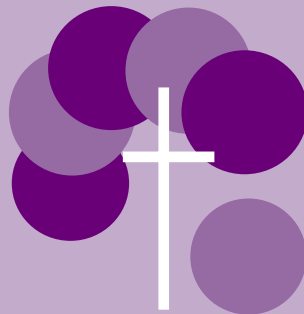


Studies on  
**Homosexuality**  
and the Church

by Erwin Buck





Studies on  
**Homosexuality**  
and the Church

by Erwin Buck

*Study on Homosexuality and the Church*

Written by Erwin Buck

Edited by Kenn Ward

Layout and Design by Susan Taylor

Copyright © 2001 Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada  
ISBN 0-9688445-0-2

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise (except brief passages for purposes of review) without the prior permission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.

Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

# Table of Contents

## Foreword

<b>A. Getting Acquainted</b> .....	1
<b>B. Sharing Our Questions and Concerns</b> .....	1
<b>C. On the Use of These Studies</b> .....	1
<b>D. A Study Covenant</b> .....	2

## Study One — Information About Homosexuality

<b>A. Getting Acquainted</b> .....	5
1. Relating to minorities	
2. Sources of information and help	
a) Organizations	
b) Films and videos	
c) Caring Conversations	
What Do You Think?	
<b>B. Toward a Definition of Homosexuality</b> .....	6
1. Attraction and behaviour	
2. Sexual orientation	
3. The range of sexual attraction	
4. The cause of sexual orientation	
5. The stability of sexual orientation	
a) Is homosexuality a disorder?	
b) Conflicting claims	
c) How can one assess these conflicting claims?	
d) What about the high failure rate?	
e) Characteristics of promising candidates for “healing”	
f) Homosexuality and spirituality	
g) Conclusion	
What Do You Think?	
6. Relationships	
a) Homosexual behaviour	
b) Are gays out to win converts?	
c) Preoccupation with sex	
d) A personal story	
<b>C. Concluding Observations</b> .....	11
What Do You Think?	

## Study Two — The Message From the Old Testament

<b>A. Introduction</b> .....	13
<b>B. Sodom and Gibeah</b> .....	13
1. Reading the stories in context	
a) Genesis 19:1–14	
b) Judges 19:1–30	
2. Exploring the stories	
a) What is meant by “to know?”	
What Do You Think?	
b) Why was Sodom destroyed?	

What Do You Think?	
c) The relevance of Genesis 19 and Judges 19	
What Do You Think?	
<b>C. Leviticus</b> .....	16
What Do You Think?	
<b>D. David and Jonathan</b> .....	18
What Do You Think?	
<b>E. Ham and Noah</b> .....	19
What Do You Think?	
<b>F. Ruth and Naomi</b> .....	19
What Do You Think?	
<b>G. The Creation Stories</b> .....	20
1. The first creation story (Genesis 1:26–31)	
2. The second creation story (Genesis 2:18–25)	
What Do You Think?	
<b>H. Marriage and Divorce</b> .....	21
What Do You Think?	

### Study Three — The Message From the New Testament

<b>A. Paul’s Injunction to the Romans</b> .....	22
1. Reading Romans 1:18–3:26 in context	
2. Exploring the biblical text in detail	
3. Two important reminders	
What Do You Think?	
<b>B. Paul’s Advice to the Corinthians</b> .....	24
1. Reading I Corinthians 5:1–6:20 in context	
2. Exploring the biblical text in detail	
a) Who are the “homosexuals?”	
b) What is meant by “will not inherit the Kingdom of God?”	
What Do You Think?	
<b>C. Instructions to Timothy</b> .....	27
What Do You Think?	
<b>D. Jesus and Homosexuals</b> .....	28
1. The centurion’s servant	
2. The young man who ran away naked	
3. The beloved disciple	
<b>E. An Early Church Decision</b> .....	29
What Do You Think?	

