sexual and cultural laws that Christians do not keep today; (3) all same-sex unions are not prohibited in the Old Testament; (Vines, 2014:88-89) and (4) patriarchy was the reason for the prohibition of male same-sex intercourse in Leviticus (Vines, 2014:93).

4.2.1 Jesus and The Old Testament law

Vines argues that Jesus fulfilled the law, which means that Christians do not have to follow the Old Testament law. He correctly affirms that Christ's death made it possible for believers to be permanently reconciled to God. Referencing Hebrews 8, Vines regards the Old Testament law as obsolete, stating that Christ's death on the cross liberated his followers from the yoke of slavery (Vines, 2014:81). In summation, Christians are released from the prohibitions of homosexual practice in Leviticus 18:22 and Leviticus 20:13, because they are reconciled to God.

Jesus clearly states that he fulfils the requirements of the law and of the prophets. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus says: "Don't assume that I came to destroy the law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil." The "law" Jesus refers to is the Torah (Brown, 2015:58) and his death on the cross was the ultimate sacrifice needed to atone for the sins of all who would believe in him (Heb. 10:8-12). Matthew 5:17 means that Jesus came to fulfil the requirements of the law and the prophecies of the prophets concerning himself.

Matthew 5:17 gives the contemporary Christian the hermeneutical principle needed to understand their relationship with the Old Testament law: "All of the Old Testament applies to Christians, but none of it applies apart from its fulfilment in Christ" (Klein, 2017:445). In other words, all the Old Testament is relevant except what the New Testament repeals, and none of the Old Testament is

relevant except what has been repeated in the New Testament (Klein, 2017:445). Jesus said:

Don't assume that I came to destroy the law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil. For I assure you: Until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter[d] or one stroke of a letter will pass from the law until all things are accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commands and teaches people to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:17-20).

Jesus affirmed that every last requirement of the law would be completed through him. The law is therefore valid until the end of the present world and the beginning of the eschaton (Matt. 5:18; Turner, 2008:163). Jesus makes clear that no part of the law, no matter how insignificant it seems, should be disobeyed or dismissed (Turner, 2008:163). Matthew is not saying that Christians are under the law. The principle here is that Jesus's coming changes his followers' relationship with the law and how it is interpreted. There is discontinuity and continuity with the law, as some laws continue to be in force and others are not with the arrival of the kingdom and the coming of Jesus (Schreiner, 2008:630-631),

After Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament law, thus putting an end to it (Rom. 10:4; Gal. 3:19-26; Eph. 2:13-16), Paul explains that we are under the law of Christ (Gal. 3:24, 6:1-2). The law of Christ reiterates the basis of the Old Testament law. When asked by the Pharisees about the greatest of the law, Jesus says: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands" (Matt 22:37-40). Though the specific ceremonial and civil commandments of the Old Testament law are no longer binding, Jesus reiterates the basis of the law, which he uses to establish the Christian ethic and way of life:

love God and love others. This is the law of Christ. In order to understand how the Christian should view the relevance of the Old Testament law, it must be understood that the Old Testament law conveys truth and morals that transcend time and culture. This is why some laws are restated and thus followed by Christians, and others are not. The laws that are restated in the New Testament demonstrate moral values and boundaries that transcend the Old Testament world.

Jesus is seen reaffirming some of the teachings of the Torah and also to be challenging some of the law as well. As an example, when Jesus healed several men of skin diseases, he told them to “go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses prescribed, as a testimony to them” (Matt. 8:4; Lk. 5:14, 17:14). When Jesus told the healed men to “show themselves to the priest,” he was acknowledging the Old Testament law which instructed people healed of skin diseases to go before the priest so that they could be ceremonially cleansed (Lev. 14:1-32). Jesus reaffirms the underlying basis of the Torah, which was love and mercy by being willing to come in contact with and heal someone who was ceremonially unclean (Brown, 2015:89; Reeves *et al.*, 2017:165). Jesus had not been crucified and resurrected: thus, the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament were still in place. For that reason, Jesus instructed those healed of the skin diseases to follow the Old Testament law. Jesus, who is able and willing to heal the unclean, points to his ability to cleanse people of their sins, which will be fulfilled when he is crucified and resurrected.

Jesus also challenged certain laws in the Torah. He exorcised a demon from a possessed man and healed a paralysed hand, both on the Sabbath (Mar. 1:21-28, 3:1-6). Jesus never broke any of the laws: to do so would have been sinful (Klein *et al.*, 2017:445). The Mishnah did permit certain actions on the Sabbath in emergency situations, for instance in order to save someone’s life (Wessel & Strauss, 2017:111-112; Turner, 2008:312-313). Exorcising a demon out of a man would have been seen as a life-saving act, which was permissible. However, Jesus’ healing of the paralytic hand would not have been considered a life-saving circumstance in the eyes of the Pharisees. When Jesus and his disciples passed

through the grain fields on the Sabbath, they began to pick and eat some heads of grain because they were hungry (Matt. 12:1). Knowing that the Pharisees were questioning his actions in their minds, Jesus affirmed that doing good on the Sabbath was lawful (Matt. 12:11; Mar. 3:4). Jesus was trying to make a point. The hearts of the Pharisees were hard toward human suffering that was itself evil (Wessel & Strauss, 2017:112). The Pharisees had no issues with rescuing a sheep who had fallen into a pit on the Sabbath, yet they took issues with Jesus healing someone on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:11). The motives and hearts of the Pharisees were sinful. The Pharisees were too concerned with the letter of the law and they disregarded the heart of the law, which was given for humanity's need and good (Wessel & Strauss, 2017:112; Turner, 2008:313).

Jesus challenges the Pharisees' understanding of the Sabbath. (Matt. 12:3-8; Mk. 2:23-28). He refers to the story of David who ate consecrated bread when he fled to Nob (1 Sam. 21:1-9). David broke the law by eating consecrated bread, but he was not punished for it (Wessel & Strauss, 2017:109). Jesus then says the Sabbath was made for humanity (Mar. 2:27). The Sabbath was a day for rest from labour and a time set aside to worship God: it was not designed to put people in bondage (Wessel & Strauss, 2017:110). Jesus also emphasises that he was Lord of the Sabbath, which signifies that ultimate rest was to be found in him, the ultimate and perfect interpreter of the law (Mar. 2:28).

The Pharisees, however, accused Jesus of breaking the law concerning the Sabbath. They did this in order to try to find a way to accuse Jesus and ultimately kill him. The Mishnah lists reaping as one of the thirty-nine forbidden acts on the Sabbath, and the penalty for violating the Sabbath was death (Wessel & Strauss, 2017:109; Turner, 2008:312). When Jesus challenges the Pharisees on their understanding of the Torah, he does two things. First, Jesus establishes that he is the Lord of the Sabbath: eschatologically, he is bringing in the new age of salvation and giving new significance to the Sabbath rest (Wessel & Strauss, 2017:109; Turner, 2008:311;). Second, Jesus also prioritises human need over the law (Wessel & Strauss, 2017:109; Turner, 2008:310). Even in Mark 7:11 Jesus rebukes the Pharisees because they disregard God's fifth command which

commands one “to honour father and mother” (Ex. 20:12) in order to adhere to their own man-made laws (Mak. 7:11). Here, the Pharisees would take a gift that was supposed to be given to their parents and devote that gift to God. Yet, instead of actually devoting that gift to God, the Pharisees would use that gift in other ways (Wessel & Strauss, 2010:178). By devoting the gift to God, a son did not necessarily give it to the temple or even to God. However, declaring the gift devoted to God legally to exclude his parents from benefiting from that gift (Wessel & Strauss, 2017:178). In this way, one would nullify God’s commands for the sake of their tradition (Mar. 7:13). That is how the Pharisees would disregard the command to “honour father and mother.” The point here is that Jesus’ presence changes the relationship between God’s people and the Old Testament law.

Understanding Jesus’s role concerning the law gives clarity around addressing Vines’s perspective. Vines tries to poke holes in the belief that the prohibition of homosexual practice should be followed by pointing out laws that Christians do or do not follow. The problem with this is that it shows limited understanding of the function of the laws in the Old Testament. Christ fulfilled the ceremonial and cultic practices of the law by being the ultimate sacrifice for sin. He also fulfilled the moral laws by never violating law and by remaining sinless. Yet, principles such as “do not murder,” “do not steal” and “do not give false testimony to your neighbour,” stand for all time; this is why Jesus and other New Testament authors restate these moral truths. These are also principles that people from all faiths and backgrounds generally hold to because they are transcendent moral truths. For this reason, some of the Old Testament laws are not only restated in the New Testament, but Christians are instructed to follow them as a way of living a holy life in relationship with God. Following the ethical guidelines of the law is not a matter of salvation; it is a matter of holiness. When Vines argues that one does not have to follow the law in order to be reconciled to God, he is right. Yet the issue here is that he equates not needing the law to be reconciled to God with not having to follow God’s ethics for living. What Vines misses in his reasoning is that Jesus gives new meaning to the law and sheds light on the synecdochic nature of the decalogue (Longman & Dillard, 2006:76). It is unique in that it is the

only portion of the law directly spoken to the Israelites, which shows its prominence (DeRouchie, 2013:93-94). It covers the ethics of how humanity relates to God and human relationships with one another (Longman & Dillard, 2006:76). All of the laws flow from the basic ethical principles in the decalogue which apply to a gamut of moral and ethical issues. The contemporary Christian must use the decalogue as a guide when assessing moral issues. Jesus and the other authors of the New Testament bear witness to the continuity of the decalogue which points to its synecdochic nature, as it is a moral summary of the additional laws set forth in Exodus and Deuteronomy (McQuilkin & Copan, 2014:92). The seventh commandment applies to homosexual practice. The command “do not commit adultery” applies to all sexual immorality and sexual practices outside of marital union between husband and wife.

4.3 Vines’s refutation of the Christian defences of Levitical homosexual prohibitions

It has been established that, though the Old Testament is not binding for Christians today, there are laws that Christians follow because they represent transcendent moral truths. With this understanding, it is necessary to address certain scriptural references Vines gives to show that the Old Testament is irrelevant. Vines argues that non-affirming Christians are inconsistent in their defence of the Levitical laws prohibiting homosexual practice. From his perspective, the inconsistency comes from the reality that Christians today do not follow all of the laws in the Old Testament. He considers some laws outdated and irrelevant for contemporary times. Others are contrary to cultural moral standards of today. Thus, in his argument that Levitical prohibitions on homosexual practice are not binding for Christians, Vines address three main defences Christians give to support the upholding of Old Testament prohibitions on homosexual practice: the unique nature of the sexual laws in the Old Testament, the use of the word “abomination” in connection with homosexual practice in Leviticus and the application of the death penalty (Vines, 2014:83). The labelling of homosexuality as an abomination will be addressed later in this chapter. For now, Vines's view about other sexual laws in the Old Testament will be addressed.

