

# THEOLOGY ROUNDTABLE

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## *Biblical Foundations of Same Sex Issues*

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Peninsula Bible Church  
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# Introduction

The contemporary questions around same sex relationships and sexual identity are a collision of numerous theological and cultural issues. Issues of politics, gender, sexual expression, marriage, personal identity, and the nature of romantic relationships all intertwine and often become polarizing and confusing. How do we engage with the biblical witness regarding sexuality in the midst of a world that is facing an unprecedented change of sexual values?

This discussion will not answer all the questions. The goal is simple: to wrestle with some of the foundational passages of Scripture in order to determine a groundwork for further consideration. Applying Scriptural truth to contemporary issues is always a work that takes time, prayer, and the guidance of the Spirit. To begin that process, we want to understand some basics of how the Scriptures approach sexuality.

The biblical interpretation presented here is that God intends for sexual activity to be enjoyed within the context of a monogamous, heterosexual marriage. Any sexual relationship outside of those bounds violates God's intention for humanity.

However, there is a growing group of people who suggest that the Bible condones same sex relationships. Arguments based on culture or experience are not authoritative. But when someone argues from the text for a particular interpretation, we must listen and understand and interact. Believers are to be people of the text. We must always be willing to go back to the Scriptures, to re-examine our own assumptions, and to see the mind of God.

To that end, we must approach the text while balancing several tensions. On the one hand, we are **confident in the truth**. We know that God has revealed himself in the words of the Bible. We believe that those words are able to be understood and applied to our lives. Truth is important and available. But we are also **humble in our interpretation**. Believers throughout history have been wrong as they have interpreted Scripture. We need to acknowledge that we are fallible even if the Scripture is not. We come to conclusions about what the text means, but we must be open to listening to people who disagree with us.

As we interact on the particular issue of same sex relationships, **we need the boldness to have a contrary opinion**. Our goal is not to appease the culture around us. Believers have always been required to make unpopular stands that counter the culture they live in. We must not capitulate to cultural assumptions or values that contradict Scripture. But we must balance that boldness with **sympathy for broken people**. We are, all of us, broken and subject to the temptations of sin. We struggle with disobeying God in numerous ways. We live in a culture full of so many confusing messages regarding sexuality that we must be sympathetic to those who are themselves confused, even if they are not aware of their own confusion.

As we proceed, we will outline some basic biblical foundations for understanding these issues. May we do so with confidence and humility. May our interactions be bold and sympathetic. And may the Holy Spirit guide us into all truth (John 16:13).

# Culture and Sexuality

Before beginning to look at the biblical foundations for understanding sexuality, some observations about culture would be helpful. We live in a time of rapid cultural transition. Attitudes about marriage, gender, sexuality, and individual identity have changed more in the past generation than in the previous several centuries. Even within the past several years, public opinion regarding same sex questions has shifted dramatically. None of these issues can be properly understood without some awareness of the underlying cultural transformations that have accompanied them.

The so-called sexual revolution of the late 20th century had vast effects on contemporary ideas of sexuality. The birth control pill changed everything. For the first time in history, technology allowed for sexual expression with a drastically reduced risk of pregnancy. Among other things, this had the cultural consequence of disassociating sex from marriage. The concept of “safe sex” was invented.

Along with the relatively recent emphasis on individualism in Western society, sex became individualized. Sex was no longer primarily about a committed relationship. It became about the individual striving for sexual fulfillment. As time passed, this concept gave rise to the notion of “sexual identity.” For contemporary adolescents, the quest to discover an individual sexual preference and identity is an assumed part of reaching adulthood. However, the very existence of that journey is a recent development.

As a result of these changes, there are numerous prevailing attitudes that are helpful to identify:

- It is the responsibility of the individual to determine a sexual identity.
- Sexual expression is an essential part of a fulfilled life.
- Any sexual expression that doesn't physically harm another person is acceptable.
- I have the right to choose when sex leads to pregnancy.
- All sexual desires must be fulfilled.
- The purpose of sex is to find personal enjoyment or fulfillment.

These and other attitudes and assumptions are an inescapable part of contemporary culture. We must be mindful of these attitudes as they affect our own thinking as well as when we consider same sex issues. Everyone is affected, whether they are Christian or non-Christian, LGBTQ or straight.

