

THE BIBLE AND HOMOSEXUALITY
SELECTED SCRIPTURES

Twenty-five years ago, my best friend from high school wrote me a letter. Finally on the bottom of page three, he finally said what I'm sure was the reason behind his writing. Let me read it to you:

“I’m gay, Terry. I’ve been so my whole life..., but it has only been in the last 5 years that I’ve dealt with it, and only in the last 3 years that I’ve been comfortable with myself....I [am] telling the truth when I [say] I’ve felt this way my whole life. I’m still a Christian, my relationship with God is still very strong. I’ve never felt God has had any problem with the fact that I’m gay, I’m the one who was scared and worried and tried to be what I was not. Being gay for me is as natural as being straight for most other people. I am so much happier and at peace since I’ve accepted myself as being gay.”

After I responded to his letter, he wrote me back another short note. Included in what he said was this: “After years of prayer, I’ve accepted the fact that I’m gay. You and I may differ about what we believe to be God’s will for us, but what is important is that I live in a way that I believe God approves. I am at peace with God about being gay. The approval of friends is comforting, but the approval of God is more important.”

As I re-read that letter again this week, I was interested to read it with the hindsight of the past 25 years, and especially of the past five years. What my friend said is typical for what all who claim to be homosexual and Christian say. And yet, ironically, one statement made by my friend was correct; the approval of God *is* more important than the approval of men. But the issue we must address, particularly if we are sincere about being followers of Jesus Christ, is, “how do I know if God approves of what I do?”

The way we know that God approves of what we do is by examining what He says about our actions in His Word. So, as we prepare to look at Romans 1:26ff in the next few weeks, this morning I want to examine what God says in His Word about homosexuality. As we survey both testaments, we will find that —

HOMOSEXUALITY IS ALWAYS CLASSIFIED AS A SIN;

BUT LIKE ALL SIN, GOD IS READY TO FORGIVE AND CLEANSE SINNERS FROM THAT SIN.

This morning, we will examine particularly the *activity* of homosexuality; in Sunday School last week, Keith dealt helpfully and clearly with the topic of homosexual attraction and desires, so I won’t repeat that discussion. We will concentrate our attention on some of the key passages dealing with homosexual activity (excluding Romans 1:26ff, which we will deal with when we get back to our study in Romans).

Today we will start in the OT, move to the NT, then the Gospels, and then the gospel.

- 1. Homosexuality in the Old Testament**
 - ✓ Genesis 1-2
 - ✓ Genesis 19:4-11
 - ✓ Leviticus 18:22; 20:13
- 2. Homosexuality in the New Testament**
 - ✓ 1 Corinthians 6:9-10
 - ✓ 1 Timothy 1:10
- 3. Homosexuality in the Gospels**
- 4. Homosexuality and the Gospel**
 - ✓ 1 Corinthians 6:11
 - A WARNING message
 - A HOPEFUL message
 - ✓ Implication 1: Homosexual sin is a DIFFERENT sin
 - ✓ Implication 2: Homosexual sin is NOT A DIFFERENT sin

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1. Homosexuality in the Old Testament

- **Genesis 1-2** — we talked about this last week, so I won't belabor the point. But note this:
 - ✓ God created us gender-specific to reflect His image (Gen. 1:27b)
 - The two genders are a recognition of the separate sexes — that God intentionally and purposefully created mankind as sexual beings. Our gender and sexuality is not accidental. God has designed and planned us to be the way we are.
 - He makes them physiologically to complement one another; there is no complementary aspect or procreation (1:28) in a homosexual relationship.
 - This also means that gender is not a conception of the mind (or a mindset or idea or adaptable). Gender is set and established in creation; it is a fixed biological reality.
 - ✓ God created heterosexual marriage as the single expression of our sexuality (Gen. 2:24-25). When both Jesus (Mt. 19:5-6) and Paul (Eph. 5:31-33) quote this verse they emphasize not only the permanence of marriage but also the union of male and female together in marriage. There is no concept of homosexual union or marriage in Genesis 1-2 or in the NT quotations of Genesis 1-2.
 - ✓ Since they are one, their sexual intimacy is not something to be shared with another (1 Cor. 6:15). To share one's body with someone else is **strange** (foreign) (Prov. 5:20; 6:25; 7:5). And most of all, this truth is essential to the picture of the union between Christ and the church:

"Marriage, by its very nature, requires complementarity. The mystical union of Christ and the church — each 'part' belonging to the other but neither interchangeable — cannot be pictured in a marital union without the differentiation of male and female....Homosexuality simply does not fit with the created order in Genesis 1 and 2." [DeYoung, 32.]