4.3.1 Answering Vines's question: Do sexual laws differ from other laws?

Vines maintains that not all Old Testament sexual norms carry over to Christians today, including Old Testament laws concerning how to sow seeds (Vines, 2014:81). He believes that Old Testament laws on homosexual practice do not differ from other Old Testament laws that are not carried over to Christians today and not upheld. For example, he points to polygamy and the prohibition of sex with a woman during menstruation. As regards polygamy, Vines writes that the Christian tradition has always rejected polygamy, but the Old Testament assumes it and does not condemn it. Christians today do not hold the same views of polygamy that the Old Testament law demonstrates. As far as the law against sexual relations during a woman's menstrual cycle are concerned, Vines writes that prohibition is not a law Christians follow today.

Again, context is important here and gets ignored by Vines. It was not inherently sinful for a woman to menstruate (there was no sacrifice for atonement for menstruation): therefore, a man would become unclean by coming in contact with her (DeYoung, 2015:45; Hess, 2017). When Christ fulfilled the requirements of the law, his work did away with the rituals for cleanliness, sacrifices and the priesthood (DeYoung, 2015:46, Liederbach & Lenow, 2021:141). He fulfilled those requirements, thus menstruation did not make one unclean anymore. That is why coming in contact with a woman sexually or for any reason during her menstruation is not an issue for Christians today. All uncleanness is not sin (DeYoung, 2015:46; Klawans, 2000:23-26). This is a ceremonial law that is not binding for Christians today.

In regards to polygamy, the Bible never affirms polygamy as a sanctioned form of marriage. Since the Bible is telling the story of humanity's sin and redemption, there will be elements in Scripture that describe what people were like and how they lived. There will be cultural depictions that the Bible portrays. Describing how one lived does not indicate the Bible affirms that way of living. The Bible is clear that marriage and sexual union are only acceptable between man and woman within the boundaries of marriage. Hence, even though the Bible does not explicitly say "polygamy is wrong," it is clear that it is, given the biblical principle

concerning sex and marriage. The Bible does assume polygamy, but portraying the culture of the time does not mean the Bible is showing approval of the practice. The interpreter of this Bible must distinguish between what is descriptive and prescriptive within the Scriptures. Polygamy was a practice in the ancient Middle East, and this is descriptive within the biblical narrative. However, marriage between man and woman is prescriptive. The Bible clearly states that only man and woman are allowed to come into a sexual marital union, as based on God's created order. Nowhere in the Bible does God prescribe polygamy.

The problem with Vines's assertions is that they show a limited understanding of the function of the laws in the Old Testament. There are three main divisions of the Old Testament law: civil, ceremonial and moral. Civil laws were given to guide the Israelites on how to govern their theocratic society (Liederbach & Lenow, 2015:149). The civil laws are also called judicial, casuistic, judgements or cultural laws (Jones, 2013:52). The primary use of civil laws was to guide the Israelites around applying God's moral standards to their particular context and, underlying these laws was a deeper moral principle (Liederbach & Lenow, 2015:149). The ceremonial laws were those given to guide Israel to be a religiously distinct nation (Liederbach & Lenow, 2015:149). The moral laws transcend context and time, because they flow from the nature of God, as revealed in the decalogue. They also reflect and demand conformity to God's own moral character (Liederbach & Lenow, 2015:150). Vines argues that all the laws in the Old Testament are moral, and that there are no distinctions among them (Vines, 2014:82.) Vines is correct in that there is no ontological separation of the laws, but those distinctions are an interpretive lens used to show what the laws consist of (Jones, 2013:51). In other words, though the Bible does not specify which laws are civil, ceremonial or moral, the reader can see the laws functioning in those categories. These are not simply made-up categories with no legitimate substantiation as Vines suggests (Vines, 2014:82). The Old Testament law as a whole comes from the moral nature of God, and therefore enjoys moral principles. Yet this does not mean that all the laws are the same and function in the same way.

The presence of the death penalty is another key defence Vines addresses. He contends that the death penalty is an example of the irrelevance of the Old Testament law, because people do not use it to punish sin. The death penalty in the Old Testament was used for several acts that God deemed abominations and severe offenses: cursing one's parents, child sacrifice, incest, bestiality, adultery and others. Homosexual practice is also listed as an offence that carried the death penalty. Leviticus 20:13 reads: "If a man sleeps with a man as with a woman, they have both committed a detestable thing. They must be put to death; their blood is on their own hands." Vines argues that one of the reasons why Old Testament law does not have to be followed is that it does not apply to contemporary society. Christians for instance no longer see working on the Sabbath, charging interest on a loan, using the Lord's name in vain and others as moral issues (Vines, 2014:86). Others have repeatedly used the Old Testament punishment of death to show not only the irrelevance of the Old Testament and the immoral complications of Christianity as a worldview.

The death penalty for homosexual practice and other acts showed the seriousness of those offenses. Homosexual practice was classified to be an abomination in the Old Testament. Homosexual practice was a grievous sin which, in Yahweh's eyes, deserved the most serious punishment. Homosexual practice, and all of the other sexual practices condemned in Leviticus, violated God's natural order, which ultimately distorts the image in which he created men and women.

The apostle Paul's guidance on addressing sexual immorality in the Corinthians is an example of the application of Old Testament law after the coming of Jesus. It was reported to Paul that sexual immorality existed in the Corinthian, and there was a particular case of a man who was having sex with his father's wife. Leviticus 18:6-8 commands the Israelites not to have sex with any close relative. If these sexual commands were violated, the penalty was to be cut off from the people of God, and being put to death (Lev. 18:29, 20:11). Paul did not instruct the New Testament Corinthian church to kill the man who committed incest: instead, he commanded the church to cut off the man from fellowship (1 Cor. 5:2, 5, 9-13).

The sexual prohibitions that the law establishes transcend time, because these are not cultural or ceremonial phenomena. These are moral issues that stem from God's set order for creation and God's design for how humanity loves him and loves one another properly. In the Christian context, de-fellowship was the proper application for this incident in the Corinthian church as to the consequences concerning sexual immoral practice, so that redemption was made possible (Gane, 2017:26): "turn that one over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the Day of the Lord" (1 Cor. 5:5). Therefore, while the death penalty is no longer in place, certain moral implications of those acts transcend time and culture, as seen in Paul's response to the sexual immorality in the Corinthians church.

The answer to Vines' question is: Yes, the sexual laws do differ from other laws. Vines is correct that Christ's death and resurrection freed God's people from the ceremonial, priestly and purification regulations of the law (DeYoung, 2015:43). This is why Christians can eat the foods once considered unclean or do things such as come in contact with a woman during her menstrual cycle. The penalty is no longer punishment for certain sins, because Jesus met the requirements of the law.

However, homosexual practice was not a simply ritual uncleanness. Homosexual practice is a moral violation of God's created order. Homosexual practice is consistently presented in a negative light throughout the Old and New Testaments, because the prohibition of homosexual practice was not temporary. Moral impurity results from committing certain acts that are so heinous that they are explicitly referred to in biblical sources as defiling (Klawans, 2000:26). Homosexual practice morally, not ritually, defiles the sinner and is considered an abomination (Klawans, 2000:26). This is why certain laws will be treated differently than others. With the coming of Christ in the New Testament, moral purity carries the emphasis. Freedom from the law does not mean freedom from God's transcendent moral standards.

4.4 Patriarchy and Leviticus

The nature and presence of patriarchy in ancient Israelite culture is a debated topic. It is generally argued that Israelites lived in a strict patriarchal society where women were devalued. It is widely established that women were considered property and did not enjoy the same legal rights as men. Patriarchy did exist among the Israelites. However, there are scholars such as Carol Meyers who argue that Western standards are often the lenses through which people view the ancient Israelite world. Thus, what contemporary Western minds would deem to be acts or states of patriarchy would not have been the case for ancient Israelites. For example, a woman's domestic work was crucial to the survival of the family; the latter, which was the backbone of ancient Israelite society, especially because ancient Israelite households had to be self-sustaining (Meyers, 1991:33-34). Ethnographic evidence shows that, in ancient Israel, a woman's role was vital to the sustaining of the economical, social, domestic and familial aspects of the household. For example, turning raw foods into that which could be regularly consumed was time-consuming, physically demanding and typically the responsibility of the woman (Meyers, 1991:146). As Meyers says, the control of food preparation and the allocation of the resources in agrarian settings gave women a high level of responsibility in the economic life of the household, which was far different from contemporary life (Meyers, 1991:147). Women were valuable, and the oppressive, misogynistic view that Vines paints is debatable.

As shown in chapter 2, the divine inspiration of Scripture stands even though elements of the biblical writer's life and culture are incorporated into the text. Patriarchy did exist in ancient Israel, but the presence of a patriarchal culture does not mean that there were no other elements of influence on the morals of the Israelites. This is where Vines errs. He emphasises, again, the influence of culture over other factors that would have influenced the Israelites. What must be stressed here is that the Old Testament law was not the result of Greco-Roman or pagan milieus. These were the very words of God, spoken by God, and relayed to the Israelites by Moses. The Israelites first heard Yahweh themselves at Mount Sinai. God descended on Mount Sinai in fire and smoke billowed from the

mountain and Yahweh spoke to the Israelites in thunder (Ex. 19:16-25). When the law is first given, God speaks directly to the Israelites, giving them the decalogue (Ex. 20:1-17). The Israelites were so frightened by God and asked Moses to speak on his behalf to them. This is important because it was understood that these were the very words of God. The Israelites knew the laws came directly from Yahweh. Knowing this also affects how to view culture in light of the law. Yahweh gave the Israelites the law which would help them live holy lives in spite of the culture around them. The laws regarding sexual practice (Lev. 18:1-29, 20:1-24) would have been seen as coming from Yahweh himself and not simply as cultural constructs. As Hayes explains, the Old Testament law is not “is not the expression of an impersonal natural reason, the rational order of the cosmos; rather, it is the expression of a personal divine being’s will, which can take the form of detailed written instruction and legislation” (Hayes, 2015:2). Culture influences how the Israelites thought, but the presence of Yahweh and the fact that gave the laws superseded whatever culture norms existed at that time. With this understanding, it is necessary to address some of the cultural challenges Vines addresses in an attempt to show that the Old Testament law is patriarchal and should not be revered in today’s world because it is outdated and irrelevant.