As we approach the Scriptures, then, we must be aware of these underlying assumptions. We cannot simply ask the Scriptures to answer our questions. We must be prepared for God to challenge our hearts and transform our own faulty ideas about our sexual ideas and experience. We all need the heart of God.

# Prohibition Passages

There are four main areas where the Bible seems to condemn same sex sexual activity: the destruction of Sodom, the Levitical holiness code, the nature of sin in Romans 1, and two separate vice lists in Paul's New Testament letters. While these passages put same sex activity outside the norm of God's design for sexuality, each of them has interpretive questions that have to be considered.

Overall, these passages are not the best place to start for addressing the contemporary issue of same sex activity. None of them directly addresses the contemporary expression of same sex relationships. Each occurs in a specific context with a unique purpose for the passage as a whole. It is helpful to understand them in their context and how they contribute to a biblical understanding of godly sexual expression, but they are not sufficient to answer contemporary questions.

## Biblical Passages

### SODOM

**Genesis 13:13** Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD.

**Genesis 19:1-11** The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed himself with his face to the earth <sup>2</sup> and said, "My lords, please turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night and wash your feet. Then you may rise up early and go on your way." They said, "No; we will spend the night in the town square." <sup>3</sup> But he pressed them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house. And he made them a feast and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.

<sup>4</sup> But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house. <sup>5</sup> And they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them." <sup>6</sup> Lot went out to the men at the entrance, shut the door after him, <sup>7</sup> and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do

not act so wickedly. 8 Behold, I have two daughters who have not known any man. Let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please. Only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof.” 9 But they said, “Stand back!” And they said, “This fellow came to sojourn, and he has become the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them.” Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and drew near to break the door down. 10 But the men reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them and shut the door. 11 And they struck with blindness the men who were at the entrance of the house, both small and great, so that they wore themselves out groping for the door.

**Comments:** This passage makes it clear that the citizens of Sodom were evil for multiple reasons. Their inclination toward violent homosexual activity was part of their overall depravity. Throughout the Bible, Sodom is referenced as one of the classic examples of communities bent toward evil. References appear throughout the prophets, twice in the Gospels and in several New Testament letters.

Most of these references to Sodom do not specify the particular evil of that community. However, Ezekiel 16:49-50 criticizes Sodom in this way: “she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty and did an abomination before me.” In addition, Jude 1:7 adds “indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire” to the list.

The sin of Sodom was multifaceted and complex, including but not limited to violent homosexual assault.

## LEVITICAL HOLINESS CODE

**Leviticus 18:22** You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.

**Leviticus 20:13** If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.



**Comments:** These passages are part of the holiness code in Leviticus. This portion of the Old Testament law provides detailed instruction for a wide variety of matters, from agricultural to property to worship to sexuality.

These passages clearly prohibit male same sex activity as part of the Old Testament Law. They are general and broad-reaching. Historians are unsure of what kinds of same sex behavior would have been present in ancient near Eastern culture that could have been in view of this prohibition.

Many commands from the Levitical law clearly do not apply to contemporary life after Jesus. Many clearly remain helpful. Many are in dispute. Commands regarding cultural issues like the mixing of cloth in garments (Lev 19:19) as well as sexual issues like avoiding intercourse during menstruation (Lev 18:19) are generally not considered applicable today. This leaves open the question of how to properly apply these commands today.

## ROMANS DESCRIPTION OF SIN

Romans 1:26-27 For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

**Comments:** The context of Romans 1:18-32 is the need for the Gospel: the story and announcement concerning the lordship of Jesus Christ (Romans 1-4).

Human sin

- Human sin is presented as refusal to worship God in response to revelation (1:18-21)
- Humans “exchanged” the worship of the Creator for the worship of the creation (other gods) (1:21-23)

God’s response

- In response to human idolatry, God “gave them over” to sin so that they became more attached to sin, illustrating the destructiveness of idolatry (1:24-25)

## Homosexual lusts

- One expression of sin is connected to homosexuality, in which women and men exchanged/abandoned the “natural [heterosexual] function” (1:26-27)
- Homosexuality corresponds to humans’ decision to worship other gods: Humans abandoned God and “exchanged” him for other gods; therefore men “abandoned” women in favor of men, and women “exchanged” men for women.