### Study Four — How Does One Apply Biblical Teaching?

<b>A. Introduction</b> .....	30
1. What is the Bible all about?	
<b>B. The Bible and Morality</b> .....	31
What Do You Think?	
<b>C. The New Commandment</b> .....	32
1. Love and making moral decisions	
2. Love and law in the Christian life	
<b>D. The Spirit as Ethical Power and Norm</b> .....	33
<b>E. Facing Moral Dilemmas</b> .....	33
<b>F. What if There Is No Word From the Lord?</b> .....	33
<b>G. Are God’s Laws Immutable?</b> .....	35

<b>H. Toward a Principle of Interpretation</b> .....	36
1. Love sentimentalized	
2. The weightier matters	
What Do You Think?	

**Study Five — Where Do We Go From Here?**

<b>A. Introduction</b> .....	38
What Do You Think?	
<b>B. Point and Counterpoint</b> .....	38
1. Rejection of violence	
What Do You Think?	
2. Eucharistic hospitality	
What Do You Think?	
3. The biblical norm	
What Do You Think?	
4. Sin	
What Do You Think?	
5. Welcome	
What Do You Think?	
<b>C. Current Issues</b> .....	41
1. Celibacy	
What Do You Think?	
2. Same-gender unions	
What Do You Think?	
<b>D. Facing Reality With Confidence</b> .....	43
1. Living with diversity	
What Do You Think?	
2. Learning from experience	
What Do You Think?	
3. Maintaining the unity in love	
What Do You Think?	
4. Pastoral care	
What Do You Think?	

<b>Bibliography</b> .....	47
---------------------------	----

<b>Films and Videos</b> .....	51
-------------------------------	----

<b>Web sites</b> .....	52
------------------------	----

<b>Appendix One – Caring Conversations</b> .....	53
--	----

<b>Glossary</b> .....	55
-----------------------	----



## Foreword

### A. Getting Acquainted

This is a thoroughly revised and updated version of *Six Studies on Homosexuality*, which appeared in 1985. At that time homosexuality was hardly spoken of in our church. Relatively few gays and lesbians had ventured to come out of the closet. Most found the climate too inhospitable.

Today a number of distinguished members of our society are openly gay or lesbian. For instance in March 2000, a conference in Saskatoon brought together gays and lesbians with members of government and leaders in the field of education. The featured speaker at the event was Mark Tewksbury, a world-renowned swimmer and Olympic gold medal winner who had decided to come out after a lengthy and intense personal struggle.

Almost every city in Canada has an active PFLAG group (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays). As the name suggests, it is the object of these groups to give support to people who have suddenly had to face the fact that a close relative or friend has declared himself or herself as a person of homosexual orientation. The stories that are told by parents and friends of gays and lesbians bear testimony to the enormous pain that is associated with the outing process.

Homosexuals and their relatives often reach the edge of despair. Many gays and lesbians, as well as their parents and friends are members of our churches. They are baptized Christians who claim their right to participate in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. This calls for pastoral care, for theological reflection, and for ideological reassessment.

### B. Sharing Our Questions and Concerns

As we begin this series of studies, a good place to start might be a frank and honest sharing of our own experience with gay and lesbian friends and colleagues. What do you know about the subject? Do you have relatives or friends who have declared themselves as homosexuals? Has your attitude toward them changed as a result of their coming out, and if so, how has it changed?

When we gather for our deliberations, we need to realize that many people in our community are currently wrestling with the question of whether they themselves

may be homosexual. Others, who have already come to terms with the fact that they are different, have so far found it too threatening to share their self-awareness with the rest of us.

It is important to remember that the homosexuals about whom we talk may be present in the same room with us. They may wonder whether you and I can be trusted with their personal secret. As a matter of fact, you yourself, the reader, may be one such struggling participant in the dialogue. You may have experienced some strange stirrings of erotic attraction which bewildered you. You may have come to these studies to learn something about yourself.

Let us hope that as a result of our gatherings, we will build such a level of trust that we can share our heart-felt joys and pains as we continue to meet together in study, conversation, and prayer. May the Holy Spirit be active among us and allow us to experience the unity and love that characterizes the Body of Christ.

### C. On the Use of These Studies

These studies leave a great deal of freedom to the group using them. It is not necessary to plan a single study session for each study, although some groups may want to do that. Each of the five studies is organized as a collection of smaller modules. These modules can be divided into a series of sessions according to the needs and interests of the group.