- **Genesis 19:1-11**
 - ✓ This is not a small group of men from Sodom — (v. 4) — **the men of the city, the men of Sodom** indicates that all the male population in Sodom is involved in this sinful request; this is not unusual, but it is the way that Sodomites live (and that is where our term came from).
 - ✓ What they want is clear — some translations say (v. 5), **that we may know them**. But that is an OT figure of speech that means, "have sexual relations with..." (e.g., 4:1). This is attempted gang rape.
 - ✓ The evaluation of this sin is also clear: Lot calls it **wicked** (v. 7). And Ezekiel calls it an **abomination** (Ezk. 16:49-50). This word is used to refer to things like idolatry (Lev. 18:30; Dt. 27:15; 32:16), child sacrifice (Dt. 12:31), following the pattern of the ungodly nations (Dt. 18:9, 12), transvestism (wearing other gender's clothes, Dt. 22:5), soliciting a prostitute (Dt. 23:18), male prostitution (1 Kg. 14:24), and false worship (Jer. 16:18; 32:35; Ezk. 5:11). Committing an **abomination** is to do something that is explicitly anti-God.

- ✓ The context of Genesis reveals that the city was judged for its homosexual desires and sin (18:20-21; 19:13, 23-24). There is nothing good about the sins of the men of Sodom.
- ✓ And the NT also never sees the sin of Sodom in a good way (cf. Jude 6-7; 2 Pt. 2:6; cf. also Matt 10:15; 11:23-24; Rom. 9:29).
- ✓ Some have suggested that the sin of Sodom was inhospitality, but that does no justice to the reading of the story. Certainly the city of Sodom was inhospitable. But that is like saying a drunk driver who killed another driver while speeding was guilty predominantly of speeding. And Ezekiel helps us with that — Ezekiel uses the word **abomination** to refer to this sin (16:50); in what is called the “holiness code” (Lev. 17-26), that word is used several times, but only the sin of homosexuality is singled out as an abominable sin (the other times it is used more generally).
- ✓ The city of Sodom was engaged in homosexual sin and was judged for the practice of that sin.

“The demand of the men of Sodom to have sex with Lot’s visitors along with their subsequent threat to ‘act more wickedly toward you [Lot] than toward them [the two visitors]’ (19:9), climaxes and establishes beyond doubt the utterly evil character of the city’s inhabitants...The [sin] here was not a minor breach of etiquette such as neglecting to set out the best dinner plates and utensils. It was not just a case of failing to take a traveler into one’s home, to wash his feet, to offer food, shelter, and protection.” [Gagon, 76.]

- **Leviticus 18:22; 20:13**

- ✓ Genesis 19, as compelling as the account is, does not explicitly prohibit sexual sin. So are there any places in Scripture that tell us that homosexuality is a sin? There are.
- ✓ These verses are found in a section of Leviticus called the “Holiness Code” (chs. 17-27). Because God is holy, His people (Israel) are to be holy (19:2). And these chapters explain what holiness is.
- ✓ Both of these verses are in sections that detail immoral sexual behavior. Among the other sins outlawed are adultery (18:20), incest (18:6-18), polygamy (18:18) child sacrifice (18:21), and bestiality (18:23).
- ✓ A few observations:
 - Homosexuality is in a list of sins that provide no qualifications for when they might be good. There is no instance of an acceptable child sacrifice or bestiality or adultery; so to say that a “monogamous, committed homosexual relationship is acceptable to God” is to miss the point of the overall passage.
 - In fact, God is particularly clear to Moses and Israel — of all the sins in these chapters (17-27), homosexuality is the only one labeled as an **abomination**. The way the word is used in the OT (see above) makes it clear that this word is reserved for things that it is readily apparent that God hates (cf. Dt. 12:31; Prov. 6:16). That was true then, and it is true today.
 - The reason that this is a sin is that it goes against the purpose of creation: a man was made to “lie with” his wife (Gen. 1:27-28; 2:24-25), not another man (Lev. 18:22). To practice homosexuality is not just to engage in some “bad” sexual sin; it is to reject God (which is also Paul’s point in Romans 1:24-27). The rebellion is not just *to* sexual sin but *against* God.