4.4.1 Addressing Vines’s Biblical interpretation concerning patriarchy

Vines argues that the narrative of the laws in the Old Testament are far removed from the modern egalitarian view of today (Vines, 2014:91). The presence of slavery in the Bible is a primary example utilised by Vines. Slavery is an ongoing subject in his book, which he uses to show that the world of the Old Testament and that of modern times are drastically different. Vines writes: “According to Exodus 21:2-11, male slaves are to be freed after six years, but female slaves are never to be freed.” This statement is used as part of his reasoning to show that patriarchy existed among God’s people, while women had less value and these sentiments are contradictory to how women are viewed today. The problem with this is that Vines’s cursory assessment is inaccurate. Exodus 21:2 reads: “When you buy a Hebrew slave, he is to serve for six years; then in the seventh

he is to leave as a free man without paying anything.” However, the law gives evidence that women slaves were also freed. Verse three says that the enslaved man marries a wife and she is able to go with him (Ex. 21:3). Deuteronomy 15:12-18 provides a whole section on the freeing of male and female slaves. Deuteronomy 15:12 states: “If your fellow Hebrew, a man or woman, is sold to you and serves you six years, you must set him free in the seventh year.” This directly contradicts Vines’s assertion that female slaves “are never to be freed” (Vines, 2014:91). Furthermore, not only are male and female slaves to be freed after a certain time, if they so chose to leave, but their masters were commanded to give them provisions (Deut. 15:13-18).

Vines also writes that women were of less value than men in vow redemptions, that is, according to Leviticus 27:1-8. He misrepresents the theological significance and meaning of the vows and their prices. In these circumstances Israelite men and women would make vows of service or giving in order to incur favour with God, oftentimes in the midst of affliction (Anders & Martin, 2002:252-253). If someone devoted another for sanctuary service, that devotee could be redeemed at a price. These redemption prices are what Vines is referring to. The relevant passage reads:

The Lord spoke to Moses: “Speak to the Israelites and tell them: When someone makes a special vow to the Lord that involves the assessment of people, if the assessment concerns a male from 20 to 60 years old, your assessment is 50 silver shekels measured by the standard sanctuary shekel. If the person is a female, your assessment is 30 shekels. If the person is from five to 20 years old, your assessment for a male is 20 shekels and for a female 10 shekels. If the person is from one month to five years old, your assessment for a male is five silver shekels, and for a female your assessment is three shekels of silver. If the person is 60 years or more, your assessment is 15 shekels for a male and 10 shekels for a female. But if one is too poor to pay the assessment, he must present the person before the priest and the priest will set a value for him. The priest will set a value for him according to what the one making the vow can afford (Lev. 27:1-8).

The higher redemption values for males have nothing to do with the inherent value of men and women. The difference in value has to do with the greater strength of men, since the values are similar to those of what slaves would have been sold for (Anders & Martin, 2002:253; Sprinkle *et al.*, 2015:181; Longman & Garland, 2008:969). Theologically, the differences in shekel prices have nothing to do with the inherent worth of men and women. Men and women were both created in the image of God, and both are equally loved and inherently valuable to God.

4.5 Perspectives of homosexual practice in the ancient Near Eastern world

The ancient Near Eastern world around the Israelites had mixed reactions to homosexual practice, and evidence does not give a clear answer on whether it was generally approved of or disapproved of. Around 1400 BC Middle Assyrian laws deemed homosexual practice to be generally degrading for men (Gagnon, 2001:39). The laws made sure that a man who falsely accused another man of being repeatedly sexually penetrated, and if a man had sex with another man of similar social standing, both were criminally punished with castration and/ or other forms of punishment (Gagnon, 2001:39-40). Similar to the Greco-Roman world of the New Testament, homosexual practice was seen as effecting one's manhood. The man being penetrated would often be seen as a man-woman, losing his manhood, and the man doing the penetrating would often be deprived of his manhood (Gagnon, 2001:44).

The Near Eastern magical texts such as the Babylonian omen text *Shumma alu* of the pre-seventh century BC, and the Assyrian Almanac of Incantations portrayed homosexual practice in negative and positive ways. It spoke of homosexual love and gives the perception that homosexual practice was not always seen as a show of power and virility by another man (Gagnon, 2001:40).

Cult prostitution in Mesopotamia shows that there was some acceptance of homosexual practice. Male sex prostitutes were often used in attempts to access the gods and goddesses of Mesopotamia. The *assinnu*, *kurgarru*, and *kuluu* were

male temple prostitutes (Gagnon, 2001:42). Sex with males in cultic practices were often seen to please the goddess Ishtar, bring success against enemies and help around the troubles of everyday life (Ganon, 2001:41).

In Egypt, there were no legal codes against homosexual practice, but Egyptian mythology, tomb evidence and The Book of the Dead show divergent views concerning homosexual practice. On the tomb of Pharaoh Ikhnaton (ca. 1370 B.C.E.) depictions of intimate scenes of nudity with his son-in-law Smenkhare are found. In these depictions, Smenkhare is given titles of endearment normally reserved for Ikhnaton's concubines and queen. Egyptian mythological stories about Horus and Seth depict shame with being penetrated by a male partner. In one story, Horus admits to penetrating Seth while he is asleep and the other gods screamed and belched in Horus' face (Ganon, 2001:43). Additionally, Ugaritic, Western Semite and Canaanite literature and art only refer to bestiality and incest (Gagnon, 2001:43). In the Hittite empire of Anatolia, father and son incestual relations were forbidden along with rape, adultery and bestiality (Gagnon, 2001:43).

How does all of this relate to Vines's perspective of the Old Testament and, more specifically, Leviticus? Vines writes that the Old Testament law, while referencing Hebrews 8:13, is obsolete, and points to the ceasing of the Old Testament law's ongoing authority: "obsolete, outdated, and soon to disappear. That doesn't sound like an endorsement of the law's ongoing authority does it?" (Vines, 2014:80). He also quotes Paul's words in Galatians 5:1: "Christ has liberated us to be free. Stand firm then and don't submit again to a yoke of slavery." Vines also adds that since Jesus has come the law is no longer needed, much like the way drivers no longer need road signs once they arrive at their destination (Vines, 2014:80). Vines is right that the law does expose our sin and our need for a Saviour (Vines, 2014:80). But, what destination is he referring to, and why would the law not be needed when the Saviour came? Consider that Jesus said: "Until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter[d] or one stroke of a letter will pass from the law until all things are accomplished" in The New Testament?

The Law becoming obsolete does not mean its moral principles have become obsolete.

Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard summarise the ways in which the Old Testament law relates to Christians in light of Christ's fulfilment (Klein *et al.*, 2017:446-447):

- Some laws retain literal validity for Christians, such as loving God and one's neighbour (Matt 5:21– 48; 22:40; Lev. 19:18).
- There are laws that no longer have literal validity because of New Testament teachings, where Christ's fulfilment has made them obsolete. An example of this would be circumcision or prohibiting the consumption of certain foods considered unclean (Acts 10:15).
- Some OT laws are made stricter under the new covenant, and Christians are held to that standard. For example, where the Old Testament permits divorce, Jesus regards divorce and remarriage as adultery. Jesus permitted divorce in the case of adultery (Lk. 16:18; Matt. 19:3-12). Jesus deals not only with actions but with the heart, as seen in the areas of lust, and anger (Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28).
- There are laws that do not apply literally, that still teach important morals and truths that transcend time and culture. The prohibition of homosexual practice is a key example. The death penalty for committing homosexual practice is no longer valid, but the principle of sexual relations between a married man and woman is still valid today.

The most glaring issue around Vines's questioning of the serious immorality of homosexual practice is that his argument lends itself to the questioning of the other sins, especially sexual ones, mentioned in the Old Testament. What makes the prohibitions of homosexual practice questionable and these other sins not? Should one reconsider the prohibitions on incest? If the standard is contemporary culture, then Vines has an evermoving goal post that will change as the culture changes. Yet, that is not the foundation on which a Christian should base his or her morality. Morality then becomes subjective and, ultimately, truth becomes relative. The condemnation of homosexual practice is clear in the Old Testament,

and its egregious immorality is restated in the New Testament, leaving no room for questioning this (Romans 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10). The prohibition of homosexual practice comes down to holiness. Homosexual practice is deemed a sinful act that should be avoided because it is unholy.

4.6 Homosexual condemnations in Leviticus

It is important to first point out that the condemnations concerning homosexual practice in Leviticus do not pertain to sexual orientation, but homosexual acts. It is quite possible that there were Israelite men and women who had sexual attractions to those of the same sex. In fact, it would not make sense for the laws against homosexual practice to exist if homosexual affections did not exist. As seen in the Old and New Testaments, sinful acts come from a sinful human nature that breeds sinful and distorted affections (Prov. 4:23; Matt. 15:19; Mk. 7:20-23).

The prohibition of homosexual practice and other sexual sinful practices were not sinful only for the Israelites. God accused the nations around the Israelites for sinning against him by engaging in homosexual practices (Lev 18:26). Since the nations around the Israelites engaged in homosexual practice and God considered it to be sinful, it can be inferred that laws against homosexual practice were not simply cultural or temporary prohibitions. These were practices that God prohibited across cultures and people. All nations were prohibited from committing those acts and, when they did, they were in sin, violating God's law.

The Old Testament laws against homosexual practice were starkly different than the culture that existed around the Israelites where, as indicated, the Mesopotamian and Egyptian world perceived homosexual relationships in positive and negative ways. The world of the ancient Israelites strictly saw homosexual practice, no matter the context, in immoral terms. The Old Testament Scriptures show the presence of cult prostitution from the reign of Rehoboam to the start of the reign of his great-grandson Jehoshaphat (922-843 B.C.E.), and the period leading up to king Josiah's reforms in 622 BCE (Gagnon, 2001:69). Gagnon (2001) points out that it is possible that some Judeans did participate in

homosexual practice due to the presence of cult prostitution and the worship of Asherah.

4.6.1 Homosexual practice labelled an abomination in Leviticus

There are two verses that explicitly forbid homosexual practice under any circumstance: Leviticus 18:22 and Leviticus 20:13.

Leviticus 18:22 You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination (ESV).

Leviticus 20:13: If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them (ESV).

