

Thought Piece: Homosexuality, What the Bible teaches

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September 2022

Introduction

The issue of human sexuality – and particularly the LGBTQ+ issue – is at the forefront of our culture. It is impossible to watch any popular show and not see the impact of this movement. Students at every level are bombarded with it in our schools. Increasingly employers are insisting their associates put their preferred pronouns on email signatures, and culture treats any discussion against homosexuality as “hate speech.”

The cultural pressure can be challenging for Christians who hold a Biblical worldview on issues of sexuality. Today, believing that sex is reserved for a biological man and biological woman joined in marriage can be considered archaic, and in some circumstances, outright bigotry.

In his comprehensive work, “A Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution”, Carl Trueman highlights the pivotal Supreme Court ruling in the 2013 case of *United States v. Windsor*, stating, “*Significant sectors of the culture no longer considered religious objections to LGBTQ+ matters to be anything more than bigotry, and policies based on such no more than pandering.*”ⁱ This is a shocking reality for many Christians!

The speed with which the homosexual movement has impacted western culture cannot be overstated. This has left many Christians with more questions than answers. Trueman continues his discussion, stating:

*“It is worth reflecting on that for a moment. Christians—and Jews—hold to a view of marriage that sees it as being between one man and one woman, and that for numerous reasons: the teaching of Genesis 2, the complementarity of men and women, and the procreative intention of marriage. Yet in Windsor, the Supreme Court dismisses two thousand years of Christian thinking (and many more of Jewish thought) as nothing more than irrational bigotry. At best, the [Supreme] court presumably decided that even if religious objections to gay marriage had once had validity, they did so no longer and the only reason for maintaining such was a smokescreen for justifying the marginalization of a certain sector of society. When the highest court in the land can codify such a view of religion in a judgment, the times—and the cultural attitudes—have truly changed.”*ⁱⁱ

So, what does the Bible say about homosexuality, and what is God's design for sex? These are the questions that this Thought Piece is intended to address.

In the Beginning

Human sexuality has been a hot topic of discussion and debate since the beginning of time. The creation story in Genesis chapter 2 alludes to sexuality in its original, pure form stating, *"Now the man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame."* ⁱⁱⁱ

God created sex to be enjoyed between a husband and wife, and to be clear, the husband is a biological male and the wife a biological female. This is the exclusive Biblical pattern, and there are no exceptions. Sex is the sign and seal of the holy marriage covenant. God created sex to be fun for the purpose of bring the wedded couple together regularly, bonding them, strengthening their relationship, and providing them a family. Speaking of the sanctity of marriage (and gently referencing the sexual union), Jesus quotes Genesis chapter 2:

"'God made them male and female' from the beginning of creation. ⁷ 'This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, ⁸ and the two are united into one.' Since they are no longer two but one, ⁹ let no one split apart what God has joined together." ^{iv}

As with all things good, the devil was quick to pervert human sexuality. In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve fall to temptation, partaking of the forbidden fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The immediate effect was shame and a recognition of their physical nakedness.

"⁸ When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the Lord God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the Lord God among the trees. ⁹ Then the Lord God called to the man, 'Where are you?'

¹⁰ He replied, 'I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked.'

¹¹ 'Who told you that you were naked?' the Lord God asked. 'Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?'" ^v

Notice God's question: "Who told you that you were naked?" The first thing the devil attacked was the purity of human sexuality in the covenant of marriage, and he has been at work perverting human sexuality ever since.

Biblical Guidelines for Sexuality

Since creation, humanity has been making a mess of sexuality. Knowing this, God was very clear in Scripture on what is and is not acceptable. Biblically, sex is exclusively reserved for a husband and wife, and while the Bible has numerous examples of heroes

and patriarchs' indiscretions, these stories are intended to be warnings for us not permission to follow in their failures.

The text begins with the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 and an admonition to keep the marriage bed pure: *"¹⁴ You must not commit adultery."*^{vi} In Leviticus 18, God spells out numerous sex acts that are "forbidden" including having sex with close relatives, animals, and homosexuality: *"²² Do not practice homosexuality, having sex with another man as with a woman. It is a detestable sin."*^{vii} Leviticus 20 spells out the punishment for these sins and makes homosexuality a capital sin.