The sequence of the studies is deliberate, but should not be seen as restrictive. There is flexibility even within each individual study. Input, critical discussion, and devotion can be rearranged at will.

The studies attempt to cover the entire spectrum of questions related to the subject of homosexuality and the church. Biblical, historical, scientific, pastoral, and theological concerns all need to receive adequate attention. These areas are intimately intertwined, each affecting the other. Scientific data is an important consideration in theology and in pastoral care, and vice versa.

Interspersed throughout each study are selections of critical questions with which one must wrestle. The heading *What Do You Think?* invites the reader to wrestle with issues. For many of these issues, there is no one, correct answer.

By reflecting on these questions together, we hope to clarify what the real issues are and how one can begin to address them. In the process we will no doubt also come to understand better why people have different persuasions in some of these matters.

A *Glossary* has been placed at the end of this book for handy reference. Some members of the group may not be familiar with some of the terms used in this book or may not understand clearly what they mean. It may be useful for the group to begin by reviewing the *Glossary*. Or the group may simply want to refer to the *Glossary* the first time a specific term comes up in the group's study.

A *Bibliography* has been provided for those who wish to do further reading. The source material for quotations in these studies is included in the *Bibliography*.

## D. A Study Covenant

It is well for us to begin by placing on the table some of our basic presuppositions and expectations.

**1) *We are seeking the will of the Lord.*** We are all here out of a sincere desire to know and do the will of the Lord. We are not facing off against one another. Rather, we want to search together for a better understanding of ourselves and of others. Most of all we want to gain greater certainty about God's plan and good will for humanity. As members of the church, we yearn to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

**2) *We do not have all the answers.*** Sometimes we think we know so clearly what it is that God would have us believe and do. When we face unprecedented problems, we are prone to get confused and to lose our sense of direction. To gather for study and reflection is to acknowledge that we do not have all the answers we would like to have.

It is an honest and honourable thing to acknowledge our personal inadequacies. More than that, it is salutary for us to be reminded that our righteousness before God is not based on our knowing and doing, or even on our believing. We are saved by the grace of God, not by an act of our own believing the right things. We confess with Paul that we are often so confused that we don't even know how or for what we should pray (Romans 8:26-30).

**3) *Every one of us is biased.*** Bias is another word for "point of view." Everyone has a point of view. That, too, is not a bad thing. In fact it is unavoidable. Our point of

view is largely a result of our past history, our upbringing, and our past experiences within the community of faith.

Usually it is not appropriate to say that one point of view is right and other points of view must therefore be wrong. Of course, there are some biases which hurt our neighbour and cause suffering for the body of Christ. A racist or sexist bias is clearly irreconcilable with the gospel according to which there is no longer Jew or Greek, male and female (Galatians 3:28). Thus we need to examine periodically what our viewpoints are, how well founded they are, and how well they agree with the gospel.

In many cases it is not necessary that we all have the same point of view. For example, some of us have grown up with a strong liturgical tradition and have come to associate deep religious experiences with liturgy and organ music. Others find that sort of thing lifeless. Real worship, according to another view, is associated with clapping of hands, the strumming of a guitar, and extemporaneous, from the heart, prayer. Still others value silence and meditation as a primary part of their worship. Most of us will probably agree that none of these points of view is either right or wrong. Nevertheless each point of view exerts a powerful influence on our perception and emotion.

It is only fair that we identify the viewpoint from which these studies are written. We proceed on the assumption that the church is strengthened when Christian brothers and sisters acknowledge and honestly wrestle with their diversity of convictions "making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).

Accordingly, we want to take a mediating position. We will try to present the various sides of the relevant arguments in as faithful a manner as we are able. In so doing, we want to help the partners in the discussion to take ownership of their own convictions and to identify the central questions which are at stake.

The purpose of these studies is not to convert people to our own point of view. Rather, we all desire to explore what our convictions and insights are and why we hold them. In the end we may see a need to modify our attitude on certain issues. Whether or not that is the case remains to be seen.