Homosexual practice is labelled as an *abomination* in the Old Testament, and Vines describes this as “strikingly negative” (Vines, 2014:84). He argues that even though the word abomination is a negative word, it does not necessarily correspond to Christian views of sin (Vines, 2014:85). He explains that abomination is not an ethical term and typically refers to idolatrous practices of the gentiles, thus rendering it a term that closely relates to something being taboo (Vines, 2014:85). Homosexual practice is considered an abomination. The word abomination (*toebah*) means “detest, abhor, to act dishonorably” (Brown, 2014:117). As Brown points out, *toebah* could be used to describe something ritually unclean or taboo because, in certain cultures or religions, certain unclean or taboo acts were abhorrent like eating pork for those of the Islamic faith (Brown, 2014:118). *Toebah* can be used in a ritualistic context and in an ethical sense (Brown, *et al.*, 2017:1072). Vines is therefore incorrect in his assertion that homosexual practice labelled as an abomination is not an ethical term. He asserts that the condemnations in Leviticus are due to their taboo nature connected with idolatrous practices. Even if the use of abomination only signified idolatrous practices, that would present an ethical and moral problem. Idolatry is an immoral consequence of the heart that rejects Yahweh’s lordship and worships false gods (Jer. 9:13-16; Ezk. 14:1-14). If idolatry is not a biblical ethical issue, then what is? Vines’s logic fails here again.

Toebah is also used in clearly ethical terms. When describing acts that are sinful to Yahweh, Proverbs states: “There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an *abomination* to him..” (Prv. 6:19, 26:25). None of the sins listed in Proverbs 6:16-19 are what would be considered taboo or explicit acts of pagan idolatry: haughty eyes, lying tongues, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies and one who sows discord among brothers. Job also uses the word *abomination* when describing his suffering: “All my intimate friends *abhor* me, and those whom I loved have turned against me” (ESV). Again, Vines does not account for the uses of the word *toebah* in ethical terms outside of the context of idolatry. Both condemnations in Leviticus are sandwiched between other sexual violations, away from the laws against pagan worship. Biblically speaking, even if the prohibitions against homosexual practice were listed next to prohibitions against pagan worship, does Vine really want to argue that all the sexual acts are only sinful because they are done in the context of idolatry? His logic would have to be applied to all of the sexual sins, not just homosexual practice. That line of thinking is antithetical to biblically moral reasoning.

Vines also maintains that there are actions in the Old Testament, are listed as abominations, that Christians widely accept and no longer consider to be abominations such as charging interest on loan, engaging in sexual acts during a women’s menstrual cycle, eating certain foods and burning incense. Because of this, Vines believes homosexual practice should be affirmed, because people no longer see it as an abomination today. It should be noted that “wide acceptance” of a principle does not in itself make that principle right by biblical standards. Whether or not Christians widely accept homosexual practice as an abomination does not affect what Yahweh thinks about it. Culture and opinions change and God’s moral stance is not contingent upon what Christians accept. The morality of an action is not based on what Christians accept or not. Morality is rooted in God’s character as reflected in Scripture. As a Christian, biblical moral reasoning begins with the revelation of Scripture, and Scripture clearly defines homosexual practice as sin.

Vines attempts to explain that abomination does not always correspond to the Christian's views of sin, pointing to the use of "abomination" in the Old Testament when describing coming into sexual contact with a woman during her menstrual cycle or charging an interest on loans (Vines, 2014:85). The point here is, though, that Christians accept certain acts that are called abominations in the Old Testament, while others are not accepted. The problem here is twofold: Vines neglects the context of the examples he uses and appeals to cultural norms instead of the totality of Scripture.

For example, the Bible does not label charging interest itself as inherently sinful. The law required no interest be charged from the poor among the Israelites or any other Israelite who borrowed money, but one could charge interest when lending to a foreigner (Ex. 22:25; Deut. 23:19-20; Alexander, 2017:141; Taylor, 2009:149). When Vines writes that charging interest was an abomination, he is not providing an honest reading of Ezekiel 18:13, which is the Scripture he utilises to make this point. Vines then goes on to say that the death penalty was applied to anyone who charged interest on a loan (Vines, 2014:86). However, it was not charging interest itself that warranted God's punishment in Ezekiel 18:13; it was the man's sinful living (Ezk. 18:13). Ezekiel 18:13 must be understood in its proper context, which is that the prophet explains that every individual person is responsible for their own sins. Ezekiel is describing two sons. One son chooses to live righteously (Ezk. 18:14-17). The other son chooses to live a sinful life (Ezk. 18:10-13). As part of his sinful life, the unrighteous son charges interest in an oppressive way. The sinful man acts unethically in his business practices. Ezekiel is not referring to the death penalty when he writes: "and lends at interest or for profit, will he live? He will not live! Since he has committed all these detestable acts, he will certainly die. His blood will be on him" (Ezk, 18:13). The death penalty is not stated here. Ezekiel states instead the ultimate price for sin, which is separation from God, and death (Alexander, 2017:141-142; Taylor, 2009:149-150; Rom. 6:23). Vines therefore takes the passage out of context for the sake of his argument.

The immediate context of Leviticus 20:13 does not mention idolatry. Homosexual practice is the only sin called an abomination in Leviticus 20. Child sacrifice is explicitly condemned in the verse before homosexual practice is mentioned in Leviticus 18:22. However, this does not signify that the homosexual practice is prohibited because it is connected with idolatry. The Scriptures make no connection between the two in Leviticus 18:21- 22. One would also have to use the same logic when considering the verse immediate before Leviticus 18:21, which addresses other sexual sins and uncleanness, and then determine where idolatry ceases to be the context, while considering the rest of the chapter before and after Leviticus 18:22. Vines attempts to limit the Levitical prohibitions of homosexual practice, and the use of their labelling as abominations (*toebah*) to idolatry, and then says this is not an ethical term. When would God deeming something an abomination ever be anything but an ethical issue? Leviticus 20:13 is an example of a moral principle or law and civil application of that moral law. The moral law is clear: homosexual practice is wrong, and sex is designed for men and women in biblical marriage. The penalty for violating that moral law is death, as the Israelites existed under a theocracy.

4.6.2 Do the prohibitions in Leviticus only refer to male same-sex intercourse?

Throughout his book, Vines characterises the homosexual prohibitions in Leviticus as though they refer only to male anal intercourse. Vines references the work of Saul Olyan, who writes that a comparison between the Leviticus prohibitions and Numbers 31:17-18 as well as the Babylonian Talmud, point to intercourse being the issue, while not prohibiting other sexual acts between males (Olyan, 1994:205-206; Vines, 2014:88). Olyan argues that the Hebrew of the Levitical prohibitions on homosexual practice only refer to a man who is the penetrator (Olyan, 1994:186). However, other scholars such as George Hollenback believe the homosexual prohibitions in Leviticus are referring to the receptive partner (Hollenback, 2017). Vines also points out the absence of an explicit prohibition of female same-sex relationships.

Longman and Garland (2008:882) address the arguments of Olyan, and Hollenback and those who argue that Leviticus only speaks to specific intercourse of either the active or passive partner. They demonstrate that the expressions in Numbers 31:17-18 and Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 are not compatible, because they use different terms. For example, the phrase “as one lies with a woman” in Leviticus 20:13 in the Hebrew uses different terms when compared with the phrase “who has slept with a man” in Numbers 31:17. The phrase in “who has slept with a man” in all of its occurrences in the Old Testament refers to a woman who is a virgin. Olyan reasons that Numbers 31:17 refers to vaginal penetration and correlates the corresponding phrase in Leviticus with anal intercourse. Longman and Garland (2008:882) point out that there is no clear distinction made in the Hebrew of Leviticus 20:13 that there a specific type of homosexual practice is held in mind. They also show that the Hebrew of Leviticus 20:13 does not correlate in the way in which Olyan argues that it does, because the expressions are not comparable:

The Levitical expression uses the plural for the first word and the term for “woman, wife,” not “female” (GK 5922), for the second term. The supposedly comparable expression uses a singular for the first term and the term for “male,” rather than “man, husband” (îš, GK 408), for the second term. These differences are not explained; therefore, the limitation of the prohibition to anal intercourse is not proven. (Why this is chosen, while other forms of homosexual behavior are not, is not explained).” (Longman & Garland, 2008:882).

A complete explanation of their refutation can be found in their commentary *Genesis-Leviticus*. As a final observation, Leviticus is clear that both parties are in sin and should be put to death, regardless of the role they take in the sexual act: “They must be put to death; their blood is on their own hands” (Lev. 20:13b). This follows the pattern seen in the sexual laws, where both parties are punished. For example, if adultery is committed or if a man sleeps with his father’s wife, both are to be put to death (Lev. 20:10-17). Even when bestiality is committed both the perpetrator and the animal are put to death (Lev. 20:15-16). The point here is, Vines’s use of Olyan’s argument falls short. There are no distinctions in

the Hebrew about the roles of the sexual partners or sexual practice. All homosexual practices, male and female, are considered sinful, and all parties are in violation of the law.

The moral logic that Vines uses here is perilous. If one questions whether or not female same-sex practices are considered sinful, one only has to travel to Paul's words in the first chapter of Romans, where he explicitly deems all and any female and male homosexual practice as sin. Even though some scholars suggest that female same-sex acts were viewed as lesser infractions in ancient Judaism, that does not mean they are not sinful (Alper & Brettschneider, 2021; Vines, 2014:89). The sinfulness of female same-sex practice would have been concluded due the assumption that both male and female same-sex practices involve the sexual use of a human partner of the same sex as though they were of the opposite sex (Longman & Garland, 2008:880). The other sexual laws mention men and women, but others do not. For instance, should one assume that the incestual prohibition in Leviticus that only refers to male violators somehow does not apply to women? Leviticus 20:11a says: "If a man sleeps with his father's wife, he has shamed his father." Would this verse only apply to men and not women? It would be understood that women also could not sleep with their mother's husband. Moreover, orthodox Judaism has never sanctioned homosexuality, for men or women, as Rabbi Jakobovits explains:

"Whereas the more liberal attitude found in some modern Christian circles is possibly due to the exaggerated importance Christians have traditionally accorded to the term "love," Jewish law holds that no hedonistic ethic, even if called "love," can justify the morality of homosexuality any more than it can legitimize adultery, incest, or polygamy, however genuinely such acts may be performed out of love and by mutual consent" (Rooker & Cole, 2000:224).

Finally, if Vines wants to argue that the Levitical prohibitions only refer to male homosexual intercourse, then he would have to address the other sexual laws in the same manner. Homosexual practice is the only sexual law that Vines reinterprets, yet his logic would warrant the reinterpretation of the other sexual

laws. To that end, if Vines argues that only male same-sex intercourse is in question, does this indicate that other forms of sexual practice between the same sexes is permissible? Is the argument then that all sexual practices between people of the same-sex outside of intercourse is permitted? The moral trajectory of Vines's reasoning is precarious. The Levitical prohibitions do not only apply to male same-sex intercourse: they apply to all forms of homosexual practice for men and women.