"¹³ If a man practices homosexuality, having sex with another man as with a woman, both men have committed a detestable act. They must both be put to death, for they are guilty of a capital offense."^{viii}

In Deuteronomy chapter 22, God goes beyond physical sex and address cross-dressing as a sin. *"⁵ A woman must not put on men's clothing, and a man must not wear women's clothing. Anyone who does this is detestable in the sight of the Lord your God."*^{ix}

Shifting our focus to the New Testament, the Apostle Paul begins his wonderful, theological essay to the Romans by harkening back to Genesis. He starts by addressing the obvious nature of creation. Humanity is without excuse, having witnessed God's greatness.

"¹⁸ But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. ¹⁹ They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. ²⁰ For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God."^x

Paul continues by describing how humanity has abandoned God:

"²¹ Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused. ²² Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools. ²³ And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles."^{xi}

Retelling the creation story and the fall of humanity, Paul draws a line directly to the depravity of humankind. Without God and without God's order, humanity is lost in its own failings and own pursuits of happiness and fulfillment – a pursuit that can never be satisfied outside of Christ. So, what does God do? He doubles down on the freewill he granted humanity:

“²⁴ So God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other’s bodies. ²⁵ They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself, who is worthy of eternal praise! Amen. ²⁶ That is why God abandoned them to their shameful desires. Even the women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other. ²⁷ And the men, instead of having normal sexual relations with women, burned with lust for each other. Men did shameful things with other men, and as a result of this sin, they suffered within themselves the penalty they deserved.”^{xii}

This is a shocking conclusion drawn by Paul! He called out homosexuality as the pinnacle example of human depravity. Why, we might ask, did he use this particular sin as his example? In the long list of human sins and failures – including the Ten Commandments, why would Paul choose homosexuality? Brilliant theologian and thinker N.T. Wright has insight for us:

“[Paul] wants to trace the way in which humans have violated, not simply a ‘law’ given at some point in human history, but the very structure of the created order itself.

Paul assumes that there is such a structure; that is, that creation is not random or arbitrary. Taking Genesis 1 as the primary theological statement, he sees humans created in God’s image and given charge over the non-human creation. Humans are commanded to be fruitful: they are to celebrate, in their male-plus-female complementarity, the abundant life-generating capacity of God’s good world. And they are charged with bringing God’s order to the world, acting as stewards of the garden and all that is in it. Males and females are very different, and they are designed to work together to make, with God, the music of creation. Something deep within the structure of the world responds to the coming together of like and unlike, something which cannot be reached by the mere joining together of like and like.

This helps to explain the otherwise baffling fact that the very first instance Paul gives of what he sees as the corruption of human life is the practice of homosexual relations. Why on earth, we think, would he single out this particular behaviour and place it at the top of the list? The answer is not simply (as many have suggested) that as a Jew he was particularly disgusted by this behaviour, which many pagan cultures accepted, and indeed celebrated, but which Judaism had always banned. Nor is it merely that the emperor, Nero himself, was known to indulge in homosexual practice, as well as various types of bizarre heterosexual behaviour, and that Paul may have wanted to point the finger at the imperial system and its rotten, immoral core. This may have been a small part of his intention, but it is certainly not his central point.

Nor is it the case, as is sometimes suggested, that in the ancient world homosexual relationships were normally either part of cult prostitution or a matter of older people exploiting younger ones, though both of these were quite common. Homosexual 'marriages' were not unknown, as is shown by the example of Nero himself. Plato offers an extended discussion of the serious and sustained love that can occur between one male and another. The modern world has put various names on this phenomenon ('homosexual'; recently, 'gay'; and its female counterpart, 'lesbian'). These imprecise labels refer to a wide range of emotions and actions which it would be foolish to think only came to light in recent generations.

Paul's point, then, is not simply 'we Jews don't approve of this', or, 'relationships like this are always unequal and exploitative'. His point is, 'this is not what males and females were made for'.

