

**Straight & Narrow, by Thomas Schimdt;**  
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Absolute standards appear to be relics of the past. In a society where all moral behaviour is considered equal, tolerance is the supreme virtue. Intolerant is the declaration that there is a universal standard by which to evaluate behaviour. This modern approach to values makes any discussion on homosexuality extremely difficult. All opposition to the gay lifestyle is called homophobia. And for an increasing number of people sexuality is no longer a moral issue, but a civil rights issue.

That our society has come to accept homosexuality is beyond dispute. Tourism actively promotes a particular resort area as "the gay and lesbian destination of the nineties!" *Time* magazine reports that mainstream tour operators are hawking "gay only" packages for everything from cruises to a ski week in Aspen. And a recent Planned Parenthood ad in the *Globe & Mail* advertises for a physician with experience in general practice with a focus on sexual health and counselling skills. Don't bother applying though if you are a white-straight-Anglo-Saxon male. Encouraged to apply are, "People of colour, people from ethnic communities, aboriginal people, gay and lesbians."

In the *Toronto Star*, Tom Harpur made the blasphemous suggestion that Jesus might have been gay. And he speculates that if the church knew for certain that he was gay, it might never have taught prejudice against gays.

Should the church accept the lifestyle of homosexuals and help them to embrace their sexuality?

Some denominations have adopted a revisionist position. For example, the United Church of Canada allows the ordination of lifestyle gays. And some have just begun to rethink the traditional Christian prohibition of homosexuality.

In the Christian Reformed Church, Classis Grand Rapids East is circulating a document which is open to the involvement of homosexuals, who live in a faithful monogamous relationship, in participation in the leadership of the church. But is homosexualism in a committed relationship permissible?

Thomas E. Schmidt professor of New Testament and Greek at Westmont College, Santa Barbara, CA, addresses all the key points in the current debate. His book, *Straight & Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate*, is primarily a debate between Christians. He hopes that the result of the debate will be a better understanding and more sensitivity of those who question and disapprove of homosexual practice.

Schmidt is amazed by the prejudice in academic circles against the traditional stance on homosexuality. He points to the powerful influence of the media on the public.

The media persistently portrays, and the public increasingly accepts, a view that homosexuals do not do but are. "If they are, and they experience oppression similar to that of minorities and women, then we must accept them - even celebrate them - to the same degree." Complex issues are oversimplified for mass consumption, especially on television. Homosexuals are carefully portrayed as parallel in every respect to heterosexuals except for the difference of the sex of the partner.

Some revisionists of the traditional Christian view claim that the Bible affirms heterosexuality, but it does not condemn homosexuality as we know it today. They argue that the Old Testament Holiness Code has in view prostitution in association with idolatry, not homosexuals between equals. Jesus Himself never condemned homosexuality. The apostle Paul wrote within the context of his time. Other revisionists acknowledge that the Scripture prohibits same-sex intimacy. For example, they claim that Paul's Gentile audience understood that he didn't associate homosexuality with sin - "it's merely impure, as is eating bacon." Paul's real message is in Romans 14:14: "Nothing is unclean in itself." The revisionist position is that anything is permissible to those who experience it positively. Schmidt comments that "such revisionist approaches all rely finally not on larger themes but on individual experience, which as teacher ends all discussion - and begins all destruction." Schmidt states that throughout the history of human cultures, no society has approved of homosexuality as we know it today. In China and Hindu India, where people constitute half of the world's population, homosexuality is virtually unknown, except as a "Western vice." The Bible exalts marriage. Heterosexuality is the norm. The activity of our bodies must agree with the way we have been made.

A frank chapter describes in detail the destructive nature of the homosexual lifestyle. Lifelong faithfulness between homosexual partners is almost nonexistent. Pedophilia is proportionally a far greater problem among homosexuals than among heterosexuals. Schmidt opines that no look at current honest scientific research allows us to view homosexuality as peaceable and harmless. For the vast majority of homosexual men "sexual behavior is obsessive, psychopathological and destructive to the body."

Schmidt's arguments from Scripture are pertinent, in depth, and persuasive. On the basis of Romans 1:26-27, and related passages, he shows that homosexual acts depart from the only acceptable norm for the full experience of sexuality, which is heterosexual marriage.

Homosexuality is sinful. It is a revolt against God. But what about homosexual orientation? Schmidt correctly claims that for many people this word has come to imply an inevitable, and therefore justified, behaviour. He says: "The fallacy here lies in the equation of sexual orientation with being ...the desire for sex is neither central nor necessary to anyone's being." With orientation he means only "what a person desires, not what a person has a right to do, much less what a person is compelled to do as an expression of his or her being."

How can the church minister to homosexuals without giving up its moral stance? Schmidt suggests that church leaders should make it periodically clear from the pulpit (and privately in specific cases of concern) that the church represents forgiveness and power to change, and it also exercises redemptive discipline in cases of sexual disobedience, including homosexual acts.

*Straight & Narrow* is a thoroughly researched, up-to-date, well documented, and readable book. It is an excellent resource for Christians, who want to think through the issue of homosexual behaviour. They will greatly benefit from the work.

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