

How should the Church respond to homosexuality?
Part 2: What Does The Bible Say About Homosexuality?

As we begin this second study on the topic of homosexuality, we need to understand two foundational points.

1: When God gives Law, He does so out of love for and knowledge of His creation.

2: All of God's laws are valid at all times though the way in which they are implemented may change.

1: When God gives Law, He does so out of love for and knowledge of His creation. The other morning I heard a story which will illustrate this point well. A UPS delivery man was having trouble with his truck not running properly and called in to the shop. The shop put the mechanic on the phone. He listened to the driver's description of the problem and then asked "are any of your lights out?" The driver wondered what in the world a light being out would have to do with how his engine was running. "Don't worry about that for now," the mechanic told him, "just step outside your truck, look around and tell me if any of your lights are out." Sure enough, a clearance light on the back of the truck was out. "'Now,'" said the mechanic, "take the cover off that light. You will see two wires touching each other. Separate the wires and the truck will run fine." The driver tried it and it worked. The truck immediately began to run properly. From 40 miles away the mechanic was able to diagnose and fix the problem, even though the cause was not obvious to the driver. The mechanic knew the vehicle.

Our Creator knows us. He knows how He made us to function. He knows what works and what hurts. The cause and effect may not always be obvious to us, but if we believe in God, we have to trust that He knows what He is doing and is doing it because He cares. It is foolish in the extreme to ignore His Laws simply because we can not see the direct and immediate effect of breaking them. He did not give us the laws arbitrarily. He gave them out of love to warn us of things that are unhealthy or harmful for us, physically, emotionally or spiritually. Doing what he forbids or failing to do what he commands will result in heartache, pain and broken lives.

For this reason, if God says that homosexual behavior is wrong then it does not matter if we can see negative affects from such behavior or not. God's Word trumps all. He knows what He is doing. In the end, He is to be obeyed. And, when we fail to obey Him, we are not to argue the rightness of our action but simply to repent and admit we were wrong.

2: All of God's laws are valid at all times though the way in which they are implemented may change. Those who want to change morality in modern times will often argue that we do not keep many of the laws of the Old Testament. We eat pork. We wear clothes of mixed fibers. We do not sacrifice. We happily eat shellfish. So why can't homosexual action be treated in the same way, as a Law that was appropriate for the Old Testament but not today? How do we decide which laws to obey and which to ignore?

Usually the answer is that the moral laws (all of which are repeated in the New Testament) apply at all times and in all places while the dietary/ceremonial and civil laws no longer apply. That is true, as far as it goes. But, what we often fail to point out is that even when the outward practice of a law no longer applies, the intent behind the law still does.

As an example, we no longer practice circumcision or sacrifice as sacramental worship. Both were confirmation of God's promise of salvation pointing ahead to the coming Savior. Once the Savior came, the outward practice of the law no longer made sense. Circumcision, which pointed ahead to the fulfillment of the promise that one of Israel's descendants would be the Savior, no longer made sense once the Savior had arrived. However, the intent behind that Law, to give us confirmation of God's promises and to strengthen our faith, remains and is proclaimed in the practices of baptism and communion.

Another example, each Israelite man was to wear tassels at the hem of his garment with at least one blue thread. Tassels on clothes, because they were merely decorative, and blue, because of the expense of the dye, both represented nobility. Each member of Israel, therefore, gave testimony that, no matter their

earthly circumstances, they were members of the family of the King of the universe and, therefore, free and noble in His eyes.

We are no longer required to wear blue or tassels. Paul, however, when speaking to the Greek believers of Corinth, told the men not to wear hats to worship and the women to cover their hair. In 1st century Greek society male slaves wore hats while free men did not and vice versa for woman. The outward practice changed but the intent behind the law did not. Believers of all times come before God as His children, noble and free, no matter our earthly circumstances.

So, the argument that any Law of the Old Testament may be ignored because it no longer fits our society and times does not hold. While the practical application may be fluid, the intent and moral foundation behind the laws of the Old Testament remains solid and immutable. The laws still apply.

So, with this in mind, that God gives His laws out of love and knowledge and that the intent behind each law still applies, let us turn to the subject of homosexuality.