4.6.3 The analogy of scripture as witness to the sinfulness of all homosexual practice

When interpreting Scripture, there are several principles one should consider, when grappling with the relevancy of the Old Testament law and homosexual practice. One is, the *analogy of Scripture*. The Old Testament is clear: homosexual practice is forbidden under any circumstance. Paul uses the wording in both Levitical prohibitions to describe homosexual practice in the New Testament where it is condemned in 1 Corinthians 16:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 (Brown, 2014:166; DeYoung, 2015:64-65; Mounce, 2006:1372, Sprinkle, 2015:108-110). DeYoung (2015:64), gives the Septuagint rendering of Leviticus 18:22 and Leviticus 20:13:

Leviticus 18:22: meta **arsenos** ou koimēthēsē **koitēn** gynaikos ("you shall not lie with a male as with a woman")

Leviticus 20:13: hos an koimēthē meta **arsenos koitēn** gynaikos ("whoever shall lie with a male as with a woman")

The word *arsenokoitai* that Paul uses to refer to homosexual practice is used in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:1. The Greek New Testament of both verses are as follows with the *arsenokoitai* pointed out:

1 Corinthians 6:9: Ἡ οὐκ οἶδατε ὅτι ἄδικοι [α]θεοῦ βασιλείαν οὐ κληρονομήσουσιν; μὴ πλανᾶσθε· οὔτε πόρνοι οὔτε εἰδωλόλατραι οὔτε μοιχοὶ οὔτε μαλακοὶ οὔτε **ἀρσενοκοῖται (arsenokoitai).**"

1 Timothy 1:10: “πόρνοις, ἀρσενοκοίταις (**arsenokoitai**), ἀνδραποδισταῖς, ψεύσταις, ἐπιόρκοις, καὶ εἴ τι ἕτερον τῇ ὑγιαίνουσῃ διδασκαλίᾳ ἀντίκειται...”

Paul uses wording that describes homosexual practice in the Septuagint to define homosexual practice in the New Testament. He coins the word *arsenokoitai* himself to indicate homosexual practice. The word *arsen* is defined as *male* and *koites* as *bed*. The word *koites* has a sexual connotation as seen in its other uses. For example, Oedipus, The Greek mythological King of Thebes, is used to describe Oedipus, *metrokoitēs*, “a man who lies with his mother” (Brown, 2014:167). Others uses of the word *doulukoitēs* include “a man who lies with maidservants or female slaves,” *polykoitēs*, “a man who lies with many” and *onokoitēs*, “a man who lies with donkeys,” said of Christians in a graffito from Carthage of about 195 AD (Brown, 2014:167).

This is important, because it involves a hermeneutical principle called the *analogy of Scripture* (Liederbach & Lenow, 2021:159; Kaiser & Silva, 2007:243). Analogy of Scripture means that clearer and plain-to-understand texts should clarify unclear texts (Liederbach & Lenow, 2012:159). Scripture interprets Scripture. This principle is pertinent when trying to make sense of certain passages that portray an act that appears to be sinful, but the immediate context does not explicitly state that it is sinful or clarify God’s moral judgement on an issue (Liederbach & Lenow, 2012:159). Vines repeatedly interprets Scriptures out of context in order to substantiate his arguments without properly explaining the Scriptures in totality and their theological meanings, as has been demonstrated amply in the present argument.

As contemporary Christians assess the biblical stance on homosexual practice, the analogy of Scripture could not be more helpful. The prohibitions in of homosexual practice in the Old Testament are the building blocks for what Paul writes in the New Testament. As previously mentioned, Paul was an educated Hebrew who knew the law. He understood the moral aspects and teachings of the law. Not only that, but Paul’s theology was built on the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:1-4; 2 Tim. 3:14-17). When he writes in 1 Cor. 6:9, and 1 Timothy 1:10 of “men who

practice homosexuality,” he uses the word *arsenokoitai* from the Levitical prohibitions against homosexual practice.

Vines admits that it is possible that Paul uses the Septuagint when coining the word *arsenokoitai*, when referencing homosexual practice, but the type of homosexual practice is in question (Vines, 2014:122-124). That perspective is intellectually dishonest. As previously noted, Paul makes a sweeping condemnation of homosexual practice, no matter the context, and Vines’s cultural arguments are not sufficient. The word *arsenokoitai* has been used in early Jewish and early Christian literature to mean homosexual practice (Sprinkle, 2015:11-115). *Analogy of Scripture* shows that homosexual practice was consistently prohibited, first in the Old Testament, then in the New Testament, and shows Vines’s support of same-sex relationships and the belief that only certain types of homosexual practices were prohibited to be faulty biblical reasoning.

4.7 Conclusion

Vines presents several arguments in order to render the Levitical prohibitions ineffective for contemporary Christians. Vines argues that the Old Testament law is not binding for Christians, because Christ fulfilled it. Christ’s fulfillment makes the law obsolete, and Christians no longer need to adhere to its prohibition of homosexual practice. To further his claim, Vines provides examples of laws that Christians do and do not follow to demonstrate that Christians today do not find the law obligatory.

In response to Vines, it has been demonstrated here that the Old Testament law is still relevant because its moral principles transcend time and culture. Jesus and the New testament writers reaffirm that the ten commandments show that those moral principles stand and should be applied when making ethical and moral decisions. Jesus is the ultimate interpreter of the law, changing the relationships of the believers to the law. Whatever is restated in the New Testament is ethically binding for Christians, and it does reaffirm in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 that homosexual practice in any form is sinful. Chapter 2 of the present

project established that Romans 1 explicitly deems male and female homosexual practice to be sinful.

With the establishment of the continued relevance of the law, it is necessary to address Vines's belief that Leviticus 18:22 and Leviticus 20:13 only applied to male same-sex intercourse and not to other forms of same-sex practice, including female same-sex practices. An examination of Vines's claims shows that his reasoning is not biblically founded. Leviticus condemns all homosexual practice, and the prohibition of female same-sex practices would have been assumed. Now that the relevance and continuation of the prohibition of homosexual practice has been established, it is necessary to discuss the importance of sexual difference in marriage as a reflection the relationship between Christ and the Church.

CHAPTER 5

HOMOSEXUAL MARRIAGE AND EPHESIANS

5.1 Introduction

Vines holds that same-sex couples can fit the basis for Christian marriage. He writes, in chapter 8 of his book, *The Biblical Argument for Marriage Equality*, that since the contemporary Christian knows sexual orientation is both fixed and unchosen, one of two Christian teachings should be modified. The two teachings that Vines believe should be modified are the voluntary nature of celibacy and the scope of marriage (Vines, 2014:134). In chapter 2 of this thesis, it was demonstrated that there was an awareness of a limited concept sexual orientation in the ancient world. It was also established in chapter 2 that the presence of same-sex orientation does not give biblical reason for modifying the Bible's clear prohibition on homosexual practice.

Nonetheless, Vines believes that same-sex couples can fit the scope of marriage because marriage is about covenant and reflecting the nature of God (Vines, 2014:136). Since same-sex couples can fit the scope of marriage, Vines argues that sexual difference is not essential to marriage, also not in the case of the symbolism of marriage in Ephesians 5 as Christ's relationship with the church. In furtherance of his argument, he explains that procreation is not a fixed standard in marriage: the Bible's reflection of gender hierarchy is not normative for Christians, and the language of "one flesh" in Genesis emphasised sameness, not sexual difference. This chapter will address Vines's assertion that same-sex couples can fit the Bible's symbolism of Christ's relationship with the church as found in Ephesians 5:22-23 (Vines 2014:137) by (1) examining the theological concept of Christ being the bridegroom and the Church being the bride; (2) examining the importance (or lack thereof) of gender in the symbolism of Christ's relationship with the Church his bride.

5.2 “One flesh”

Vines sets out to show that the essence of Christian marriage permits the inclusion of same-sex couples, because sexual difference is not essential to marriage, by addressing the “one flesh” concept in Genesis 2 (Vines, 2014:144). It is not the particular sex act that the phrase “one flesh” denotes. Vines argues that becoming “one flesh” encompasses not just sex but the entire covenantal context in which God intends for sex to take place (Vines, 2014:145). “One flesh” points beyond sexual practice to the strong relational bond that comes from being sexually united with one’s spouse (Vines, 2014:145). In order to address this argument, a closer look at the creation of Eve is paramount.

5.2.1 A suitable helper

In chapter 3, it was established that Adam was not lonely in the manner in which Vines interprets the Genesis account of Eve’s creation. God did not say it was not good for man to be lonely. God said it was not good for man to be alone. Adam was not lonely in the sense of lacking adequate love or companionship, since he had a perfect relationship with God. The word translated as “alone” to describe Adam in Genesis 2:18 does not speak of loneliness, as has been indicated. In the Hebrew, the word translated as “alone” is *lebaddô* (לְבַדּוֹ), which indicates solitude or separation or something “by itself,” and does not mean lacking intimacy of relationships (Brown-Driver-Briggs, 2017:94; Longman & Garland, 2009:101). The Genesis account conveys that Adam needed a proper partner to help him cultivate and take care of the earth as God commanded. What was “not good” about Adam being alone was not having another helper like himself to share in the work and in the fellowship with God. It was not good for man to be alone because he could not fulfil the divine command to be fruitful and multiply by himself.

Thus, God formed a woman from the side of Adam. In Genesis 2:18 God says that he would make a *helper*, as his *compliment* (HCSB). The word translated as “helper” in Hebrew does not correlate to an inferior, subservient role as some might think (Carr *et al.*, 2021:112; Longman, 2019:43). The word used is *`ezer*,

and it comes from *`azar* (to help) (Letellier, 2015:54). *`Ezer* denotes support and “helpmate,” and is used only a few times in the Old Testament, for instance in Psalm 54:4 (Letellier, 2015:54). Interestingly, *`ezer* was also used in military terms to denote an ally (Letellier, 2015:54). God desired a helper for Adam that would be *suitable* or *compliment* him, not just physically, but emotionally and spiritually. Animals could not fit that need.

Eve came from Adam’s rib: “Then the Lord God made the rib He had taken from the man into a woman and brought her to the man” (Gen. 2:22). The Hebrew word translated as “made” is *banah*, which means to build (Letellier, 2015:55). God intentionally fashioned Eve from Adam’s body, giving her similarities and differences from Adam as his companion (Carr *et al.*, 2021:113; Letellier, 2015:55). Eve’s sameness was necessary in that Adam needed another human who could spiritually, physically and emotionally match him. However, it was the sameness and differences together that made Eve (a woman) the best helper.