## Other sins

- God not only gave humans over to homosexuality, he also “gave them over” to antisocial behavior (1:28-32). There is no indication that Paul is speaking in degrees of sin.
- Homosexuality distorts the image of God (male and female); antisocial behavior attacks the image of God.

## Conclusion

- Homosexual choices and antisocial behavior aptly illustrate the effect of false worship. Humanity worshiped other gods. As one consequence, because God “gave them over,” some chose, and continue to choose, homosexuality. As another consequence, because God “gave them over,” some chose, and continue to choose, antisocial behavior.
- The enslaving nature of both homosexuality and antisocial behavior signals that humanity has rejected God in favor of other gods. The enslaving nature of sin therefore serves notice that humans need the Gospel.
- Those who are subject to greed, envy, strife, deceit, malice, gossip, or boasting, for example, find themselves on the same page as those who are subject to homosexuality and in need of the Gospel.
- Given Paul’s diagnosis of the human condition, we would expect to see intense, God-aided attachment to such “lusts” that concern not only homosexuality but also, greed, envy, gossip, and more.

## NEW TESTAMENT REFERENCES TO SAME SEX INTERCOURSE AS PART OF “VICE LISTS”

**1 Corinthians 6:9-11** Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, 10 nor thieves,

nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. 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** Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, 9 understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, 10 the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine.

**Comments:** These two references are usually translated as “homosexuality.” The Greek word in question (*arsenokoitai*) is notoriously difficult to translate. It appears only twice in the New Testament, in these two passages. The standard Greek lexicon BDAG glosses it as “a male who engages in sexual activity with a person of his own sex.”

Some have suggested that this word is a reference to the first century practice of temple prostitution or the practice of adult men having young boys as sexual servants. There continues to be some debate about the nature of this word and the apostle Paul’s intention for using it.

Most conservative scholars make a strong case for its applicability to wide-ranging same sex sexual activity.



# Theology of Marriage

The best place to start in considering contemporary questions of sexuality is with the biblical understanding of marriage. The witness of Scripture clearly locates all healthy sexual activity within the marriage relationship. Therefore, marriage must be understood in order to understand sex.

The Old Testament and the New Testament clearly present heterosexual marriage as the normative model. This was true in the cultures that these texts were written within. Some suggest that the authors of Scripture assumed this as the normal model, but did not intend to prescribe it as normative. However, several aspects of how marriage is understood within God's design suggest that heterosexual marriage is the normative model for sexual relationship within God's intention for creation.

Two aspects are particularly relevant. The first is the emphasis on fruitfulness within marriage. God's creation is intended to be fruitful and replicate life. Marriage is meant to play a large part in that. While this does not limit the purpose of marriage or of sexual activity to procreation, it provides a foundation for understanding the intention of marriage.

Secondly, marriage is consistently presented as a union of two different persons. Distinction that is combined into unity seems to be part of the very nature of God's intention for marriage.

## Biblical Passages

### FRUITFULNESS OF CREATION

**Genesis 1:11-12** And God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth." And it was so. 12 The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

**Comments:** The original creation is described with a peculiar emphasis on the fruitfulness of the life that God created. Life is meant to reproduce life.

## CREATION OF HUMANKIND

**Genesis 1:27-28** So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

**Comments:** When God created humankind, one of the first instructions was for this new part of creation to continue in the fruitfulness of life. God created humankind to be creators and reproducers of life. Though this isn't limited to those who are married, this procreative nature of life informs a biblical understanding of marriage.

## CREATION OF WOMAN

**Genesis 2:18-25** Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” 19 Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. 21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” 24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

**Comments:** The creation of the woman paints a fascinating picture of men and women as similar but distinct. After God realized that man was unable to complete his intended purpose by himself, the quest for a suitable helper began.

Adam naming all of the animals has the effect of elongating this process. It concludes with the observation that none of these creatures were suitable as a helper for Adam, with the implication that none were similar enough to him.