- Robert Gagnon is correct when he writes, “The commands of God, and not the consensus of the surrounding culture, must shape the behavior of God’s people.” [117]
- To engage in any of the sins of chapter 18, including homosexuality, is to be **cut off** from the people of God and defiled (unacceptable to God, 18:29-30). They are defiled because they have engaged willfully, intentionally, and repeatedly in a sin that God hates. He is holy; they are not.
- ✓ Some have suggested because these commands are in the OT, they are no longer for us today. The reasoning is something like this: “The OT outlaws things like eating shellfish (Lev. 11:9ff) and wearing clothes made of mixed fabrics (Lev. 19:19), and we don’t obey those laws, so we don’t need to obey the law against homosexuality either.” Yet this misunderstands the kinds of OT law:
 - There was *civil* law that regulated how the Israelite nation would be governed. Those laws ended with the demise of the Jewish civil government.
 - There was *ceremonial* law that delineated how the nation would live (like the laws relating to diet and clothing). These laws ended with the fulfillment of Christ’s priestly work (Matt. 3:15).
 - There was *moral* law that revealed how all men everywhere should live. There is no end to these laws because they are based on God’s eternal character (e.g., 19:2). Homosexuality is a moral law, evidenced by the fact that the Egyptians and Canaanites practiced it (18:3). So homosexuality was a sin for the Egyptians, Canaanites, Israelites, and still for us today.
 - And additionally, the New Testament affirms the standard of God against homosexuality...

2. Homosexuality in the New Testament

- **1 Corinthians 6:9-10**

- ✓ In these verses, Paul speaks of both the aggressive and passive members of a homosexual relationship — both of them are willfully engaging in sin.
- ✓ The word **homosexuals** is a word created by Paul (it doesn’t exist prior to his writing). He evidently makes up the word from the Greek translation of Lev. 20:13, combining the words **bed** (or **lies**) and **male** — it is a man who goes to bed with men. And both that man and his **effeminate** partner are categorized with others who engage in sexual sin — **fornicators** and **adulterers** as well as with **idolaters** and more.
- ✓ Paul is clearly putting every kind of homosexual act in the category of sin. Just as Moses does not make any qualifications for a “good homosexual relationship,” neither does Paul. He is not talking about “exploitive” acts of homosexuality. Every action of homosexuality is classified as a sin.
- ✓ And Paul’s particular point is that those people whose lives are categorized as habitual lifestyles of homosexuality, adultery, drunkenness, etc. will not **inherit the kingdom of God**. Paul is not talking about a single incidence of sin, but talking about a pattern and lifestyle of sin that could be characterized in these ways. Those kinds of people aren’t forgiven, don’t enter Heaven, and do endure the eternal wrath of God. As is said in Romans 1, there is judgment for homosexual sin. The stakes are high about this sin; we need to understand it accurately. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, this should grieve you.

- **1 Timothy 1:10**

- ✓ Again Paul uses the same word for **homosexuals** as he does in 1 Corinthians 6:9. He is reinforcing that all those who practice that sin are breakers of the Law of God and living contrary to **sound teaching**. In other words, you can't be a homosexual and be experiencing God's peace and blessing.
- ✓ Paul is also reinforcing what is said about homosexuality in Leviticus 18 and 20. And in fact, he is reinforcing the usefulness of the OT Law for NT believers. He says in v. 8 that **the Law is good**. How is it good (how can we use it **lawfully**)? The Law is good in that it demonstrates to sinners (like the ones mentioned in vv. 9-10) that they are indeed sinners and in need of the gospel of Christ to save them from their sin. (Cf. Gal. 3:23-24, which make clear that the Law is given to reveal our sin and to lead us to Christ.)
- ✓ So while some (and increasingly more) are saying that it is unkind and harsh to call homosexuals sinners, it is actually an act of kindness and grace (if it is done in a spirit of love and not anger) because it reveals to the homosexual what he is (a sinner) and what he needs (a Savior).

