

A BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO HOMOSEXUALITY



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Why are you reading this?

Did a friend or family member give you this booklet because you are gay and that person wants you to know what God says about it? Or did you pick it up on your own because you want to know what the Bible teaches about homosexuality, and you're confused why some Christian denominations condemn it and others approve of it? Do you want biblical guidance because your son or daughter or husband or wife or mother or father or friend just announced that he or she is gay? Maybe you are reading this because you already know what the Bible says about this topic, and you want to know if God loves someone who has same-sex desires.

Whatever your reason for reading this, there is something you must know:

God loves you!

Whether you are a Christian or a non-Christian, gay or straight, married or single, whatever

your desires or behaviors—know that God loves you.

An Overview

Ever since the first two humans rebelled against God (Genesis 3:1–8; 2 Corinthians 11:3), we all have been conceived as people who do not love God and who do not trust Him (Genesis 8:21; Psalm 51; Romans 5:12). We all engage in behaviors that the Bible clearly condemns as sinful and rebellious against God’s will. We deserve nothing but His just wrath (Ephesians 2:1–3). But God does not leave us there. He chose to love us and to save us from ourselves and the condemnation we deserve. Look closely at Ephesians 2:4–10. God’s grace is a *gift*; we do not earn it. The entire Bible can be summed up as God’s plan to save us from our own evil choices so that we might live eternally in His love.

The apostle Paul wrote, “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost” (1 Timothy 1:15). Paul also wrote, “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His

Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life” (Romans 5:10). God’s Son willingly suffered God’s wrath when He suffered and died on the cross for all of our sins—including our sexual sins.

When God confronts us about the sin in our life, whether through this booklet or a sermon or a Bible reading, it is so we might understand that our sin is evil and receive forgiveness and new life through His Son (1 John 1:7–2:2). When God moves us to grieve over our sin and trust in His Son, He makes us into new people whom He cherishes (2 Corinthians 5:14–19) and through whom He does good works that are pleasing in His sight (John 15:5; Ephesians 2:10).

Christians continue to struggle with evil desires and behaviors because we have a sinful nature (Romans 7:14–24; Galatians 5:17), but we are forgiven because of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. God adores us as His dearly loved children (Romans 7:25–8:1; 1 John 3:1–2).

So if you are convicted of sexual sin in your life, know that

God loves you.

And through faith in His Son, you are forgiven and holy in God’s sight.

If you are concerned about someone else who is practicing same-sex behavior, be assured that God loves that person even more than you do, and He can use you to share His forgiveness and saving Word with them.

“Heterosexuality” versus “Homosexuality”

To understand what the Bible teaches about this topic, we must first recognize that Scripture does not make a distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality as though the former is normal and the latter abnormal. Instead, Scripture speaks of sexuality as “very good” when it takes place between one man and one woman within God’s gift of marriage (Genesis 1:27–28; 2:24; Matthew 19:1–6). Scripture also speaks of the single and celibate life as a vocation that can give glory to God and be a blessing to others (Matthew 19:12b; 1 Corinthians 7:7).

The problem is that when we adopt the world’s distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality, we can fall into the error of thinking that opposite-sex behavior outside of marriage is not as sinful as same-sex behavior. We must recognize that Scripture clearly teach-

es that sex outside of monogamous, heterosexual marriage—whether it is fornication (sex between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman) or adultery or nonbiblical divorce or pornography or lustful desires—is just as sinful and just as condemned by God as same-sex behavior. One sin is no worse than the other.

Our failure as Christians to think biblically about sexuality has led us to adopt some skewed opinions. For many decades, American pop culture has winked at sinful opposite-sex behavior. For example:

- The popular sitcom *Happy Days* (mid-1970s–mid-1980s) depicted young men taking girls to “Inspiration Point” to engage in various degrees of sexual activity as the norm for dating.
- In the 1980s, pop songs such as Madonna’s “Like a Virgin” and Olivia Newton-John’s “Physical” were at the top of the charts.
- The blockbuster movie *Pretty Woman* (1990) romanticized sex work and depicted a woman finding her happy ending by leaving prostitution for an extramarital sexual relationship with a rich client.

Times have changed. The fact that our culture now also accepts and celebrates same-sex behavior is simply the continuation of our tolerating (and even championing) sinful opposite-sex behavior, even though Scripture teaches that it is all equally evil.

Many Christians are concerned that same-sex behavior has gone from being taboo to being commonplace. We who wish to be faithful to Scripture may worry that we may be persecuted for speaking the truth that God's Word condemns same-sex behavior in all circumstances. In fact, some mainline Christian denominations now not only support same-sex behavior, but they also allow clergy to practice it and perform same-sex marriages.

Faithful Christians are right to be distressed. Some Christians have adopted the world's distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Some are guilty of giving a pass to various opposite-sex sins (such as living together apart from marriage) because they are "normal." Some Christians are guilty of the opposite, of condemning the behavior but failing to witness to the truth of God's grace. They may even speak

about homosexuality in such a way as to give the impression that God could not possibly love people who have erotic desires for the same sex.

If we want to give a faithful and loving witness to those who have same-sex attraction, then we must turn away from our culture's understanding of sexuality and learn about God's gift of sexuality from God Himself.

What Does the Bible Teach about Homosexuality?

First, it must be stressed again that Scripture speaks of God's gift of sexuality as something that is "very good" only within the context of marriage between one man and one woman. It has been said that sex is God's wedding gift to husbands and wives.

