

Draft Critique of the CoCD Document: What the Bible Teaches on SSCM Relationships 2017

About the Report:

I found reading this report to be a tiresome task as it takes a great deal of effort to track the logic and flow of the hermeneutic contortions and scholastic name-dropping it attempts in order to present a scriptural case for supporting SSCM Relationships.

I believe two things about this, i) If it takes this much effort to try to explain how wrongly the church and scholars of great repute have long misunderstood the entire flow and unity of scripture, something isn't quite right with this argument ii) this is intentional by design, so that an undecided reader, who does not have much experience with hermeneutics or biblical studies, is simply overwhelmed by its verbosity into conceding that perhaps SSCM relationships could possibly be a biblical option after all.

Additionally, I find it very ironic that all this work and effort, inspired by the ideology of inclusion and freeing those who are oppressed by traditional sexual norms, has been expended to force the scriptures to include Same Sex marriage as an option – only to restrict such a marriage to those who are willing to be monogamous and covenanted. In the end all this work only moves the boundaries but a little, and not only excludes but fails to provide any further ability to develop guidelines of inclusion for others who cannot identify with monogamy and covenanted relationships. This report would have been pertinent 10 years ago – but now it is dated and it fails to address the current reality of what people are exploring with their sexuality and marriage in our society.

This report brings to mind Proverbs 19:10 *“When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but the prudent are restrained in speech.”*

It does not bring to mind 2 Tim 2:15 *“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.”*

Critiques:

1. Spins that the 2003 G.A statement regarding same-sex orientation as not sinful.

Critique: *I believe this assertion spins the intention of this distinction in order to clear the way to continue on with attempting to show the bible can speak in favor of SSCM Relationships.*

The distinction in question is meant to be a recognition that many people do not choose to be attracted sexually to members of the same sex, and thus they are not individually guilty or culpable for having chosen something that is against God's will. So it should not be considered a “small-s sin” in the same manner as having lost one's temper, or having intentionally committed tax fraud. However whether we have chosen it or not, it still remains a desire that is contrary to God's creational intentions and is one manifestation among many that give evidence to “big-S SIN” into which we are born, and the curse that is upon the creation as a result of Adam and Eve's rebellion. SIN does things to us that we do not choose for ourselves, as the authors of the study acknowledge (quote: But Jesus understands sin in a much broader

way as evil that brings sickness, demon possession, harm, suffering and oppression.) *It also such as warp and twist our sexual desire towards things that God has set off limits. So while we recognize SSA may not be a sin of “choice”, it is still a result/effect of SIN and the brokenness of Creation and thus falls under the need for Redemption and reformation through sanctification. The rest of the report is moot if we disagree on this point.*

2. Relies only on Living Faith as a Secondary Standard Reference.

Critique: Living Faith was never written to be a Secondary Standard, and it is telling that this document never once refers to the Westminster Confession or other approved alternative Reformed secondary standards, (I believe the Belgic Confession and Cannons of Dordt are also acceptable in the PCC as such??) In part this is because so few people are familiar with the W.C., but I think it is also because L.F. was not crafted with the same theological precision/technicality of the WC and is thus easier to manipulate and quote to make it appear as though this document is simply continuing on the logical outworking of our church’s standards and actually conforms to them.

3. Inconsistent hermeneutical characterization of Genesis 1-2

Critique: Quote “We also recognized that the Bible itself is a multifaceted text containing many genres of writing including poetry (Psalms) and narrative (Genesis 1–2).” However later in the report when dealing with Genesis 1-2 it says this; “To take the Bible seriously in reading these texts, we also have to recognize that these texts come to us as poetry and a poetic story.”

So – which is it, Narrative or Poetry? Either way the report gives no indication as to how they treat the text according to its genre other than to state that because it is poetry “We have to be careful not to literalize these metaphors and we have to be cautious not to make these metaphors into fact.”

Yet even if – and it is a very big IF – Genesis 1-2 could be considered poetry, one can still determine how poetry communicates truth and facts about God and humanity etc.. and state what those facts are as we do with the Psalms, yet the authors seem to indicate that what we can know from poetry is a bit vague and not very factual, and so we can’t really know much of anything but broad and vague themes from Genesis 1-2. So whatever you’ve thought was settled by Genesis 1-2 is not really settled.

This is a deliberate attempt to undermine the very clear traditional teachings which the Reformed Tradition and our Westminster Confession put forward on Gen 1-2, in order to introduce opposing concepts and make them seem to be in accord with this part of scripture.

The biggest problems with this report is :

4. A critical misunderstanding of what it means to read scripture “in light of Jesus”

I am still working on composing this critique but a quick summary would be that when the authors of this report say they read scripture in light of Jesus/ or as bearing witness to Jesus what they mean is that wherever they find portions of scripture that seem contrary to whatever current worldview they hold to (take note of the references to the patriarchy and that starts to

clue you in that it's not a biblical worldview) they are able to dismiss them or spin them to fit their worldview by reading them "in light of Jesus."

How this works: Start with the vaguest portion of Jesus' teaching, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'" (Matthew 22:36–40)

Take it out of its immediate context of Jesus' ongoing battles with the Pharisees... and disconnect it completely from Jesus' reference to the Law and Prophets, or misread this statement to mean that "this vague statement is more important than all the very specific things that God has said in the Law and Prophets"

Once this teaching is free from any contextual, or Old Testament Covenant defining features, one can then import a generic post-modern, secular humanistic, feminist, free-the oppressed type definition of "love" into it.

Now, Jesus' teaching in Matt 22 becomes a cannon within the cannon that can be used to determine what parts of the scripture can be considered authoritative and applicable to our lives and which parts are actually incorrect and we should ignore, or realize that we've been reading them wrongly and reinterpret them.

