



Metropolitan Community Church in Glasgow

What does the Bible really say about Homosexuality?

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One of the questions we get asked about, is what the Bible says about homosexuality. This is an issue where Christians come up with different answers – much like we do on other issues, like baptism. Some Churches teach that babies should be baptised (for example, the Church of Scotland, Catholics, Anglicans). Others believe that only Christians who are old enough to make an informed choice should be baptised (for example, Baptists, Pentecostals). So, Christians having different answers to some questions isn't a new thing. We all agree on the "core" teachings of Christianity – such as Jesus being God in human form, his death and resurrection, and the inspiration and authority of the Bible – but we sometimes disagree on some "side" issues. Same-sex relationships are one of these issues.

The traditional view

Historically most Christians have believed that gay and lesbian relationships are wrong. They based this claim on two facts. Firstly, whenever the Bible mentions homosexuality, it seems to do so in a negative way (see Genesis 19, Leviticus 18:22, 20:13, Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 1 Timothy 1:9-10). Secondly, they point out that God's creative intention is clearly heterosexual marriage, and that the Bible speaks positively of this. Taken together, this forms the basis for teaching that same-sex relationships are sinful. The overwhelming majority of Christians who hold this view point out that they do not believe that being gay or lesbian is sinful in and of itself. They too believe that God loves us, but we ought to be single and celibate.

Why question the traditional view?

The Bible tells us that God is love (1 John 4:8). So, when we read the Bible a problem arises. When we look at the commandments God gives us, we can easily see why they are right or wrong. Looking through the lens of "God is love" we know why murder, theft, gossip, abuse and oppression are sinful – they're not actions grounded in love. In the same way commandments to love everyone, to live at peace with everyone, to help others and to be generous – we can see how these are grounded in

love. The commandments are grounded in God's character. So, why would God have a problem with two people who love each other, even if they are two men or two women?

What about those verses?

Genesis 19 (Sodom and Gomorrah) is about attempted gang rape, which has nothing to do with loving same-sex relationships. Leviticus is a ritual holiness code which doesn't apply to Christians – in fact the Apostle Paul even quotes Leviticus 18 to make that very point (Galatians 3). Romans 1 isn't about Christians, it's about people who suppress truth (Romans 1:18). Paul was writing to the Church in Rome, when they thought of same sex "behaviour" they would have thought of the shrine prostitution practiced in Roman temples. Paul also uses very specific phrases – "shameful acts", "inflamed with lust" (NLT). Surely that's not the same as two people who love each other!

The last two verses (1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:9-10) are more difficult. Look at how the four most commonly used modern English translations of the Bible use phrases like, "sodomites" (NRSV¹), "men who have sex with men" (NIV²), "practice homosexuality" (NLT³), and "men who practice homosexuality" (ESV⁴). The word "homosexuality" wasn't coined until 1869 when it was used in a German pamphlet written by Karl-Maria Kertbeny (who also coined the term heterosexual). It wasn't used in English until 1892. So, how did a Greek text written two thousand years ago come to be translated using modern terminology, and how did it end up in modern English translations? More importantly, is that correct?

How did the words "homosexual" and "sodomite" make it into the Bible?

The first translation to use the word "sodomite" was the Revised Standard Version of 1971. With the discovery of new manuscripts of the Bible and the evolution of the English language, it has been revised and retranslated as the New Revised Standard Version and the English Standard Version. Both retained that meaning. The New International Version⁵ and New Living Translation also picked up that meaning.

¹ New Revised Standard Version (1989)

² New International Version (2011)

³ New Living Translation (2015)

⁴ English Standard Version (2016)

⁵ The 1984 edition of the NIV reveals how difficult this word is. In the two places arsenokoitai was used in Greek, the same word was translated into English as "perverts" and "homosexual offenders".

What's in the Greek text?

The word in question is the Greek word "arsenokoitai" which is only used in these two verses. It literally translates as "male-beds" and it does have something to do with males having sex with other males. Both 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:9-10 are vice lists, so they don't provide any context to help decipher the word. This means we must look outside the Bible to see how the word was used in ancient literature, and there we don't see descriptions of two men in love. It seems to have been used in two ways – pederasty (adult males having sex with adolescent boys) or male-male sexual exploitation.

So, what's the Bible saying in these 6 verses?

What the Bible condemns is sexual abuse. Whether it's rape, shrine prostitution, pederasty or sexual exploitation, the Bible clearly condemns those things – but that's not the same type of thing as a loving relationship. Condemning these things is of course perfectly in keeping with God's character, but we're still left with the question of whether loving same-sex relationships would be ok.

You've only addressed the first part of the traditional view. What about the second part?

It is true that the Bible speaks positively of heterosexual marriage. It is also true that there are no clear examples of loving same-sex relationships in the Bible.⁶ This isn't surprising though. We cannot read the Bible and assume it was written to us, or about us. It wasn't. It was written in specific cultures and often to specific people (see for example Luke 1:1-4). When we read the Bible we are reading about how God interacted with different people in their circumstances. Of course, lots of it is clearly intended for all people (John 17:20), including us – this is how God chose to reveal himself. He didn't send us a book with a list of "do's and don'ts", he gave us a book that gives us an insight into who God is, what he delights in, his overall plan for humanity, and what he wants with us.

How do you know same-sex relationships are okay?

We know that God created us to live in relationships (Genesis 2:18). We know that the Bible says it's better to marry than to burn with lust (1 Corinthians 7:9 NLT). There is no reason why we should apply different standards to gay and lesbian people – after all, God himself shows no

⁶ Some have argued that David and Jonathan, or Ruth and Naomi were lovers but there is no evidence to support those claims. You can only come to that conclusion by reading modern western culture into ancient near eastern cultures.

favouritism and judges with absolute impartiality and we're to do the same (see Acts 10:34, 1 Peter 1:17, James 2:8-9). God is concerned with how we love, not who we love.

Are you sure? Does God really love me?

Yes! If you have been told that God hates LGBT+ people, this breaks our hearts. This is not what the Bible says. God loves you far more than you will ever know (1 John 4:16). Jesus died for all people, not just heterosexuals (John 3:16-17). You are included, you are invited to come and receive a fresh start with God, you too are invited to receive eternal life (Acts 2:39, Romans 3:22).

Where can I find out more?

I would recommend three books. "God and the Gay Christian" by Matthew Vines, "Unconditional: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays-vs-Christians Debate" by Justin Lee, and "Undivided: Coming Out, Becoming Whole, and Living Free from Shame" by Vicky Beeching. All three are available in hard copy and as e-books.

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