Here are the verses which deal with homosexuality:

The Destruction of Sodom Genesis 19:4-9 In this particular passage, the men of Sodom gather and demand the right to “know” (have sex with) Lot’s angelic visitors who have appeared to him as men. It is from this passage that the term “sodomite” came to be used as a synonym for homosexual. Many pro-gay theologians discount this passages with the argument that it was not homosexuality that Sodom was being destroyed for but rape and inhospitality. I’m not going to deal with this passage because, to be honest, such theologians are partially correct. In a city with as many sins as Sodom, we can’t pick out just one as “the sin” for which God destroyed the city.

Leviticus 18:22; 20:13

Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable [or, 'an abomination']

If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable [or, 'an abomination']. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.

These are the most direct and concise condemnations of homosexual behavior in the Bible. There are 2 points to be made about these verses.

Firstly, theologians who wish to take a pro-gay view of scripture have come up with many interpretations of the various Bible passages to support their view. I won’t deal with most of them. If you happen to come across any of the pro-gay theology, exodus-international.org has a number of articles that counter the pro-gay viewpoint. wheregraceabounds.org/homosexuality.html is another excellent resource, though their articles are a bit more complex.

However, I do want to take a moment to re-emphasize a point I made earlier. By far, the most common attack on these verses goes something like this, “we no longer put adulterers to death, though the Old Testament commands us to do so. So, if we don’t follow that law, why can’t we also put aside the laws against homosexual action?” The answer to this is that, while the application of the law may change, the intention of the law never does. No, we do not put adulterers to death. But we still believe adultery is a sin. Even Christ, when he forgave the woman caught in adultery in John 8, said, “go and sin no more.” Though He saved her from the Old Testament penalty for adultery and forgave her, by saying, “sin no more,” He is acknowledging that what she did was a sin and that He did not want to see that sin continue. The same is true of homosexual behavior. We should not seek to enact the Old Testament death penalty against homosexual behavior. But we must proclaim it is a sin, just as adultery is a sin.

Secondly, notice how the verse condemns homosexual behavior but says nothing about what we might call “orientation,” the tendency to experience homosexual temptation rather than heterosexual. For some reason, our modern society has reversed that, seeing the temptation as being more worthy of condemnation than the action.

Take for instance, the example of Ted Haggard, the Colorado Spring Pastor who made national news a few years ago when he was caught having sex with a male prostitute.

Following the discovery, one of the pastors in charge of helping see the New Life Church through the aftermath made the following statement, “He is completely heterosexual. That is something he discovered. It was the acting-out situations where things took place. It wasn’t a constant thing.” In spite of the awkward phrasing, it is obvious the pastor was trying to say that Ted was not really a homosexual, he just had homosexual sex once in a while.

Apparently, in the eyes of that pastor (and I believe he is typical of modern society) a person who does not experience homosexual temptation on a regular basis but has homosexual sex is somehow less sinful than a young person who experiences the temptations but has not yet physically followed through with the action. Talk about twisted logic!

Can you see the kind of confusion this causes for our kids when they perceive us as excusing the action while condemning the temptation? Except for the Romans verse, all the verses we will see in the Bible speak only to the action, including the actions of the mind such as fantasy, of course. None condemn a person for experiencing temptation alone. Keep in mind also that Christ “was tempted in every way, just as we are, but without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15)

In the last study I used the word “homosexuality” quite a bit. I did that because I wanted the reader to see the situation from the point of view of a young teen-ager who, though they have not acted on their impulses, already feels guilty and condemned for facing a particular kind of temptation. These young people pick up on society’s label of “homosexual” as applying to their feelings and then, when they hear homosexuality condemned in church without a clear distinction being made, internalize the condemnation as well.

In this and the next study however, I will be following the guidelines used by the LCMS for official press releases and letters and use the phrase “homosexual actions” when speaking of the sins of mind, word and thought and the phrase “homosexuality” to mean the condition which causes a person to experience homosexual temptation.

So, these verses condemn homosexual action quite strongly but say nothing about homosexual temptation.

