

# Theological and Pastoral Responses to Same-Sex Relationships

## Primary Theological Issues - What Does the Bible Actually Teach?

Hermeneutics: the interpretive process for Scripture-

1. What is the nature of sin? Is it ALWAYS “evil” (in the common sense of the word) or as the Greek word implies, can it simply be missing the mark or the imperfection of our post-fall life (i.e., pre-fall ideal vs. post fall reality)? This is not to say that there are no genuinely evil acts!
2. Are prohibitions in scripture pure revelation from God, or are they a blend of inspiration from God and cultural norms/views, i.e. laws that suit that particular historical and cultural context (eg slavery, place of women, etc. - see note under Romans 1 below for an example).
  - A. Patriarcal culture -
    - a. Issues with male in passive sexual role (notice no specific banning of woman/woman)?
    - b. Women needed husbands in order to survive.
    - c. Marriage/sex was viewed primarily as procreative, not primarily romance or intimacy (i.e., biology vs. intimacy).
3. Do our modern interpretations follow the express meaning of the author (eg. *pornea* is generally translated broadly as “sexual immorality” but it actually specifically referred to male prostitution).

## Biblical Passages Dealing with Same-sex Relations (exhaustive list)

### **Leviticus 18:22** (NIVUK)

**22** “Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable.

- The word used for detestable can speak of cultural impropriety and is used, aside from speaking of various sexual issues, of how the Egyptians felt about eating with Hebrews in Gen 43:32, as well as in introducing the Kosher food laws in Deuteronomy 14.

### **Leviticus 20:13** (NIVUK)

**13** “If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.

- See above. Also commanded to be put to death were rebellious children, for example (Deut 21:18–21).

How does Paul’s understanding of the passing of the Law, in the NT, relate to how we interpret these Levitical passages (eg. Rom 7:6 - “**But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.**”)? A common answer is that the “ceremonial” laws passed away but the “civic” laws did not. Can this view be backed up from Scripture itself? As Israel was a Theocratic society, was there such a separation of ceremonial/civic implicit, or would it rightly be understood that all of their laws were both religious AND civic?

### **Romans 1:26-27** (NIVUK)

**26** Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. **27** In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

- These two verses speak of what God handed us over to (perhaps conceded us to?) rather than the sins that brought His judgement in the first place (see earlier in the chapter where it is clear that the context of both the sin and the judgement is in idolatry, where prostitution and sexual rituals were the norm). Note, this still does not assume a positive light, but might simply be a less focused indictment than most in the Traditional view imply, or may in fact be solely focused on the ritual sex involved with idol worship.
- The words “shameful” (Gr. “dishonour”) and “natural” are the same Greek words Paul uses in 1 Cor 11:14, “**Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him,**” in discussing why a woman should always have her head covered in church. Obviously, if left to nature a man’s hair would grow as long as a woman’s, so it’s clear in this instance Paul is not speaking in the literal sense of the word. The Greek word for “nature” that is used in both these cases is often used in the same way we would use the English word nature, to speak of something that has become a habit or cultural norm (eg. “it has become second nature to him”, or “it

## **Theological and Pastoral Responses to Same-Sex Relationships**

is the nature of English people to be more reserved.”). However, it must be conceded that in terms of biological procreation, homosexual activity would fall outside the “natural” norm, which may in fact inform the Jewish view, as marriage within Judaism was largely for procreation (the continuance of the man’s bloodline, cf. Gen 38:8, Deut 25:5, Matt 22:24 , etc.) and not primarily intimacy.

- The most important argument that can be made about Paul’s discussion in Romans 1 is that it must NEVER be read without reading Romans 2 (remember Paul did not use verse and chapter numbers) as his argument in chapter 1 is just the lead up to his main point in chapter 2 (vv 1-4): **“You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God’s judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realising that it is God’s kindness that leads you to repentance?”** - i.e., we are not to judge others because we all are in the same boat, God is our judge and His judgement is based in love and grace.

### **1 Corinthians 6:9-11 (NIVUK)**

**9** Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men **10** nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. **11** 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 1:9-11 (NIVUK)**

**9** We also know that the 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, **10** for the sexually immoral, for those practising homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers – and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine **11** that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

- These are admittedly, on the surface, the most straightforward condemnation of homosexuality in the New Testament. The Greek word used in both these passages is *arsenokoitai* which literally means “a male who lies with males”. What is not immediately clear is that in both Greek and Roman culture by far the most common homosexual relationship was pederasty, which was a sexual relationship between an adult man and a pubescent or adolescent boy, often a slave. In fact, “given the importance in Greek society of cultivating the masculinity of the adult male and the perceived feminizing effect of being the passive partner, relations between adult men of comparable social status were considered highly problematic, and usually associated with social stigma.”<sup>1</sup> Nearly all references to homosexual acts in the early church Fathers refer specifically to sex with boys.
- In the 1 Corinthians passage there is another Greek word in the list (*malakoi*) that many modern translations simply combine with *arsenokoitai*, translating both into the single word homosexuality. Older translations typically translate the word “effeminate”. *Malakoi* literally means “soft” and is used every other time in the NT to refer to someone who wears soft clothing (i.e., the wealthy who live luxuriously).

Additionally, Mark 10 is often cited to demonstrate that Jesus reaffirmed that marriage was solely to be defined as between a man and a woman-

### **Mark 10:2-12 UK (NIVUK)**

**2** Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?’ **3** ‘What did Moses command you?’ he replied. **4** They said, ‘Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.’