The Hebrew word used to describe the type of helper that God desired for Adam is *kenegdo* (כְּנֶגְדּוֹ). This is a compound word where *ke* means “as” or “like” and *neged* “opposite,” “against” or “in front of” (Sprinkle, 2015:32, Yuan, 2018:83-85). This word denotes “what is in front of, corresponding to, beyond, before (Brown *et al.*, 2017:617; Mounce *et al.*, 2006:1243). Literally, this word is saying that God desired a help “as opposite him” Adam or “like against him” (Kidner, 2008:70; Sprinkle, 2015:32). God desired a corresponding helper who was like Adam but also his opposite. Eve was the same as Adam, made human as he was, yet wholly different. Vines does admit that Eve’s gender is relevant to the story of creation because the first couple would have had to procreate (Vines, 2014:46), but then he emphasises sameness over Adam and Eve’s gender difference. Vines also admits that the phrase “suitable helper does encompass a sense of difference (Vines, 2014:46), but he brushes over that (Vines, 2014:46). Vines’s argument is imbalanced, and he ignores the full scope of Eve’s significance. Instead of emphasising one over the other, sameness and difference between Adam and Eve should be seen as equally important. There was an assignment attached to Adam and Eve’s creations. Eve was a needed helper and she brought

companionship and intimacy as well. It is a biological woman that was divinely created to complement man, and same-sex couples were not God's divinely intended partnership in marriage. The biological female was divinely created to compliment the biological male. This principle connects to the biblical concept of man and woman becoming "one flesh" in marriage.

5.2.2 One flesh

A proper understanding of why biological females are the only divine compliment to biological males is the basis for Scripture's description of the "one flesh" marital union. Vines argues that "the phrase "one flesh" in Scripture refers to the formation of a new primary kinship bond, not the "anatomical fittedness" of male and female bodies. That is why Ephesians tells us that "the two will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24), which then "really refers to the union between Christ and the church, which is based on God's covenantal love for humanity—not anatomical design" (Reformation Project: Marriage is about covenant). Ephesians 5 will be addressed later within this chapter, but for now, the language of "one flesh" will be discussed.

When Adam exclaims that Eve is "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh," he is referring to not only her being created from his very body (bone), but also that she holds a kin relationship with him (Carr *et al.*, 2021:114; Letellier, 2015:55). The phrase "flesh of my flesh" signifies familial relationships and it shows Adam's recognition that she had a different connection with him than the animals (Carr *et al.*, 2021:114). She was a familial counterpart, she was his wife. Adam said, "this one will be called 'woman,' for she was taken from man." The Hebrew here is important. The word that Adam uses in the Hebrew for 'woman,' is נֶשֶׁא (*ʾīšāh*). She is called woman (*ʾīšāh*) because she is taken from the "man" (*ʾīš*). The word נֶשֶׁא (*ʾīšāh*) is a common noun, designating gender (Gehring, 2013:16). Therefore, Adam is not naming the human that was made from his side: it is a designation of the unique female being that came from his side (Carr *et al.*, 2021:114). Eve was divinely built from Adam as his human sexual counterpart, who was to work with him in the Garden of Eden, fulfilling God's divine command to "be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the

birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth “ (Gen. 1:28). Adam and Eve could only fulfil God’s command in full by being a heterosexual couple. It is their difference in biological sex that makes them able to obey God’s command.

After Adam declared Eve to be “bone of his bone” and “flesh of his flesh,” the Bible describes that man and woman come together as “one flesh” in marital union (Gen. 2:24). Vines presents a distorted definition of the phrase “one flesh.” He argues that the phrase is over-sexualised, quoting Brownson, while he holds that the focus is on the commonality between the two spouses (Vines, 2014: 44). Vines asserts that the phrase does not point to the sexual union between male and female but “refers to the formation of a new primary kinship bond, not the “anatomical fittedness” of male and female bodies,” as indicated. He used 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 to drive home his point, which is completely out of context and actually disproves his point. In 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, Paul is talking about the dangers of sexual immorality and the truth that the body belongs to the Lord and should be conducted with that truth in mind. Paul writes: “Don’t you know that anyone joined to a prostitute is one body with her? For Scripture says, ‘The two will become one flesh’” (1 Corinthians 6:16). Vines writes that Paul’s use of “one flesh” refers to the bond people create in marriage (Vines, 2014:145). Again, becoming one flesh involves more than the physical act of sex, but it does not exclude it. Additionally, sexual intercourse is not just physical; it involves the whole person, mind body and spirit. Paul is saying that when a man has sex with a prostitute he is performing sexual acts and creating the spiritual and emotional bonds that are in violation of God’s will for sexual practice and intimacy. This is sexual immorality, and it violates how God designed men and women to conduct themselves sexually. Vines repeatedly only emphasises parts of Scripture, or interprets them out of context in ways that support his argument without thoughtful engagement with the totality of the Scriptures. Vines presents a faulty argument when he tries to dismiss the glaring sexual connotation that “one flesh” carries in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. Thus, it is intellectually dishonest to attempt to dismiss the sexual connotation that the phrase “one flesh” clearly carries throughout Scripture. Becoming one flesh is sexual, just as it is emotional

and spiritual. One of the primary ways man and woman become the most intimate and form that kinship bond is through sex in marriage. Jesus emphasised that male and female sex is the only authorised way in which to become one flesh, in every sense of the phrase. The kinship bond is not solely about sex, but definitely includes it. Companionship was important, but it had to be opposite-sex companionship that would best fit Adam and allow him and his wife to complete God's command. They had to procreate, as Vines admits, and God's desire for people to procreate has not changed. The reality of not being able to procreate does not change the original intent God had for sexual relationships between men and women. Gender complementarity is a crucial factor that Vines dismisses.

Vines's perspective is that the Bible does not teach any particular understanding of "gender complementarity," which means that gender complementarity can mean a number of things: social customs, gender hierarchy or anatomical differences to name a few (Vines, 2014:27; The Reformation Project, 2021). The totality of Scripture must be taken into account. There is evidence in the Scriptures that gender complementarity does include gender roles and functions, as well as the anatomical difference between men and women. In the Genesis account of the creation of man and woman, all the complexities of gender roles and functions are not explicitly mentioned. However, there are two gender functions that sexual difference influences, as seen in Genesis. We have already discussed the woman as the suitable helper, which is one explicit gender role laid out in Genesis that is influenced by sexual difference. The other clear example is reproduction. The point of procreation was to fill the earth with God's image. That can only be done through the joining of man and woman in the union that God blessed. Adam and Eve had an assignment attached to their ability to reproduce. Procreation was the divinely intended product of the different biological sexes coming together. Gender roles may be debated, but the reason for the difference in biological sex cannot. Jesus reinstates this in Mark 10:6.

Vines argues that the essence of marriage involves a covenant-keeping relationship of mutual self-giving (Vines, 2014:137). He believes that, at its core, marriage was about displaying the nature and glory of God through the covenant

one makes with his or her spouse (Vines, 2014:136), and this does not exclude same-sex relationships. The only difference that matters within marriage is not gender difference, but “differences in personality, passions, careers, goals and needs are the differences that require each partner’s self-sacrifice, which reflects Christ’s sacrificial love for us” (Vines, 2014:147). He continues that same-sex couples can and do live out the deepest sense of difference and are able to value and sacrifice for those differences which reflect Christ’s sacrificial love (Vines, 2014:147). Marriage, he concludes, “is designed to be a human reflection of the only love that offers true completion, and that is God’s love for us in Christ” (Vines, 2014:147). The essence of Christian marriage according to Ephesians 5, he sums up, involves keeping a covenant with one’s spouse in a relationship of mutual self-giving. That picture does not exclude same-sex couples (Vines, 2014:143). In summation, Vines believes that “according to Ephesians, marriage is fundamentally about commitment—keeping our covenant with our spouse as a reflection of God’s own covenant with us through Jesus. Same-sex couples are just as capable of doing that as are heterosexual couples” Reformation Project: Marriage is about covenant).

Vines repeatedly argues that procreation is not a fixed standard in marriage, and is therefore not essential to marriage (Vines, 2014:141). Because of the fall, many couples may not be able to have children, and there are those who may not want biological children, but those facts do not support the permitting of same-sex marriage from a biblical standpoint. As Jesus states, referencing God’s created intent in Genesis, God created humanity either male or female. It is only male and female that Jesus reiterates that authorised to become one flesh, which has sexual connotations to it as already explained. As much as Vines desires to dismiss or avoid the words of Jesus, he cannot. Sex is a major part of marriage, given not only for procreation but for pleasure and intimacy in marriage. Even without the sexual aspect of marriage, women were created as the divine compliment for a man. Two men or two women cannot complement one another biblically. Additionally, marriage between man and a woman is the only construct in which the Bible authorises sexual practice of any kind. Sex does not need the possibility off spring to be moral (Vines, 2014:140), but sex needs to occur

between male and female in marriage to me moral. Arguing that procreation is not a fixed aspect of marriage misses the point. On his organisation's website, it is stated that:

In Matthew 19:1-12, Jesus may have made an exception to his prohibition of divorce in the case of adultery, but he made no such exception in the case of infertility. That indicates that covenantal commitment is more essential to marriage than the ability to procreate.

Procreation is not the sole purpose of marriage, but the sexual practice itself is only designed for man and woman in marriage. Interestingly, Vines emphasises that Jesus said nothing about infertility, but he says nothing about what Jesus *does* say, which is that God created people male and female and it is male and female that become one flesh (Matt. 19:4-5).

5.3 Does Christ's redemption indicate the end of gender roles?

As part of the marriage covenant, marriage is intended to reflect Christ's relationship with the Church, and this is done through the husband and wife assuming their different God-given roles, which prepares them for the coming of Christ (Keller, 2012; Yuan, 2018:93). The primary purpose of marriage is to assist the other spouse towards pursuing holiness. Paul speaks to this in Ephesians 5. Paul writes: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word. He did this to present the church to Himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless" (Keller, 2012; Eph. 5:25-27). The emphasis here is on the husband's service and love towards the wife in his authority. Through sacrificial love and care, the husband's purpose is loving his wife to help her become more holy before God. The husband is a sanctifying presence in the life of his wife, much like the relationship between Christ and the Church (Osborne, 2017:131). This was counter-cultural in the Hellenistic world that emphasised male dominance. The command to love one's wife would have been starkly different in that culture (Osborne, 2017:131).

Vines writes that Ephesians 5 assumes that gender hierarchy exists exclusively between men and women in heterosexual marriages. (Vines, 2014:141). When Paul writes that the husband is the head of the wife and that the wife is to submit to her husband, this is a sign of gender hierarchy. Vines's point is that Paul wrote in Galatians 3:28 that gender hierarchy, just as the subordinate status of slaves, would fade away in Christ. While connecting Paul's writing on slavery with the submission of women, Vines believes that same-sex marriages are biblically supported because gender difference has been done away with in Christ:

Scripture lays the groundwork for a redemptive reordering of gender relations in God's kingdom, so gender hierarchy can't be said to be essential to marriage. Even if, when a man and a woman marry, they don't have a hierarchical relationship, no claims their marriage is valid on that basis. Acceptance of these marriages indicates that, even with opposite-sex spouses, gender hierarchy isn't part of the essence of Christian marriage (Vines, 2014:143).