Romans 1:21-27

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

This is the only verse of the ones we will look at which touches on the condition of “homosexuality.” Even here, however, the thrust is not condemning a person who experiences a certain kind of temptation but rather is warning of being “given over” to temptation, acting on that temptation and, eventually, experiencing the horrible results of that action.

More importantly, however, is the fact that homosexuality is not pictured in a vacuum. It is portrayed as one step on a downward slide, a continuum into chaos. President Kieschnick's letter (see the short answer) warns of "weak alternatives" to the family as God designed it to be. Notice, that he used the plural. He was not merely referring to gay marriage alone but to a whole host of alternatives society seems to accept, all of which together further us on the downward spiral into chaos. Such weak alternatives certainly would include divorce, adultery, living together before marriage, single parenthood, multiple remarriages and homosexual marriage among others.

Certainly if the research is correct, as I believe it is, one of the major factors of homosexuality, as well as many other sexual dysfunctions, is a poor relationship with a parent. (Once again, keep in mind this may not be the parent's fault) The parent may be absent, rejecting, or simply too busy to form the bond necessary with the child. This being the case, the destruction of society occurs exactly as Romans 1 shows it.

The chaos begins with exchanging the truth of God for a lie, putting created things into His place in our heart. The result is selfishness and greed, fracturing the family structure which depends on loving sacrifice of one's own needs for others for its stability. The fracturing of the family results in difficult relationships between parents and children, leaving the children even less prepared to face the stresses of family and marriage than their parents were, causing even greater chaos in the next generation. Along the line, sexual dysfunctions, such as homosexuality, become more and more common, and even accepted as normal, further accelerating the slide into chaos.

For this reason we can in no way excuse or ignore homosexual action. To leave a sin unchallenged in either an individual or society leads only to destruction. It is not a kindness to turn our heads and pretend it is not there. It is not love to allow a person to continue on a path that will lead them to death without calling out a warning.

But we also can not pick out only one sin for special condemnation. We must denounce all sin. Acceptance of homosexual action is neither the first nor the last stage in the destruction of society. It is one step along the way. God allows such Chaos to occur when people have turned from Him so that they will see the need for Him in their live. Either people will repent and return to God or society will crumble. But, in the meantime, we have to be careful not to put the full blame for the chaos on a single sin, such as homosexual behavior, nor to excuse any sin on the grounds that "it is no worse than what others are doing."

Recognizing sin, includes the sins committed by Christians also. One last comment before we leave this passage. We have to remember that Romans was written to a Church composed of both Gentile and Jewish Christians. This passage is addressed to the condition of the Gentile world. However, Paul just as strongly and thoroughly points out the sin to which the Jewish believers were more prone, the sin of trusting in themselves and their own actions for salvation, or at least of seeing themselves in a more favorable light than their fellow Christians. This pride is just as wrong and as strongly condemned as the evils of the society to which the Gentiles were tempted. We need to take this to heart as Christians and be as willing to condemn and repent of our own sin as to condemn the sin of others.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

1 Timothy 1:8-10

We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who

kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts (same word used for “homosexuals in 1 Corinthians 6), for slave traders and liars and perjurers

The word Paul uses here for “homosexual offenders” is unusual, arsenokoitai. In fact, the word does not appear anywhere outside the Bible and in the Bible appears only in these 2 spots. Now, there were other Greek words Paul could have used that meant one kind or another of homo-eroticism. However, instead of using any of them Paul makes up a word using the Greek word for male (arsenos) and the Greek word for bed (koiten). He seems to have used the Greek translation of the Leviticus passages when he did so because both words appear there. It would seem that the Greek words available to him were all too narrow in their meanings and he wanted his readers to recall the prohibition of Leviticus that homosexual sex of any kind is sinful, plain and simple.

Perhaps the most important point of the Corinthian verse however, is that Paul includes, “And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.” No one needs to be locked into an action. There is forgiveness and healing available for all sin, including every single one mentioned in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy. The believers of Corinth were living proof of the power of Christ’s mercy.