Nor is he suggesting that everyone who feels sexually attracted to members of their own sex, or everyone who engages in actual same-sex relations, has got to that point through committing specific acts of idolatry. Nor, again, does he suppose that all those who find themselves in that situation have arrived there by a deliberate choice to give up heterosexual possibilities. Reading the text like that reflects a modern individualism rather than Paul's larger, all-embracing perspective. Rather, he is talking about the human race as a whole. His point is not 'there are some exceptionally wicked people out there who do these revolting things' but 'the fact that such clear distortions of the creator's male-plus-female intention occur in the world indicates that the human race as a whole is guilty of a character-twisting idolatry'. He sees the practice of same-sex relations as a sign that the human world in general is out of joint." xiii

Thus, Paul was not simply pointing out the sin of homosexuality. He was using it as an example of the extreme of depravity and departure from God's way that humanity has gone. The Good News is that God had a plan for humanity, a plan for redemption shared later in Romans, chapter 3:

"²¹ But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. ²² We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. ²³ For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. ²⁴ Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. ²⁵ For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood." xiv

Paul does address homosexuality – and numerous other sins – directly in his first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 6:

“⁹ Don’t you realize that those who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don’t fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality, ¹⁰ or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God. ¹¹ Some of you were once like that. But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

¹² You say, “I am allowed to do anything”—but not everything is good for you. And even though “I am allowed to do anything,” I must not become a slave to anything. ¹³ You say, “Food was made for the stomach, and the stomach for food.” (This is true, though someday God will do away with both of them.) But you can’t say that our bodies were made for sexual immorality. They were made for the Lord, and the Lord cares about our bodies. ¹⁴ And God will raise us from the dead by his power, just as he raised our Lord from the dead.”^{xv}

This text has numerous lessons for us. First note that Paul begins by saying, “*Those who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God.*” It is important to understand that Paul is not referring to Heaven our eternal home per se but rather to the place of God’s blessing, provision, protection, and ultimate design for humanity. God has not created a list of rules for us to follow to “get in;” rather, he has modeled a successful life for us in Jesus. As N.T. Wright shares:

“the creator God has unveiled his genuine model for humanity in Jesus the Messiah, and there are certain ways of behaving which just won’t fit. If you want to be a truly, fully human being, those ways of behaving have to be left behind. Coming on board into God’s kingdom while still being that sort of person is a liability both for the person themselves and for everybody else.”^{xvi}

Next, we look to the list of sins. Paul begins with sexual immorality or fornication – a broad category of sexual sin roughly defined as anything outside of sexual relations between a husband and wife. Then he mentions idol worship followed by those who commit adultery – sex outside of marriage – and “*male prostitutes*” and those who “*practice homosexuality.*” Much argument has been raised concerning the words used for these two specific sins.

- The first word used is the Greek word “malakós” translated in the New Living Translation as “male prostitute” “*Figuratively it means effeminate or a person who allows himself to be sexually abused contrary to nature.*”^{xvii}

- The second word used is the Greek word “*arsenokoîtēs*” translated in the New Living Translation as “homosexual” and translated as “sodomite.” Literally, “*a man who lies in bed with another male, a homosexual.*” ^{xviii} (Paul uses this same word again in 1 Timothy 1:10 where it is, again, translated as “homosexual.”)

Many progressive Christians have tried to suggest that the meanings of these words do not equate to modern expressions of homosexuality. However, any attempt to reframe Paul’s intent is misguided for two reasons. (1) The totality of scripture clearly limits permitted sexual activity to that which transpires between a husband (male) and a wife (female). (2) Leading theologians agree the words are translated accurately. N.T. Wright expounds on these words saying:

“The terms Paul uses here include two words which have been much debated, but which, experts have now established, clearly refer to the practice of male homosexuality. The two terms refer respectively to the passive or submissive partner and the active or aggressive one, and Paul places both roles in his list of unacceptable behaviour. As with everything else on the list, these are practices that some people find they deeply want to engage in, so much so that in our own day (this is a novelty of the last hundred years or so) we have seen the rise of the words ‘homosexual’ or ‘gay’ as an identifying label, a sign of a hidden ‘identity’ which can be ‘discovered’ or ‘recognized’. Biblical witness and pastoral insight alike suggest that this is deeply misleading—as is the implication that all humans need active sexual experience, of whatever sort they prefer, in order to be complete, to be fully alive.” ^{xix}