**5** ‘It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,’ Jesus replied. **6** ‘But at the beginning of creation God “made them male and female”. **7** “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, **8** and the two will become one flesh.” So they are no longer two, but one flesh. **9** Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.’

---

<sup>1</sup> Meredith G. F. Worthen (10 June 2016). *Sexual Deviance and Society: A Sociological Examination*. Routledge. pp. 160

## **Theological and Pastoral Responses to Same-Sex Relationships**

10 When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. 11 He answered, 'Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. 12 And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.'

- Though cited to affirm heterosexual marriage as the only model, this disregards the point of Jesus words which are in fact speaking of the issue of divorce rather than marriage itself. The modern Evangelical church has typically taken a hard stance on the heterosexual nature of marriage, whilst taking a soft stance (or no stance at all!) on the issue of divorce, and the rather strong implications that Jesus makes about remarriage. \*\*\*\* *Apologies to our remarried friends - the point is to challenge whether we shouldn't walk in Grace in both instances, rather than rigidity only on the side that we are least comfortable with.*\*\*\*\*

Two other oft quoted passages for the traditional view follow, with an explanation as to why I don't believe they are relevant to the discussion:

**Genesis 19**, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah.

- This story of God's judgement these cities is often cited to demonstrate God's abhorrence of homosexual practice, and is the reason that homosexual activity in the past was termed "sodomy". The problem with using this passage is that God's judgement on Sodom and Gomorrah was not on the basis of homosexual activity but on rape (as well as other things mentioned in Ezekiel 16:49).

Related to this is **Jude 7** which states "Likewise, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which, in the same manner as they, indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural lust, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire."

- It is often interpreted that Jude, when referring to "unnatural lusts" or "strange flesh," is speaking of homosexual practice. However, Jude throughout his letter references an extra-biblical prophecy from the book of 1 Enoch, which was recognised as canonical by many of the Jews of his day. Enoch speaks of God's judgement toward the sexual relationship between humans and angels (Enoch itself may be referring to the stories of Sodom/Gomorrah and the mention of the Nephilim in Genesis 6)

Finally, as there is growing scientific evidence that homosexuality may indeed be, though not totally, heavily influenced biologically (and therefore may in fact be "natural" for some), how do we respond in light of passages such as **Psalm 139:13-17**-

**For you created my inmost being;  
*You knit me together in my mother's womb.*  
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
*all your works are wonderful,*  
I know that full well.  
My frame was not hidden from you  
when I was made in the secret place,  
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.  
Your eyes saw my unformed body;  
all the days ordained for me were written in your book  
before one of them came to be.  
*How precious toward me are your thoughts, God!*  
How vast is the sum of them!**

### **Primary Pastoral Issues - What Should the Church's Response Be?**

Even assuming that one maintains that same sex relationship (sexual activity) is sin, what was Jesus' example to us toward those in society that were viewed as "sinners"?

- **Luke 19:1-10** - Zaccheaus
- **John 4:1-26** - The Samaritan woman at the well
- **John 8:1-11** - The woman caught in adultery
- **Luke 7:36-50** - Woman who anointed Jesus feet.
- **Mark 2:15-17** - Jesus loved and fellowshiped with sinners

In Scripture we never see Jesus address a persons specific sins. Why? Is it because specific sins are not what Jesus is concerned with, rather He is focusing on the healing of the individual as a whole and reconciling them into intimate relationship with God, who's Holy Spirit promises to convict (**John 16:8**). Can we trust Jesus to be Lord (we are not) in a person's life and allow the Holy Spirit to decide which areas He will work on in an individual?

## Theological and Pastoral Responses to Same-Sex Relationships

How did Jesus command us to respond to those we or society views as “sinners” (as if we’re not)?

- **Luke 6:36** - Be merciful just as God is merciful
- **Matt 7:1-2** - Do not judge others
- **Matt 7:3** - We’re not to focus on another’s sin, but our own - even heterosexual relationships are broken and filled with a varied mix selfishness and genuine love!

Recognising the great number of LGBTQ Christians who genuinely love and have a relationship with Jesus, are used and filled with the Spirit (including supernatural gifts in some cases), and long to serve God with their whole lives, genuinely seeking His guidance and correction in their lives (just as we do in ours), do we have the right to choose which areas they, or God should be working on in their lives at any time?

**The Point? - Whether you view homosexuality as consistent with God’s ideal for one’s life or not, we are all in the same boat, needing grace and love from God and from one another! We should welcome EVERYONE with open arms as beloved of God and with all the dignity that comes from being His children, made in His image. We are all at once beautiful and broken, and on the same journey of healing and liberation.**

### **Resources**

**Changing Our Mind:** A Call from America's Leading Evangelical Ethics Scholar for Full Acceptance of LGBT Christians in the Church



David P. Gushee, David Crumm Media, LLC, 2015

**God and the Gay Christian:** The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships



Matthew Vines, Crown Publishing Group, 22 Apr 2014

**Undivided:** Coming Out, Becoming Whole, and Living Free From Shame



Vicky Beeching, HarperCollins UK, 12 Jun 2018

**Homosexuality and the Christian:** A Guide for Parents, Pastors, and Friends



Mark A. PsyD Yarhouse, Bethany House, 1 Sep 2010

**People to Be Loved:** Why Homosexuality Is Not Just an Issue



Preston Sprinkle, Zondervan, 8 Dec 2015