Matthew 19:4-6

Haven’t you read,” (Jesus) replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”

A few comments about this verse, especially in light of the recent court decisions allowing gay marriage:

1: There is an emphasis on mankind created as male and female. Though animals also come in male and female, there is a special emphasis when it comes to the creation of human beings. This male-female union in a lifelong monogamous marriage is the standard upheld and praised consistently throughout the Bible as God’s plan for sexual behavior. Even when some variations are permitted (such as polygamy, concubines and divorce in the Old Testament) they are never praised as the ideal and, in fact, quite a bit of effort is made to correct them and to draw society back to the standard of one man and one woman in a life long union.

Going back to the very first point made in this study, God made us. Having designed us, He knows how life works best and what is best for us. If He tells us something is wrong, it is not out of anger or hate, but a loving admonition to avoid what may damage us severely. If He points to and praises a standard of behavior, He does so because He designed that behavior to be beneficial to us. Certain actions (such as divorce) may have been occasionally permitted by God in the civil law in order to regulate and lessen the devastation they cause. But only the standard, as intended by God can be pronounced “very good” and beneficial to us emotionally, spiritually and physically.

2: It is God, not society, who creates a marriage. Though the acceptance of “gay marriage” is likely to have a devastating impact on our society, one thing it does NOT do is create an actual marriage between two men or two women. The government certainly has some leeway in regulating marriage by imposing minimum age standards or saying who can perform a wedding, etc. But the government never has the ability to step outside the boundaries of what God ordains. It is God who makes a marriage, not the government and so the government can not create a “gay marriage” through legislation, amendment or judicial decision. God does not bring two men or two women together in marriage. Whatever relationship they may have, whatever they may choose to call it, in reality it is no marriage at all.

3: Two relationships are pictured in this passage; the parent/child relationship and the husband/wife relationship. They are very different from each other in their goals, and, therefore, in the needs they each meet.

The child/parent relationship is, in many ways, the opposite of the husband/wife relationship. The parent/child relationship is a process in which one flesh becomes two. The child is born from the union of mother and father. His or her flesh is that of the parents, combined and shared to make the child. The goal is that the child will eventually separate from the parent to become a unique and independent individual. Especially in the childhood years, it is a very unequal relationship with the child taking and the parent giving. The child is fully “selfish” (in the sense that the child has nothing to give and must receive everything) while the parent is fully “selfless” (in the sense that the parent can ask nothing from the child, who has nothing to give, and will sacrifice their own good for that of the child). The goal is to move the child from weakness, selfishness and complete dependence on the parent to being an independent adult with the ability and resources to give to others. And so “a man will leave his father and mother”

The husband/wife relationship is very different. In marriage two equal but opposite beings come together. They come together to share on equal terms. Both give joyfully and both receive abundantly because of the giving of the other. Neither demands but both give freely, not as a parent gives out of the necessity of the weakness of the child, but freely out of strength, independence joyfully exchanged for dependence on one another. The goal is the exact opposite of the parent/child relationship. Instead of one flesh becoming two, the two become one. Instead of the goal being separation, the aim is ever increasing union for life. The two become one whole without ever losing themselves.

This being the case, then, we can see one of the major dangers of homosexual activity.

Homosexuality is a temptation to fulfill unmet childhood needs in a sexual/marriage relationship. By their very nature, childhood needs, which are selfish, can not be fulfilled in a marriage relationship, which is intended to be fully self-giving. While there are many dangers to those who practice homosexual action ranging from AIDS to depression to emotional injuries, the danger greater than all is this one, trying to meet God given needs in a way that God did not create to fulfill them.

Sex is, by its very nature, a selfish desire. It is the desire to satisfy one’s self with the use of another’s body. It works well and becomes a beautiful thing when used in a selfless relationship of marriage. Within marriage, as it was designed to be, the selfishness of sex is balanced by the self-giving relationship itself so that sex is lifted up to a new level. It becomes an opportunity to give of one’s self, one’s own body, to another’s needs. It is a special kind of giving which God designed us to share with only one other person in a lifetime. Any other use of it shatters its integrity, allows its inherent selfishness to overwhelm the relationship, and makes it among the most damaging and controlling of sins.