This is completely contrary to the Reformed Tradition of confessing that all of scripture points to Jesus Christ. This belief comes from Paul's assertion in 2 Tim 3:15 that "All scripture – can make us wise for salvation through Jesus Christ" The reference to "all Scripture" would be the Old Testament... so the inference is that without the NT, the OT is sufficient to lead us to Jesus Christ. Thus the O.T. not only foreshadows and sets up the need for Christ, but as the start of the story of Redemption – it defines and creates who Christ will be and who Christ is.

The Old Testament and the rest of scripture is not read "in the light of Christ" as this report would have us understand it, instead the Old Testament determines and defines who Christ is and protects him against our projections of making him into our own personal Jesus and supplies us with the context to properly understand Him and what He taught and what His mission was all about.

Additional Problem with the Report – for further exploration and critique

5. A clumsy/faulty method of determining how to ask the right questions of the scripture.

Critique: Ironically this part of the report calls out the practice of eisegesis when asking the question of whether or not the bible approves of homosexuality saying that is reading a modern definition back into the scriptures that wasn't originally there - while simultaneously doing exactly that by using Jesus' "love command" as a hermeneutical principle and guide, and claiming Jesus was dealing with "gender" issues as we understand them today in Matt 19. Rather hypocritical – you can't have it both ways.

However the report fumbles its way towards a valid point here, albeit in a terribly clumsy way; that when we are attempting see what scripture has to say about any given topic we may come across in our modern world that did not exist in the ancient world (or even when it did) we should not first go looking for specific verses on that topic; e.g. the bible says nothing specific about nuclear energy or cars.

Instead we need to look at the topic with-in the overall biblical framework of redemptive history – and I would add as the report does not – this redemptive history must be informed by robust and properly Reformed doctrines of creation, fall, redemption, and new creation (consummation) which then enables us to view a topic through the spectacles of the scripture.

Why can we use scripture as spectacles to view the world? Because of the fact we learn about God’s written Law from the metaphor found in the poetry of Psalm 119: 105 where it says “your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path”

So the report is correct in saying the a more appropriate question to ask is the anthropological question of what does scripture reveal to us about what it means to be human?

But then why not start with Genesis – why start with Paul in the New Testament? (this again is evidence of the incorrect understanding of what it means to read scripture in the light of Christ) And how exactly does “Jesus Christ teaches us and demonstrates to us that we are creatures who are all in need of redemption and destined in Christ to receive grace and be set free.”?? Without the defining OT background these NT terms are relatively plastic and easy to shape according to our own non-biblical worldviews and philosophical understandings

However the proper question that should be asked in this situation with regards to homosexuality is “What does the scripture reveal about the origins of Human sexuality?”

It should be noted that the report assumes that Human Sexuality and its expression is inherently good? Why is that? On what basis? How do we know that our sexual desire is not something that came about after the fall? Why should we not assume that it is a base desire which is left over from our primitive origins and we have not evolved past it yet? Why is sexuality not a problem to be solved since when left unchecked is responsible for the majority of our social ills and family problems?

Obviously there are some assumptions going on here that can only be founded by examining the topic of human sexuality in the proper biblical order of creation, fall, redemption, new creation... and relying upon a traditional understanding of Genesis 1 – 2 and the original goodness of creation.

But then the report does not want to follow the proper biblical order – because if it did then it would be quite evident that the effects of the fall are responsible for all the variety of deviations which our human sexuality manifests away from God’s original creational intentions, additionally it goes out of its way to try and discredit Genesis 1 and 2.

Yet ironically, when discussing Gender issues later on the report it has to fall back on these assumptions from Genesis 1-2 in order to disapprove of the act of self-castration. Quote “This actually became a practice among some Christian men in later-early Christianity. A practice that seems to depart from a biblical understanding of the human body and God’s created intention for it.”

So the report continues to play around with vague New Testament themes, trying to avoid examining the issue of Human sexuality according the proper order of the very framework it suggested should be used to determine what scripture says about any given topic.

As I said, if the proper biblical order was followed in examining human sexuality or even homosexuality – we would discover God’s creational intentions, discern the ways in which the fall into sin affects that part of humanity and God’s creation as we follow the details of the story of God’s covenant work with humanity (Noah, Abraham, Israel, David) leading to its culmination in Jesus Christ.

Instead what the report offers as a biblical summary is this: QUOTE

- that we are creatures of God who belong to God in Jesus Christ and who stand in need of liberation from sin, oppression and suffering.*
- that we are all equal in Jesus Christ regardless of class, status, race, or gender variance.*
- that Jesus, in his teaching about eunuchs, recognizes and identifies with gender difference that goes beyond a simplistic male or female complementarity.*
- that as carriers of the image of God, we are relational creatures destined in Christ to be in loving relationship with God and one another.*
- that we are made for a moral logic of mutual respect and love as summarized in the “love commandment” taught by Jesus, the law and the prophets.*

It’s quite obvious that these summaries do not follow the biblical order, and do not reflect any serious consideration or thought of the Reformed doctrines of Creation, Fall, Redemption applied to Human sexuality, and there is a huge gaping hole when it comes to summarizing the effects of Sin and the Fall.

This brings me back to my earlier point that the report assumes that Homosexual orientation is not a SIN - and my statement that the report is pretty much moot and irrelevant unless this point is resolved.

At this point it should be fairly clear that how this report us a compilation of half-truths, theological truisms, which combined with a deliberate attempt to avoid the biblical framework, allows the authors to make their hermeneutical contortions and suggest that maybe the bible does really approve of SSCM relationships after all. In vain....