All people born since Adam and Eve first rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden are conceived with a sinful nature that twists and distorts all of God's good gifts. We are all sexually broken. We all have sexual desires that are in conflict with God's will. Many Christians have engaged in sexual sin. We are all equally condemned by the Sixth Commandment ("You

shall not commit adultery”), and we all equally need the forgiveness and new life that only Jesus can give. Therefore, as we focus on what Scripture teaches about same-sex behavior, we must remember that we all are sinners who need Jesus.

It is important to know what Scripture teaches about sex so we can confidently talk about homosexuality. Some people insist that the Bible has been misinterpreted on this issue and that God does not condemn same-sex behavior as long as it takes place within a consensual, committed relationship between two adults. Many sincere Christians believe that what was true in the past does not apply today because “times change.” Only in recent history have some attempted to read the Bible in this new way. God’s Word does not change; it stands forever (Isaiah 40:8).

So what does the Bible say about same-sex behavior?

Genesis

In Genesis 1 and 2, God teaches that He created the first humans as male and female and gave them to each other in marriage: “a man

shall . . . hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). No mention is made of same-sex behavior. In Matthew 19:1–12, Jesus uses the marriage texts from Genesis 1 and 2 as a commentary regarding God’s will for our sexuality. Jesus says that the only God-pleasing context for sex is between one man and one woman who are married. The only other option is celibacy. This rules out same-sex behavior in all circumstances. Some suggest that when Jesus speaks of “eunuchs” in Matthew 19:12, He is affirming those who practice same-sex behavior. However, the Greek word translated as “eunuch” refers to those who are celibate and do not engage in any type of sexual behavior, so that argument is flawed.

Leviticus

In Leviticus 18 and 20, God condemns various sexual sins—including consensual same-sex behavior (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13). The context is that these sexual prohibitions are not temporary ceremonial laws given only to the Jews. Unlike food laws and the Passover (which were never given to the Gentiles), God also condemns the

Gentile nations for their sexual sin, including same-sex behavior.

Some suggest that since we no longer follow what Leviticus teaches about not eating shrimp (Leviticus 11:10), for example, we can also ignore what Leviticus says when it condemns same-sex behavior. But this argument fails to distinguish between ceremonial laws given only to the Jews for a finite period of history and God's Law, which is given to all people of all times and places.

The New Testament reveals that Jesus fulfilled the ceremonial laws, which pointed to Him (Colossians 2:16–17), and also maintained the moral laws—including the sexual prohibitions—found in Leviticus. For instance, in Mark 7:14–23, Jesus condemns not only sinful sexual behavior but also sinful sexual desires. He does this with the Greek word *porneia*, which was used by Jews of that time to refer to all the sexual prohibitions in Leviticus 18 and 20—including same-sex behavior.

No Affirmation of Committed Same-Sex Relationships

The Song of Solomon affirms monogamous marriage between one man and one woman (6:9) and never once mentions monogamous same-sex marriage. In the Book of Hosea, God uses monogamous marriage between one man and one woman as an image for His relationship with His people (2:14–20)—but never speaks of same-sex marriage. Historical documentation indicates that committed same-sex relationships existed in ancient times, but if God were in favor of it, we could expect Him to specifically approve of it in His Word. However, whenever Scripture mentions same-sex behavior, it always condemns it as sinful.

The “Silence” of Jesus?

Some claim that Jesus is silent about same-sex behavior within committed relationships, so it can be assumed that He tolerated or even affirmed it. We dealt with Jesus’ silence on the topic when we examined Matthew 19:1–12 and Mark 7:14–23, where He confirms that the only

God-pleasing context for sex is between one man and one woman who are married. However, the reason Jesus did not need to mention same-sex behavior specifically is that His Jewish audience already held that it was sinful. In the same way, Jesus never mentioned bestiality, incest, rape, or the like because the Jewish culture of His day agreed that such acts were and are sinful.

Some have attempted to find evidence of Jesus affirming a homosexual relationship by suggesting that the Roman centurion and his servant (Matthew 8:5–13; Luke 7:1–10) were homosexual lovers. Where does this idea come from? Evidence has been found that indicates some Roman men who owned slaves had same-sex relations with them. Jesus does not mention or condemn such relationships, so, some argue, Jesus was thereby affirming them. However, Matthew 8:5–13 and Luke 7:1–10 say absolutely nothing about a same-sex relationship between the centurion and his slave. In fact, the biblical texts indicate that this Roman centurion was a God-fearer—and God-fearers worshiped the God of Israel and submitted to all moral laws. Therefore, the centurion would have agreed

with Jesus and Jewish law that same-sex behavior is sinful. Also, if this centurion had been involved in homosexual behavior, Scripture would have recorded that Jesus would have called him to repentance, just as He did with tax collectors, prostitutes, and others who were actively engaged in sinful behaviors. The fact that Jesus said nothing about a supposed homosexual relationship between the centurion and his slave is strong evidence that the relationship did not exist.

Finally, the Gospels teach that Jesus entrusted His teaching to His apostles. When Paul took Jesus' teaching to the Gentile culture, where many affirmed same-sex behavior, he authoritatively addressed and condemned the behavior.

Romans

In Romans 1:18–32, Paul teaches that all forms of same-sex behavior, regardless of the circumstances, are contrary to nature, based on God's creation of humans as male and female. Paul alludes to Genesis, where it states that sexual behavior is “very good” only within God's gift of marriage between one man and one woman. And he makes the argument that creation itself