"People who engage in homosexual intercourse do so in spite of the self-evident clues implanted in nature by God; specifically, male-female anatomical, physiological, psychological, and procreative complementarity....even gentiles without access to the direct revelation of Scripture have enough evidence in the natural realm to discern God's aversion to homosexual behavior....[So] Paul's rhetorical aim was to demonstrate that Jews and gentile alike had no option but to believe in Jesus Christ or die, to urge believers to unite in common praise in what God's grace had done in Christ, to exhort believers to a transformed life in things that matter, and to caution against judgment over matters of indifference within the Christian community of faith." [Gagnon, 338.]

3. Homosexuality in the Gospels

- Those who attempt to defend homosexuality from Scripture say something like, "Jesus never talks about homosexuality, and homosexuality is never discussed in the gospels and because Jesus is the God of love (meaning 'acceptance' and 'tolerance'), then Jesus couldn't have been against homosexuality."
 - ✓ It is true that the word **homosexuality** does not appear in the gospels.
 - ✓ Does that mean that Jesus is tolerant of homosexual sin (and approves of it, as my friend said)?
- Jesus didn't mention homosexuality, but He did speak about marriage and He did speak about sexual sin.
 - ✓ In Matthew 19:5, Jesus quotes and then interprets Genesis 2:24. And then in v. 6 He applies it: this union between man and wife is inviolable. It is a one-flesh relationship that is inseparable. Jesus is affirming with this statement the sanctity of marriage between one man and one woman in a covenantal relationship. By this definition, Jesus eliminates the possibility of a homosexual relationship or union of any kind. He is reaffirming the purposes of sexuality in Gen. 1-2. So Jesus doesn't use the word **homosexuality**, but He does address the impossibility of it pleasing God.

- ✓ Jesus also speaks about sexual sin in broad terms. He calls **immorality** and **adultery** sin (Mt. 5:32; 19:9; 15:18-19; Mk. 7:21). The word **immorality** is *porneia* and includes any kind of sexual sin that is outside of the covenantal one-flesh heterosexual union of marriage. So when Jesus said **immorality**, His hearers would likely have thought of a passage like Leviticus 18 and all the sins that are outside of heterosexual marriage and said, “that’s sin” — including homosexuality. He didn’t need to specifically use the word to speak about the sin of homosexuality. (Aside, He also did not explicitly mention sins like bestiality or incest, but we also know He wasn’t neutral toward those sins!)
 - ✓ As we read the gospels, what is also clear is that Jesus doesn’t lower the standard of what we understand righteousness to be; He raises it. So it was taught that adultery is an act of sexual intimacy outside of the marital commitment; but Jesus taught that adultery is a sin that begins in the mind (Mt. 5:28). He *raises* the standard of sexual righteousness. So whatever men might be tempted to think about homosexual behavior, understand that Jesus’ standard is higher.
 - ✓ Don’t think that Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, perfect in all holiness, could for one moment or with one word ever approve of and condone something that God His Father calls evil. Christ could not sin and could never call good anything that is evil. Jesus was not tolerant and embracing of homosexuality any more than He was of any other sin.
- What Scripture (including the Gospels) says about homosexuality is summarized well by Sam Allberry:

“In each instance where the Bible directly addresses homosexual behaviour, it is to condemn it. The consistent teaching of the Bible is clear: God forbids homosexual activity....God is opposed to all sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage.” [36]

4. Homosexuality and the Gospel

- **1 Corinthians 6:11**
 - ✓ A **WARNING** message (vv. 9-10). We’ve already spoken about this. Those who engage in unrepentant homosexual sin will not enter Heaven; they will experience God’s wrath in Hell forever.
 - ✓ A **HOPEFUL** message. There is another message in this passage — **such were some of you**.
 - In other words, that was the former life, but in Christ there is a new life. Christ has fundamentally changed these people so that their identity is no longer “fornicator” or “idolater” or “homosexual” or “thief” or “drunkard” or “swindler...” The new identity is “Child of God” because of the justifying work of Christ.
 - Notice the change that takes place — Paul doesn’t say “adulterers are now monogamous,” and he doesn’t say “drunkards are teetotalers” and he doesn’t say, “homosexuals are heterosexuals.” He *does* say that all these are **washed, sanctified, and justified**. That is, the blood of Christ has been applied and God views them as righteous and they are progressively being sanctified.