Finally, we see a list of character failures that keep individuals out of the Kingdom of God including being a thief, greedy, drunk, abuser, or cheat. Paul is being clear that the Kingdom of God is not wide open. While we have grace through our faith in Christ Jesus, we must strive to live as Jesus demonstrated if we hope to walk in the blessings of the Kingdom of God. It is important to note that while Paul is not addressing eternal destinations in his discussion of the Kingdom of God, any individual who can continually practice the vices listed without remorse or repentance should question if they have truly made Jesus Lord.

So, What’s the Big Deal?

As previously stated, Biblically sex is reserved for a husband and wife. Within that union there is enormous freedom. Outside of that union, sex is forbidden. Here it is worthwhile to ask ourselves, and God, “Why? Why is sex reserved for marriage in the Bible?”

God is our creator. He designed every aspect of us from our physiology to our psychology to our neurology, and obviously he created us to be sexual beings with a strong sexual desire. The purpose of this desire is to drive us towards our spouse – to encourage marriage, reproduction, and family. The Apostle Paul alludes to this drive in his advice for widows, widowers, and the unmarried: “⁸ *So I say to those who aren’t*

married and to widows—it's better to stay unmarried, just as I am.⁹ But if they can't control themselves, they should go ahead and marry. It's better to marry than to burn with lust.”^{xx}

When sexual fulfillment is found outside the bounds of marriage, it becomes something selfish and self-gratifying. Professor Mark Regnerus in his book “Cheap Sex” addresses the current state of sex in our culture. He uses marketing terminology to address the classic value proposition. The worth of something is determined by how much someone is willing to pay for it. Culturally, sex has become relatively “cheap” as contraceptives like the pill combined with changing cultural expectations have led to widespread promiscuity. Today, it is not uncommon for someone in their 20's to have had numerous sexual partners. The side effect of cheap sex has produced more sex, ultimately making relational commitment more “expensive.”

“Sex is cheap. It is more widely available, at lower cost to all than ever before in human history. What has emerged is not at all unlike the decline of the locally owned boutique shops and the rise of big-box, discount chains. Cheap sex has been mass-produced with the help of two distinctive means that have little to do with each other—the wide uptake of the Pill and mass-produced high-quality pornography—and then made more efficient by communication technologies. They drive the cost of sex down, make real commitment more ‘expensive’ and challenging to navigate, have created a massive slow-down in the development of long-term relationships, especially marriage, put women’s fertility at risk—driving up demand for infertility treatments—and have taken a toll on men’s marriageability. The ‘pure relationship’ regime, which has flourished alongside the dramatic rise in cheap sex, is not nearly so consonant with other long-standing priorities like childrearing and relational stability. But it is becoming the norm in the West—the template for evaluating relationship development. And it has changed how men and women perceive themselves, their sexuality, each other, and the point of relationships. Cheap sex does not make marriage unappealing; it just makes marriage less urgent and more difficult to accomplish.”^{xxi}

What Regnerus found was that people still desire to have a committed relationship; however, it is becoming harder and harder to accomplish. The reason? Because the very act God created to bring a husband and wife together is being used to satisfy individual desires with little or no relational expectation.

Our culture acts as if it is possible to have sex free from its consequences; yet, when we choose to ignore God’s direction and travel our own road – putting our truth over his Truth, and our way over his Way – devastation and pain are always the result. N.T. Wright once again eloquently describes the reality of our human connection with sex:

“But consequences there are, especially when it comes to sex. We humans are so designed, in the fascinating interplay of body, mind,

emotions and imagination, that what we are and do as sexual beings affects every other aspect of our lives. There is no such thing as 'casual sex'; sex is far more important than that. To trivialize sex is to trivialize our God-given humanness. To tell lies in that area inevitably sets up a fault line that will run through the rest of our character; or, to look at it the other way round, if there are fault lines elsewhere in our lives, they may well result in distorted or damaging sexual desires and practices.