Homosexuality is not the only example of trying to meet childhood needs through sex, of course. Adultery, pre-marital sex, divorce, prostitution, pornography or even entering a marriage with the attitude of what one will get out of it rather than give, are all ways in which childhood selfishness intrudes into the marriage/sexual relationship. All of them lead to disaster and hurt. Any husband or wife who demands their spouse fulfill their need to have their self esteem built up is looking to their spouse as a parent instead of husband or wife. Any husband or wife who resents their spouse for not fulfilling their needs is forcing the marriage into a child/parent mold rather than upholding it as a marriage.

In a way, this is what all sin is about, trying to meet needs though some way other than the proper ones God created. For instance, attempting to find our security, identity and meaning in some earthly and temporary thing rather than in God.

Sin, therefore, locks all of us into our brokenness. It seems to provide a balm to pain but it is a false healing and only leaves us empty in the end. We turn back to sin because it seems to be the quick fix – but it never fixes anything. It is a lie. It only takes our eyes off Christ and locks our eyes on the things of this world as we search for answers.

Homosexual behavior does what every other sin does. It appears to offer an answer, it feels like it gives wholeness. But it is hollow, a lie. All it does is lock a person into the brokenness of childhood hurts and unmet needs. It seeks for answers where answers can not be found. Sex can not fulfill or alleviate the unmet childhood needs which are at the root of homosexuality.

In the end, this attempt to fulfill needs in the wrong way will separate a person from God and destroy faith.

The Greatest Love of All:

We often talk about what teens can do to make their parents trust them. We just as often forget to tell teens that the best way to make their parents trust them is to trust their parents first. Mom and Dad don't make them attend school, stay away from alcohol and sex, or keep reasonable hours because they want to make their kids miserable. Mom and Dad do it because they love their kids and want to see them happy. They know that some control and work now will make for a better and happier life in the future. But when a teen breaks those rules, what the child is really saying is, "I don't trust my parents. I don't think they really know what's best for me. I don't think they really care about what me. What I want is better for me than what they want me to do."

Sin is the same thing in relation to God. Faith is trust in God. Sin is an act of mistrust. In sinning we are saying to God, "I do not trust You. I do not think You have my best interests in mind. I do not think Your laws are for my benefit." Every sin is an act of mistrust, a step away from faith. Continued sin, in the end, creates final separation, a complete lack of trust in God. Faith is utterly destroyed.

This is really the greatest danger of homosexual behavior. Rather than trust God and go through the effort to find ways to meet needs in a God pleasing way, homosexual behavior seems to alleviate those needs for the moment. Yes, it feels good. It feels like love. It feels like it is affirming the person's need for gender identity and acceptance. But it does not do any of those things in reality, because sex can not do that. Yet there is a powerful draw to return to the "quick fix" instead of the way of repentance and trust that will really fulfill the needs.

Compared to this, all the other results of homosexual behavior are minor. God does not stop wanting to forgive and desiring the relationship. But at some point the person will cease to desire that relationship, stop wanting the forgiveness, and no longer trust in God as He is. Oh the person may have faith in a god as he or she imagines god to be. But that is nothing more than self worship and self trust in the end because that god only exists in the person's mind. In the end, homosexual behavior, obstinately practiced will destroy faith.

Love, true love, does not allow another person to start down that road without a warning. The greatest love we can show must begin with the denouncement of homosexual behavior as sin. We can not allow anyone to begin that path with out at least warning of the destruction that lies at the end. We are not being unloving but loving when we say, "homosexual behavior is sin." For God gives Law because He loves us. And because He loves us, He does not change those Laws just to suit our time or society. Love says, "homosexual behavior is sin."

So, what is the solution? Well, we will talk about that more in the next study. But for now, the answer is simply this: to realize that nothing on earth can fulfill any need for which it was not created. One kind of relationship can not completely fulfill the needs that can only be filled by another. Neither can any thing on earth fulfill our eternal needs. But God is all-sufficient. He can fulfill any and all needs left unmet by any earthly thing or relationship. He can be Father (Matthew 6:8), Brother (Matthew 28:10) Friend (John 15:15) and even Lover (Ephesians 5:25b-27).

How to do that and point people to that wonderful and tremendous hope will be the subject of our next study, "How can the Church respond lovingly to homosexuality?"