Which is a theological way of saying they are being made holy. And that's the goal for all sinners — not to change to a particular kind of lifestyle, but to become a follower of a particular Person (Jesus Christ) and to live like Him. We don't want those with homosexual desires to become people with heterosexual desires; we want them to become people who have desires for Christ and to live for Him and like Him (which means, like all people, they will live a celibate lifestyle until/if they get married and then live faithfully to that spouse).

- If you struggle with *any* kind of sexual sin, the way out is to trust Christ (1 Cor. 6:11) and cultivate gratitude (**Eph. 5:3-4**). Sexual sin is rooted in covetous desires ("I want something I don't have"); what we need to cultivate is godly desires ("I am grateful that God has given me what I have"). Instead of fighting for something (ungodly) you want, fight for joy by being thankful. Be thankful for your marriage or singleness. Be thankful for the gift of sexuality and how God has called you to practice it right now (in marriage or in celibacy). Be thankful that whatever your desires, God is using them to expose your sinfulness and to move you toward Christlikeness and to sanctify you.
- **Implication 1: Homosexual sin is a DIFFERENT sin** — i.e., you might not be sinning either in your desires or actions with homosexual sin. But you sin in other ways that are analogous. You have desires that are ungodly and you have actions that are ungodly. Notice again the list of sins in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; in either desire or activity, most of us have committed most of those sins. So be careful about how you speak about homosexuality and about how you speak to homosexuals. You may not be inclined towards that sin, but in the flesh *you are inclined to sin that would leave you under God's wrath, if not for the work of Christ* (Eph. 2:1-3).
- **Implication 2: Homosexual sin is NOT A DIFFERENT sin.**
 - ✓ If you struggle with homosexuality, understand that "suffering" with homosexual desires is part of the fall of Adam. And in that sense it is not different from what all of us experience as sinners. The pull of homosexual desires is strong. And so is the pull of unrighteous heterosexual desires. And pride. And covetous greed. And unrighteous anger. If you are "suffering" with homosexual desires understand that you are part of the fallen human race and all of us suffer the pull of sins that we hate and don't want in similar ways. That you don't want your sin of homosexual desire is no different than me not wanting the sin of adulterous desire (what we commonly call "lust").
 - ✓ To make homosexual sin a "special" sin is to, in some sense, deny the power of the gospel to change and transform people. There is hope for change in the gospel. Deny the gospel and all hope is lost.
 - ✓ If you do not struggle with this sin, understand that it is only one manifestation of many results of idolatrous desires (**Rom. 1:31-32**). So as believers we dare not mock, disparage, or ridicule homosexuals. What homosexuals need is the same thing every sinner, including me, needs — the gospel of Christ. And I dare not be the obstacle because of my mockery that inhibits them from hearing and responding to the gospel.

CONCLUSION: I have taken some time to show you that the Scriptures speak clearly to the issue of homosexuality; I want you to be confident in what the Word of God says about this topic. And I want you to know that God has provided answers to the world about this topic.

Ironically, at least one scholar who embraces homosexuality is honest about what the Scriptures teach:

I have little patience with efforts to make Scripture say something other than what it says, through appeals to linguistic or cultural subtleties. The exegetical situation is straightforward: we know what the text says. But what are we to *do* with what the text says? ...

I think it important to state clearly that we do, in fact, reject the straightforward commands of Scripture, and appeal instead to another authority when we declare that same-sex unions can be holy and good. And what exactly is that authority? We appeal explicitly to the weight of our own experience and the experience thousands of others have witnessed to, which tells us that to claim our own sexual orientation is in fact to accept the way in which God has created us. By so doing, we explicitly reject as well the premises of the scriptural statements condemning homosexuality — namely, that it is a vice freely chosen, a symptom of human corruption, and disobedience to God's created order.

So there you go — he understands what the Scriptures teach; he just rejects it because he is an idolater who does not want to submit to the authority of Christ, the King.

What we say to him is what we say to all those whom we love who are ensnared in this sin: "I love you enough to tell you the truth about what God says about your sin. But I also love you enough to tell you the truth about what God has provided for the way out of your sin — and for the way out of my sin. We are two sinners who both need a Savior. Won't you come with me to the cross and embrace the Savior who will wash, sanctify, and justify you from all your sin?"

BENEDICTION: Jude 24-25