**4) *We respect one another.*** Our baptism into Christ has made us all one in Christ. As members of the one body we realize our dependence on one another. The Body of

Christ has need of eyes and hands, ears and feet, heads and hearts. Everyone has a gift to offer, a gift which the rest of the body needs desperately. We do get into one another's hair, at times. That is not necessarily a bad thing. We can see our debates not as evidence of alienation or hostility, but as a sign that we take each other seriously and want to learn from one another's insights as well as from each other's faults.

**5) We use words with care.** "Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words will never hurt me." We know this saying is not true. Words can hurt, and hurt very deeply. If we do not want to offend or to be offended unnecessarily, we should pay attention to the words we use. It is not enough that we use words which feel right to us. We need to be sensitive to how words are perceived by others. If we want to make progress in our discussion, we need to use language which is precise and which does not devalue the other person. This applies equally to people on all sides of the debate. Let us remember that some of those gathered for discussion may be gay themselves, or they may wonder whether they might be.

Language changes constantly. Words which at one time were neutral can become offensive and vice versa. New words are created and old words acquire new meaning. While the *Glossary* at the end of this book attempts to provide some help, it will no doubt be outdated within a relatively short time. We need to be sensitive about such things.

**6) We listen to Scripture.** When Christians study any given subject in the hope of discerning the will of God, they ask God to speak to them through the Scriptures, through the witness of the Holy Spirit, and through the insight of Christian brothers and sisters throughout the ages.

These three things are inseparable: scripture, Holy Spirit, and Christian community. To discern the will of God, we need to listen to all three voices. Our Christian brothers and sisters play an important role in our listening to God. We need to hear how scripture and the Holy Spirit speak to them. The Holy Spirit works also in the people with whom we disagree. When we voice our disagreements, we come to a better understanding of what unites us. This is how the Council of Nicea came to agree on the Nicene Creed which has become a cornerstone of Christian doctrine.

God does not make things easy for us. However we have the promise of Jesus that where two or three are gathered in his name, there he will be present among us.

It is very important in this process that we pay particular attention when our partner in dialog espouses a position which makes us uncomfortable. This applies equally to people on the left and people on the right of the theological spectrum.

**7) We focus on the issues.** To make desirable progress, it is important that we maintain the appropriate focus. We want to deal with issues rather than with personalities. We are not in competition with one another to determine who is right and who is wrong, who wins and who loses. We are together in our search for greater clarity. If we do our work carefully, we will all win in the end.

**8) We enter into the fray with courage.** The subject of homosexuality is sometimes hotly debated in the church and in society generally. Much is being written both in defense of certain viewpoints and as attack on them. Often emotion and our presuppositions threaten to get the better of us. Whatever our position, none of us is immune from making distorted claims and defending them tenaciously.

This can cause frustration. How is one to adjudicate between competing claims unless one is an expert in the discipline? It does not help that even the experts disagree on important points of research.

In our searching we can be sustained by the assurance of Jesus that where two or three are gathered in his name, there he will be personally present (Matthew 18:20). We cling to the promise that God will send the Holy Spirit who will guide us into all the truth (John 16:13). We are on a difficult journey, but we do not walk in darkness.

**9) We gain expertise.** We need to keep an open mind, to watch developments as they unfold, to listen critically to dissenting voices, and to reserve the right to change our mind as we proceed.

Regular exercise builds stronger muscles and a healthier body. A physical workout produces not only a physically more fit heart, it also raises one's spirit and level of energy. This is true not only in the physical but also in the spiritual realm. Regular exercise of our mind, our emotion, and our faith also makes us stronger and more ready to take on still more demanding tasks in the future. By engaging in this series of studies we can expect to become more fit to tackle even more difficult ethical and theological tasks in the future.

**10) *We worship.*** We gain a proper perspective when we gather at the foot of the cross to worship. These studies are not a purely intellectual exercise. They are deeply interrelated with our spirituality. The group will decide when it is most appropriate to meditate and to pray during their study.

The Early Church experienced many internal tensions. In those struggles our Christian forebears learned to return to those things which are essential. There is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of us all (Ephesians 4:4-6).