In order to address Vines's argument faithfully, a proper interpretation of Galatians 3:28 is paramount. Galatians 3 is rich in theology. Paul explains the purpose of the law, justification and the new believer's position in Christ. The immediate context of Galatians 3:28 is Paul's explanation that man is no longer under the law, which had acted as a guardian (Gal. 3:24). The law was no longer needed as a guardian, because those who would be justified were justified by faith due to the coming of Christ (Gal. 3:25). Verses 27-29 say:

For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ like a garment. There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:27-29).

What Paul is saying here is that there are no longer any distinctions between Jews and Christians in God's family, as there was continued conflict over whether or not new Christians should be circumcised. Every man and woman were equally considered sons and daughters of God if they are in Christ by faith. As Vorster explains, the phrase "in Christ" denotes a new relationship with God and this also

changes all other relationships and exceeds the historic differences between Jews and gentiles (Vorster, 2019:6). Being baptised in Christ (Gal. 3:27) expresses the union with Christ by faith, and that gender is irrelevant to membership in God's family (Erickson, 2013:498; Vorster, 2019:6). In fact, all faith in Christ abolished all ethnic, social and sexual distinctions, and all believers received all privileges and responsibilities like adult family members (Lea & Black, 2003:373).

The non-distinction between men and women in Galatians 3:28 addresses one's place in faith. While Scripture values men and women equally from the beginning of creation, faith in Christ does not erase how God designed humanity. Galatians 3:28 does not authorise the violation of God's created order between men and women or the fixed state of biological sex and its importance. When Vines uses Galatians 3:28 to support his claim that gender differences are null and void, it is simply used out of context. In fact, if different gender functions had been erased, Paul would not have reaffirmed them nearly ten years later in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 11:9). Furthermore, the apostle wrote Galatians around 49 AD, and his letter to the Ephesians was written around 60 AD. If he believed that gender functions had been done away with in Christ, why would he affirm them nearly ten years after writing Galatians 3:28? The redemption of Christ does not entail the "reordering of gender relations" (Vines, 2014:143). In fact, redemption clarifies God's unique designs for men and women and strengthens the truth that men and women are equal and value but different in function. Redemption addresses the sin nature that causes man to rebel against God's ordained order and purpose for men and women. Every human has sinned and is therefore guilty of sin and wrong before God, because the very nature of humanity is sinful (Rom. 3:23). Humanity has been redeemed, and bought back, from the curse of sin.

Though forms of patriarchy did exist from the beginning of creation, the Bible points to the equal value of women and men in spite of their sexual differences. Both were made in the image of God. Galatians 3:28 is one of the greatest examples in the Scriptures of intimating that women hold equal worth and that, though their function is different it has no bearing on their worth in the kingdom.

When Vines connects the issue of slavery and the “subordinate status of women” in Galatians, he twists the meaning of the text (Vines, 2014:143). Galatians is not equating slavery and gender hierarchy as Vines tries to assert. When Paul says there is neither “slave nor free,” he is emphasising the equality between slaves, masters and those who are free in Christ. In Christ, no matter one’s social standing, everyone is equal as believers. Though the New Testament does not call for the ending of slavery, Galatians 3:28 points inevitably to the eventual disappearance of slavery from the world scene (Osborne, 2017:79). Women, like slaves, were not typically heirs under biblical law, but both become heirs in God’s Kingdom when they are in Christ (Keener, 2019:280). The three distinctions Paul makes for the fundamental distinctions of human existence are ethnicity, economic capacity and sexuality (George, 2020:589a). Women were often seen in inferior ways. Affirming women’s equal value in the Kingdom and even socially, does not translate to redefining the way God originally designed men and women’s function with one another, and it does not erase created sexual difference in Christ, which solidifies God’s design as right and something to be upheld.

Vines uses the same motif, connecting the submission of wives to that of slaves in Ephesians 5, to refute the idea of gender hierarchy in his argument that gender difference is not essential to marriage. Slavery is a sensitive and emotionally triggering word in modern society, especially in America. When people hear the word “slavery” in America, they typically think of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Black Africans were stolen from their land and forced into chattel slavery in America. Slavery is one of the greatest sins of America. Skin colour was used as the justification for dehumanising and subjecting black Africans for the profit of white slave owners for four hundred years. The Bible was even used to promote and eventually end that barbaric practice.

Vines understands how emotionally charged the concept of slavery is. He compares the abusive submission that African slaves in the Americas were subjected to, to that of how women are instructed to submit to their husbands. He argues that, just as the church came to grips with the tragic reality of slavery and

chose to abolish it, so oppressive requirements of gender hierarchy should be abolished (Vines, 2014:143). He writes: “given that Paul in Galatians connected the issues of slavery and gender hierarchy, we should as well. The New Testament explicitly links the submission of slaves to the submission of wives” (Vines, 2014:143). He continues by adding that, in 1 Peter 3:1, wives are instructed to submit to their husbands in the same way that slaves did to their masters, as found also in 1 Peter 2:18-25. Using this logic, Vines believes that the submission in Ephesians 5 is invalid and has been done away with in Christ. Yet, he does not provide a reason why this instruction is in there; he merely tries to invalidate it. Again, he has to account for why Paul makes these distinctions after he wrote Galatians 3:28.

One must use caution here, because slavery in the Roman world was different from the trans-Atlantic slave trade that Vines refers to. This is different from slavery in the Americas, where slaves were not allowed to learn to read or be educated. Furthermore, slavery was not based on race in the ancient world. People became slaves because they were kidnapped, prisoners of war or were born into a slave household; or they became a slave to pay off debt (Schreiner, 2003:135). This is not to say that the practice of slavery in the New Testament Greco-Roman world was ideal or always humane. Greco-Roman society was built on the backs of slaves. Greek, Roman and Judean parents would sell their children into slavery to pay off debts, and it was commonplace for creditors to force Judean fathers to sell their (premenstrual) daughters (Green & McDonald, 2013:171). Slaves in the New Testament world were considered property and were under the control of their master. and they had no rights. There is a discrepancy in New Testament scholarship about the humaneness of slavery in the New-Testament world compared to that of America. Nevertheless, slaves were subject to kind and benevolent masters and also those who were cruel and abusive.

Ancient and modern slavery are similar in significant ways, because both were a “social death” for that of the enslaved, since they were under the absolute authority and control of their master (Green & McDonald, 2013:172). However,

as Green and McDonald caution, there are differences between the modern and ancient practices of slavery that should be considered so as to avoid anachronism. First, slavery was not based on ethnicity or skin colour. Slaves were not typically detectable by their appearance unless they wore collars or were eventually tattooed (Green & McDonald, 2013:172). The fact that mere appearance was not enough to tell who was a slave, it made it easier for slaves to escape and become invisible in society (Green & McDonald, 2013:172). Black African slaves did not have that privilege. Slaves could temporarily flee an angry master or go see relatives and not be considered a fugitive slave in the Roman world (Green & McDonald, 2013:172). Second, both slaves and masters typically shared the dominant cultural values and religious traditions, and oftentimes, after manumission, freedmen and freedwomen would own their own slaves (Green & McDonald, 2013:172). Third, slaves could own their own property and even other slaves (Green & McDonald, 2013:172). Fourth, they could also be educated: black African slaves were rarely allowed to pursue an education, and in the Roman world that was different. It would not have been out of the ordinary for a slave to be more educated than his or her master and being educated increased their value (Green & McDonald, 2013:173; Schreiner, 2003:135). Fifth, some slaves held highly sensitive and respected positions, even municipal office (Green & McDonald, 2013:172). Even enslaved eunuchs could be used in high-ranking positions as seen in Acts 8:27 (Green & McDonald, 2013:172). They could hold positions such as an accountant, doctor, manager, teacher, artisan, musician, tutor, sea captain, personal secretary and so on (Green & McDonald, 2013:172; Schreiner, 2003:135). Educated slaves could add the owner's public reputation (Green & McDonald, 2013:173). Sixth, being a slave did not amount to the lowest social status, even though becoming a slave was universally execrated--being an impoverished freedman or woman was the lowest social position. For this reason, many would sell themselves into slavery in order to secure income/ employment or improve their social status (Green & McDonald, 2013:173). In a letter to the Corinthian church, Bishop Clement of Rome remarked that there were Christians who sold themselves into slavery in order to

ransom others from slavery or provide food for other with the price they received for themselves (Green & McDonald, 2013:174).

Green and McDonald make an interesting observation concerning the difference between slavery in modern times and the ancient world. They write that Roman slaves had no consciousness of social class because they came from a wide variety of ethnic, educational and social backgrounds (Green & McDonald, 2013:174). Furthermore, slave owners came from various social and economic levels as well, which hindered the idea of slaves suffering a common travail (Green & McDonald, 2013:174). This is starkly different from slavery in America. Slaves in the Roman world of the first century gained their identity from their owners (Green & McDonald, 2013:174). Finally, manumission was more attainable in the ancient world than in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Manumission was possible with the help of their master, while rural and prison slaves had no hope of becoming free (Green & McDonald, 2013:174). A large number of urban and domestic slaves could anticipate being set free after slaves had obtained hope of manumission by the age of thirty (Green & McDonald, 2013:174; Schreiner, 2003:135). This was not true for enslaved Africans. Life-long enslavement was expected and it was the norm. Generations of slave families were enslaved. It was often that former Roman slaves would become full citizens after manumission (Green & McDonald, 2013:175). Slavery in the Americas and that of the Greco-Roman world were similar in some ways, yet different in others.

The Bible neither condones nor promotes the institution of slavery. The New Testament writers were addressing readers in the situations they were in; they were not social revolutionaries (Schreiner, 2003:135). Pushing for the eradication of slavery was not the aim of the New Testament writers, and slavery was the backbone of the Roman economy. Slavery is never condoned as a social structure in the Bible, and it is not rooted in the created order ordained by God (Schreiner, 2003:136). However, the practice of slavery of the kind practiced in the trans-Atlantic slave trade was considered “contrary to sound doctrine” in 1 Timothy. Among the actions listed in 1 Timothy 1, considered sinful and contrary to sound doctrine, are “enslavers.” Some translations use the word “kidnappers”

like the Holman Christian Standard Bible and The New International Version. These slavers or kidnappers were people who would capture other humans and sell them into slavery (DeYoung, 2015:107; Helm, 2008:94; Köstenberger, 2017:78-79). One should use caution when using slavery as an excuse to dismiss the Bible's moral stance on certain issues. Slavery, as thought of contemporary times, especially in America, would have been abhorrent and condemned by the New Testament writers.

