

The Biblical Teaching on Homosexuality

Intro: In our generation there has been a concerted effort to get people to accept homosexual behavior as an alternative moral lifestyle to heterosexual behavior. Even religious groups under the influence of political correctness have changed their views on this subject.

Some of you will remember when Gene Robinson, who openly practices homosexual behavior, was made a bishop of the Episcopal church (2004). In the aftermath of this event several religious groups have determined to accept in full fellowship those who practice the behavior and even allowed them to serve in church ministry.

For secularists who reject the concept of God and the inspiration of Scripture, moral choices are relative and individual. In that context, every person is entitled to determine his own moral values; and no one has a right to question them. However, if we claim to believe in God and in the Scriptures, then we need to look carefully and fairly at the evidence of Scripture concerning this topic.

Tonight we look at the Biblical teaching on this topic. (I'm aware of the sensitive nature of the topic and will try to speak judiciously about the practice in view of our mixed audience.)

The Biblical evidence against homosexual behavior

We can see from Scripture that homosexual behavior has been consistently portrayed as sinful in every dispensation and that it brings one under the wrath of God.

Homosexuality in the Patriarchal Age

In our lesson this morning we showed that at the creation God ordained marriage to consist of one man and one woman joined together for life. The woman was made to be the "suitable" helper to man (Gen. 2:18, 20). And, only this relationship could fulfill the creational mandate to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. In Genesis 19 we see the first example of departure from God's male-female arrangement in the conduct of the men of Sodom who sought to have a sexual relationship with the "men" (angels) who came to warn Lot of the impending judgment upon the cities of the plain for their wickedness.

"and they called to Lot and said to him, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them."'" (Genesis 19:5, NASB)

The term "know" is often used as a euphemism for sexual activity (Genesis 4:1; 19:8). This usage has been confirmed in other ancient languages including Egyptian, Akkadian, and Ugaritic (Botterweck, 1986, pp. 455-456,460), as well as Syriac, Arabic, Ethiopic, and Greek (Gesenius, 1979, p. 334).

Lot rightly protested, *“Please, my brethren, do not do so wickedly! See now, I have two daughters who have not known a man; please, let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you wish; only do nothing to these men, since this is the reason they have come under the shadow of my roof.”*

Clearly the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah consisted of more than homosexual activity; yet the Scriptures make it clear that this sin is often a manifestation of extreme wickedness in a culture (more on this later). It is reasonable to suggest that the homosexual behavior of these men was part of the wickedness that caused God to decree the destruction of Sodom.

Defenders of homosexuality who seek justification for their viewpoint from the Bible have pursued a revisionist interpretation of the account of the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (along with Admah and Zeboiim, Deuteronomy 29:23) to avoid the force of this example.

Some have tried to reinterpret the meaning of the word “know” in Gen. 19:5—that the men of Sodom simply wanted to become more acquainted with Lot’s visitors.

Such a definition would make no sense in this context?

Lot characterized their desire as “wicked,” hardly a description of someone who just wants to get to know someone better.

Second Lot offers his daughters as a substitute in order that the men might “know” them.

Clearly they are offered as a sexual alternative, since the men of Sodom surely “knew” these females in the conventional sense of knowing them. They had lived there for quite some time. It would make no sense of the men’s threat that they would “do worse” to Lot than to his visitors? What were they threatening to do?

And it is noteworthy that Lot’s behavior verifies the fact that the unnatural lust of homosexuality was considered far more repugnant than even illicit heterosexuality.

Some have contended that other texts referring to the event describe Sodom in terms of other moral transgression, but not homosexuality.

Isaiah (3:9), Jeremiah (23:14), and Ezekiel (16:49) all refer to the sinfulness of Sodom, but none explicitly mentioned homosexuality as the problem. In fact, Ezekiel pinpointed the specific sins of “pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness,” as well as her unwillingness to aid the poor and needy.

But none of these verses would establish the fact that homosexuality was not wicked. They would just demonstrate that their sexual misbehavior was a piece of a general attitude of rebellion against the Lord's will that manifested itself in various ways.

Others suggest that the sin of the Sodomites was to be distinguished from what they describe as "loving consensual relationships;" i.e. their sin was rape.

But note in response Jude's characterization:

"Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example, in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire." (Jude 7, NASB)

Jude's characterization would be equally applicable whether the actions of the men of Sodom were forced or consensual.

"Given themselves over to sexual immorality" is a translation of the compound word *ekporneusasai* which lexicographer Thayer describes as "a lust that gluts itself" (Thayer, 1977, p. 199). Their sexual appetites took them beyond the range of normal sexual activity. The idea of force or coercion is not in the meaning of the word.

"Strange" refers to "one not of the same nature, form, class, kind" (Thayer, p. 254), and so pertains to the indulgence of passions that are "contrary to nature" (Barnes, 1949, p. 392)—"a departure from the laws of nature in the impurities practiced" (Salmond, 1950, 22:7).

Homosexuality in the Mosaic Period

Homosexual acts were explicitly forbidden and punished under the Law as acts of immorality.

You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination.... Do not defile yourselves with any of these things,...lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you (Leviticus 18:22-30).

If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them (Leviticus 20:13).