Many in today's world have drunk so deeply from the 'anything goes' culture that they find the mere suggestion of moral restrictions on sexual behaviour surprising or even offensive. Yet, as every pastor knows, the human devastation that results from sexual permissiveness, especially where it involves breaking marriage promises, is far-reaching and long-lasting." ^{xxii}

How Should Christians Respond?

Jesus, quoting to the religious elite their judgement of him, said, *"¹⁹ The Son of Man, on the other hand, feasts and drinks, and you say, 'He's a glutton and a drunkard, and a friend of tax collectors and other sinners!' But wisdom is shown to be right by its results."* ^{xxiii} Jesus was famous for being a "friend of sinners," but notice the last bit of that verse. *"Wisdom is shown to be right by its results."*

The results Jesus was looking for was changed lives. True, he willingly and regularly engaged honestly and openly with sinners. From the woman at the well to the woman caught in adultery to Zacchaeus climbing up a tree, Jesus made a point of putting himself in the middle of their lives, much to the chagrin of the religious establishment that prided themselves on avoiding such "sinners."

Jesus saw them, engaged with them, and invested into them. But what he did not do – ever – was condone their sin. In every case, he worked to earn the right to be heard, and then he spoke the truth in love, setting them free. For the woman at the well, he pointed out her past failed relationships and current immoral one. For the woman caught in adultery, he skillfully banished her accusers, refused to accuse her himself, then told her to "go and sin no more." For Zacchaeus, we're not included in on the conversation, but we can see the result as Zacchaeus joyously proclaims, *"I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!"* ^{xxiv}

Of course, Zacchaeus had cheated people on their taxes! Why else would the crowd be so angry that Jesus had gone to dine with him. (I suspect they were a bit more excited when Zacchaeus started handing out money.) And what was Jesus' response to Zacchaeus' transformation? *"Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost."* ^{xxv} Seeking and saving those who are lost – this is what Jesus was all about, and it's what he calls his followers to do as well.

I've heard Christians say, "Who am I to judge? After all, didn't Jesus himself instruct us not to judge?" Not exactly. Let's look closely at that passage in Matthew chapter 7:

"Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. ² For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged. ³ And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own? ⁴ How can you think of saying to your friend, 'Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,' when you can't see past the log in your own eye? ⁵ Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye." xxvi

Look closely at Jesus' instructions. First, he equates the standard of judgement we use on others to the standard we will receive. Which of us would not want someone to point out a flaw that is leading us to destruction? Second, he ends this passage by setting priorities. Deal with your own issues, then help others with there's. This passage is referencing hypocrisy and is not a prohibition for identifying sin in others.

True love – the love Jesus demonstrated to us all – is a love that is willing to engage with sinners for the sake of saving their souls and helping them find the fullness of life God has for them. With compassion, we look for opportunities and ways to share the truth in love, always pointing them towards Jesus.

Conclusion

The Bible is crystal clear on the issue of homosexuality. God created sex for husbands and wives. It is intended to draw them together, to bond them to one another, and to help them produce a family, fulfilling his purpose for humanity. Any sexual practice that is outside of Biblical marriage (a biological man and a biological woman joined together), is forbidden. Not because God is mean or difficult, but because he wants what is best for us. We were created for monogamous, heterosexual relationships. Some, like the Apostle Paul, have the grace to remain celibate, but for most of humanity, Biblical marriage done God's way is one of the keys to finding fulfillment, purpose, and satisfaction in life.

As the church, the Ekklesia, we hold the *"the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven."* xxvii It is our responsibility to reach out to, and engage with, those whom God puts in our circle of influence. Because of our deep love for him and our compassion for others, we have the responsibility to show those in sin the love Jesus has for them, as we look to minister to the hurts within them. We accept them without affirming their sin. We love them without endorsing their lifestyle. And we pray for the grace of God to set them free. Jesus came that they might have *"a rich and satisfying life."* xxviii It's our responsibility to help show them The Way.

End Notes

- ⁱ Trueman, Carl R. (2022). *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution*. (pp. 141). Crossway Publishing.
- ⁱⁱ *ibid*
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- ^{xx} Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (1 Co 7:8–9). Tyndale House Publishers.
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- ^{xxiv} Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Lk 19:8). Tyndale House Publishers.
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