1 Peter 3:1 reads: "In the same way, wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, even if some disobey the Christian message, they may be won over without a message by the way their wives live." In his book, Vines makes an interpretive addition to 1 Peter 3:1 and rewrites the Scriptures as follows: "Wives in the same way [that slaves are to submit to their masters] submit yourselves to your own husbands." He writes that his comparison of the submission of wives to their husbands and the submission of slaves to their masters comes from 1 Peter 2:18-25. When Vines speaks of slavery, he is referring primarily to slavery in the West, what many would recognise as the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Vines, 2014: 142). He does this knowing that, when he tries to connect the submission of the wife to that of slavery, people will generally think of slavery in the West, and this will bolster his argument in the mind of the reader. Upon first glance, it would seem that Peter is saying that wife and slaves are both oppressed in their submission due to social hierarchy, and this is what Christ did away with.

The problem here can be unpacked as follows. If hierarchies in slave master relationships and in wife/ husband relationships fade away due to Christ's redemption, and Jesus calls "us to make that reality now" (Vines, 2014:143), Paul would not instruct slaves and wives on how to conduct themselves in those existing hierarchies. Certainly, Paul and Peter would have theologically understood that Christ's redemption would have done away with these hierarchies. Yet, as stated, the New Testament writers were concerned about the heart of a person, which would ultimately affect society. Jesus did not come to change society, he came to transform hearts which, by default, transforms societies. Jesus does not call for the eradication of God's design for married

relationships or to how men and women should relate to one another, because this is rooted in creation. Nowhere in Scripture is a reordering of gender relations supported. The New Testament writers are instructing slaves, husbands, wives and all how to properly relate to one another in spite of their social standing, which should bring glory to God, and could even help win over an unbelieving spouse (1 Pet. 3:1-3).

What Vines fails to do, once more, is assess the submission in their proper contexts. 1 Peter was written primarily to encourage gentile Christians under persecution (Lea & Black, 2003:554; Padgett, 2011:50). When Peter instructed slaves to submit to their master in all fear in 1 Peter 2:18-25, he did this to instruct them that, no matter how much persecution they incur from unbelieving masters, that the way they responded was a witness to Jesus if they still respected and submitted to their master. Responding in a Christ-like way in spite of persecution would not go unrewarded. The promise of reward in the face of persecution would have been an encouragement to the early Christians. The word translated as “fear” is *phobos*, and this is a noun cognate of the term Peter uses for reverencing God in 2:17 (Keener, 2021:136). Peter uses this same word for wives’ reverence and respect for their husbands as they submit to them (3:2), and it is used to describe Christians’ humility (3:16), while rejecting the wrong sort of fear (3:6, 14) (Keener, 2021:136).

Peter is not telling early Christians that they must endure abuse in order to win favour with God, nor is he telling them to seek out unfair treatment (Keener, 2012:137). Peter explains that, if they do endure hardship due to persecution, the Lord would reward their commitment to remain committed to Christ-like behaviour in spite of these. Peter presents Christ as the greatest example of suffering persecution, yet still “entrusted himself to the One who judges justly” (1 Peter 2 23). Wives are instructed to submit in the same way in 1 Peter 3:1, just as slaves are encouraged to submit in their own context. Wives are encouraged to submit as well, especially in marriage with an unbelieving husband. The reason is she might win him to Christ through the example of her Christ-likeness in submitting. No matter one’s social standing or whether the husband is unbelieving or not,

Peter encourages wives and slaves to stand firm in their commitment to show Christ in their situations. Slavery is not a God-ordained social or relational structure; however, marriage between man and woman is. The institution of slavery may fade away, but not God's design for sexual and marital union.

As a final note, Children are also told to obey their parents in I Peter 3, yet Vines makes no mention of the hierarchy between children and parents fading away with the redemption of Christ, perhaps because he realises that those dynamics are needed, natural and appropriate. By design, children are meant to be reared by their parents: they are part of the natural multiplication God commanded of Adam and Eve, yet Vines prefers to elide this.

5.4 Sexual difference and Ephesians 5:21-33

Paul begins his instructions on Christian marriage in Ephesians 5:22. Ephesians 5:22 is a continuation of verse 21 where the apostle instructs believers to submit to one another in the fear of Christ. The command in verse 22, "Wives submit to your own husbands," does not contain a verb in the original Greek (Merida, 2014:131). The verse simply states "Wives to your own husbands as to the Lord." In verses 18 through 22, Paul is instructing believers to submit to one another, and then he admonishes wives to submit to their husbands (Merida, 2014:131). Paul is continuing his instruction on submission as he begins to reference the Christian household in verse 22. Paul's instruction regarding how husband and wife relate to one another flows from the principle he expresses in verse 21 to submit to one another in the fear of Christ. Husbands are instructed to love their wives as Christ loved the Church (Eph. 5:25). Wives are instructed to submit to their husbands as the Church submits to Christ (Eph. 5:24). The instructions Paul gives are not oppressive, patriarchal instructions based on the culture of the time. The roles that Paul describes are rooted in God's creational order. This is indicated by Paul's appeal to Genesis 2:24, at the end of his explanation of the marital roles that reflect Christ's relationship with the church (Merida, 2014:141; Montgomery, 1997:205).

Vines appeals to culture in his assessment of gender complementarity that is portrayed in Ephesians 5. As his definition shows: "Gender complementarity is a set of social norms, not a biblical teaching" (Reformation project: Gender Complementarity). This is wrong. Though the Bible does not explicitly state "gender complementarity," it is present within the Word. Theologians may differ on the complexities of gender complementarity, but the principle is present within the Scriptures. The reason Vines argues that gender complementarity is not a biblical teaching, is because he is not defining it in a biblical way. Vines bases his perspective of gender complementarity in culture. This is faulty, because gender complementary is based on biological sex. In other words, it would be easy to dismiss gender complementarity if it was purely based on culture. Yet, this is not the case: when God created male and female, he created them with certain functions. Gender and biological sex are not divorced from one another in Scripture. Men and women are complementary sexually and in function (role). The sexual difference and differences in roles must both be equally valued in order to have a balanced perspective of proper sexuality and relational standards for men and women.

It is only when a man and a woman are joined together as "one flesh," that they are able to fulfil the symbolism of Christ's relationship with the Church. The biological woman was uniquely designed to fill the role of help-meet and submissive partner to the headship role of the biological male. Biological sex determines gender and gender function which is displayed in the example of Christ's relationship with the Church between husband and wife. Two biological males or females cannot properly exemplify the different roles that were designed for each gender. Vines argues that marriage is about mutual self-giving. Mutual self-giving is an element of marriage but it is not the main purpose of marriage. However, gender function is essential to biblical marriage. DeYoung (2021:74) sums up the importance of sexual difference in marriage, as a reflection of Christ's relationship with the church:

Marriage is a picture of Christ and the church. If there is no distinction in how we related to each, no ordering, no self-sacrificing headship, no joyful submission,

we are left with Christ and Christ or the church and the church. God is trying to show something in our marriages. If we disallow sexual differentiation, we are not allowing to shine forth the very heart of marriage itself. Yes, God created marriage for companionship and for sex and for children, but most of all, he created marriage to reveal this profound mystery of Christ and the church.

Without sexual difference, the distinct roles in the symbolism of Christ and the church would not be fully realised in the marriage union. Sexual difference is essential to biblical marriage and its reflection of Christ's relationship with his bride, which is the church.

The creation account of Eve in Genesis demonstrates that sexual difference is essential to biblical marriage. The concept of Eve as a suitable helper indicates that a biological woman is the divinely fashioned partner for a biological man. Vines attempts to emphasise Eve's sameness to Adam, as a way to dismiss the importance of her sexual difference. However, its Eve's sameness and sexual difference that are equally important. She is human in the same way as Adam, and she is capable of providing companionship. She is sexually different than Adam, which allows her to help him to fulfil the God-given assignment to be fruitful and multiply. The concept of "one flesh" also demonstrates that sexual difference was needed in order for Adam and Eve to come together as a marital union in the most intimate way. Vines argument that sexual difference is not essential to marriage does not stand against biblical scrutiny. Biological women are God's divine compliment to biological women. This is consistently affirmed throughout Scripture, and rooted in the Genesis account of creation.

Finally, sexual difference is essential to the marriage union as a reflection of Christ's relationship with the church. Gender and gender function are tied to biological sex. Vines's argument assumes gender function and biological sex are divisible. However, the Bible never separates gender function from biological sex. Gender function is determined by biological sex. Thus, the husband is uniquely designed to portray the sacrificial role of Christ in the marriage union, and the woman is uniquely designed to portray the submissive role of the church.

5.5 Conclusion

Matthew Vines's assertion that the Bible does not exclude loving same-sex relationships is not supported by biblical, theological and historical evidence. He argues that the contemporary understanding of sexual orientation did not exist in the ancient world, thus, the biblical writers had no knowledge of people who had fixed same-sex orientation. This fact, he asserts, demonstrates that the Bible's prohibitions on homosexual practice do not apply to same-sex orientated people. He also argues that gay Christians are forced into celibacy, and forced celibacy harms gay Christians. With all of this in mind, Vines believes that the biblical passages prohibiting homosexual practice should be reinterpreted. Historical evidence shows that there was a limited concept of sexual orientation in the ancient world.

Vines also argues that cultural patriarchy, and gender hierarchy are the reasons why the Bible prohibits same-sex relationships. It was established that from a biblical standpoint, his arguments fail. The prohibitions of homosexual practice are considered a violation of God's design for sexual relations that are rooted in creation. Sexual difference is essential to biblical marriage, as men and women were designed to fulfil different roles, which are based on biological sex. The marriage union is designed to reflect Christ's relationship with the church, and sexual union is essential to that reflection. Vines argues that two people of the same sex can fulfil the roles of Christ and the church, but this is theologically inaccurate. Biological men were uniquely designed to symbolise Christ's sacrificial love to the church. Biological women were uniquely designed to symbolise the church's submissiveness to Christ. These are gender roles that are specifically tied to biological sex. The Bible does not separate gender function from biological sex. The answer for gay Christians is not reinterpretation of the Bible. The answer for gay Christians, is submission the Word of God, receiving the grace that God gives every believer to live a holy life.

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DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITING



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DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITING

I, Christien Terblanche, hereby declare that I edited the text titled:

**A scriptural, theological and historical analysis of Matthew Vines's
argument for the biblical support for same-sex marriages**

**for Cameron Hodge for the purpose of submission as a study for
examination. Suggestions were indicated in track changes and application
was left to the author. The student was advised to rework the referencing.**

The language editor did not view a final version.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "CME Terblanche". The signature is stylized, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

CME Terblanche

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Full member of the Professional Editors Guild