In addition we have the anecdotal evidence of Judges 19. In an event similar to Sodom, "sons of Belial" (i.e., worthless men) surrounded a house where travelers had taken refuge for the night. As in Sodom, they desired to "know" the male guests

(vs. 22). The host, like Lot, knew exactly what they meant, as is evident from the fact that, like Lot, he offered them a sexual alternative (which, of course, God did not approve). Their sexual desire was labeled as “wickedness,” “outrage,” “vileness,” “lewdness,” and “evil” (Judges 19:23-24; 20:3,6,10,12,13).

The rest of the Old Testament corroborates this judgment of same-sex relations. For example, during the period of the kings, Josiah instituted sweeping moral and religious reforms, including tearing down the homes of the Sodomites (2 Kings 23:7).

Again some have sought to counter these arguments by pointing out that there are other laws in the Mosaic code that no one binds today. Thus, to be consistent we must reject the prohibitions of homosexuality as equivalent to other non-binding laws of the Mosaic code like eating pork.

This argument fails to take into consideration a distinction in the Law between matters that relate to ceremonial uncleanness as opposed to laws that forbid immorality.

In the former case, these violations were corrected by washing and separation.

However the latter were punishable by death without the possibility of being atoned for by sacrifice, indicating a high-handed violation of moral principle.

Under the Law, eating pork and committing a homosexual act were not considered morally equivalent actions.

Homosexuality in the New Testament Period (Gospel)

But even if we acknowledge that such laws were a part of the Mosaic Law which found its fulfillment in Christ, we cannot avoid the conception that the teaching of the Law stood as a basis for Jesus’ teaching.

“For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. “All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.”” (Mark 7:21–23, NASB)

Jesus’ condemnation of things like fornications (Mk. 7:21) is grounded in the teaching of texts like Leviticus 18.

Thus they become a part of the law of Christ. Thus the common objection that Jesus never addressed the sin of homosexuality is false. It is subsumed under his condemnation of “fornications.”

Paul summarized the “unrighteous” and “ungodly” behavior of the Gentile nations with these words:

For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting. ...who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them (Romans 1:26-32).

Observe that “God gave them up” to “vile passions.”

Paul’s observation that homosexual activity goes “against nature” harks back to the Creation model when God created the first human beings (Genesis 1:26). Homosexual practices go against the natural pattern established by God when He created “male and female” (Deyoung, 1988, pp. 429-441). Such behavior is “contrary to the intention of the Creator” (Cranfield, p. 123).

And note also that, not only is God displeased with those who participate in homosexual behavior, but Paul indicates that He is equally displeased with those who are supportive of such conduct—even if they do not engage in the activity themselves.

Again advocates of homosexuality seek to nullify the force of Paul’s statements by various means.

Some suggest that Paul only refers to heterosexuals who engage in homosexual acts; but where does the text so imply this.

Others place various spins on the text to avoid a modern universal application.

Martin has suggested that Paul referred to the Gentile culture, not the “universal human condition” (1995, p. 338). But is Romans 1:26-27 a “cultural chastisement,” or a universal condemnation? The immediate context (1:18-3:20) consists of God’s pronouncement that all humans in every culture and nation are under sin—“all the world” (3:19). These early chapters of Romans are intended to be a universal indictment of sin and to reveal the universal need of the gospel.

The condemnation of homosexuality in Romans 1 is parallel to its like condemnation of murder, deceit, covetousness, and all the other sins itemized by Paul.

Finally consider the words of Paul to the Corinthian church:

“Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor

adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.” (1 Corinthians 6:9–11, NASB)

The Greek word translated “effeminate” in this passage is a metaphorical use of a term that literally means “soft,” and when referring to people, refers to males allowing themselves to be used sexually by other males. Again, lexicographers apply the term to the person who is a “catamite,” i.e., a male who submits his body to another male for unnatural lewdness—i.e., homosexually (Thayer, p. 387; Arndt and Gingrich, 1957, p. 489).

“Homosexuals” is a translation of the term arsenokoitai. It derives from two words: arsein (a male) and koitei (a bed), and refers to one who engages in sex with a male as with a female (Thayer, p. 75).

Paul used the same term as in 1 Corinthians when he wrote to Timothy to discuss certain behaviors that are both “contrary to sound doctrine” and characteristic of the one who is not “a righteous man” (1 Timothy 1:9-10).

“realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching,” (1 Timothy 1:9–10)

But also note that when Paul said to the Christians at Corinth, “such were some of you,” he proved not only that homosexuals may be forgiven, but that they can cease such sinful activity. Here we have a clear biblical indication that someone can change their sexual practice, and can be forgiven of a past immoral lifestyle. We are forced to conclude that sexual activity between persons of the same sex is not a matter of genetics and an immutable part of one’s composition; but is a behavioral phenomenon associated largely with environmental factors.

CONCLUSION: The evidence is clear that in every dispensation of God’s law, this practice is clearly defined as sin against God and against His purposes for creating marriage. Let us speak the truth on this topic like all others with love for those ensnared in sin. The words of the apostle Paul to Timothy are especially appropriate here:

“And the Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the

knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.” (2 Timothy 2:24–26, NASB)

I am indebted to the published material of Apologetics Press on this topic.