The woman is created from the man's own flesh, emphasizing her connection and similarity to Adam. Adam's proclamation regarding Eve emphasizes her similarity to him in the midst of her distinction. She is different from him, but similar enough to be a suitable helper.

This emphasis of complementarity within marriage continues throughout the Old Testament. The oneness of marriage occurs in the context of their distinction. That tension and complexity is what makes their union so powerful and effective as the bearers of God's image in his creation.

## CONNECTION BETWEEN MARRIAGE AND WORSHIP

**Ephesians 5:31-33** “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. 33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

**Comments:** The parallel between God's relationship with his people and marriage is drawn several times throughout the Old Testament (Eze 16:8-14; Jer 3:20, 31:32; Isa 54:5; Hosea 1:2). That analogy is stated in its most explicit form here in Ephesians 5, where marriage is compared to the relationship between Christ and the church.

As the apostle Paul states, this is a great mystery. But part of this mystery has to do with the distinction between God and his people in combination with the unity achieved in their love. The same aspect of being one without being the same is carried forward and highlighted in this comparison.

Marriage, at its theological core, is a picture of God's love. This love is the love of distinction brought together in unity.





# Theology of Sexuality

The Bible offers a clear picture of God's design for sexuality. Sexual activity is always presented as being enjoyed within the context of a heterosexual, monogamous marriage. Sex is rarely presented as an isolated topic. Rather, it is discussed in the context of relationships. Sexual practice within marriage gives life to and affirms the oneness of that relationship. Sexual practice outside of marriage damages a wide variety of relationships.

This theology of sexuality from the Bible reveals numerous areas where contemporary assumptions and attitudes regarding sex fall short. Many of these contribute to questions around sexual identity and same sex activity. Correcting some areas where culture misunderstands sexuality helps to restore a healthy sexuality in many areas, including questions of same sex relationships.

## Biblical Passages

### SEXUALITY IS NOT AN APPETITE

**1 Corinthians 6:13** “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food” -- and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

**Comments:** We are not to think of sexuality as an appetite or a necessary aspect of a fulfilling life. Sex is different from other desires. It is not a “need” or a “right.” Sex is a gift that God gives for his purposes. This does not mean that we are to ignore it or be prudish about sex, but it must be understood within its theological purpose.

Sex does not start with us or with our sexual desires. It starts with God's intention.

### SEXUAL DESIRES MUST BE RESPONDED TO IN OBEDIENCE

**Galatians 5:24-25** And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

**Comments:** Responding well to the temptation of unhealthy desires is a critical aspect of life in obedience to God. Submission to God’s will is part of learning to follow Jesus. The believer has a new resource in the Holy Spirit to “crucify the flesh with its passions and desires.”

While there is legitimate debate about what classifies as fleshly passion or desire, any faithful biblical interpretation must not fail to recognize the importance of responding in a biblical manner to human desires.

## RELATIONAL AND SPIRITUAL NATURE OF SEXUALITY

**1 Corinthians 6: 15-20** Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! 16 Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.” 17 But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. 18 Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. 19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, 20 for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

**Comments:** The nature of sex is that it creates a powerful physical connection in the context of a relationship. The experience of emotional unity is expressed in a physical manner through the act of sexual intercourse. Sexual immorality has the effect of breaking relationships that are meant to be maintained or creating the false sense of unity where no such unity is intended. Thus, sexual sin is particularly dangerous because it affects the continued ability to relate to other people.

In the biblical context, sex is about relationship, not personal fulfillment.

## SEXUALITY IS NOT PRIMARY IDENTITY

**Galatians 3:28** There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

**Galatians 6:15** For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

**Comments:** The current cultural concept of “sexual identity” is not found within the Bible. However, the New Testament clearly describes all current markers of identity as falling away in favor of relationship with Christ as the primary identity.

## SEX IS WITHIN CONTEXT OF MARRIAGE

**1 Corinthians 7:1-3** Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” <sup>2</sup> But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. <sup>3</sup> The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.

**Comments:** The New Testament is clear that sex is always to be enjoyed within the context of marriage. In ancient culture, sex was almost equivalent to marriage.

## SEX IS NOT NECESSARY

**1 Corinthians 7:6-7** Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. <sup>7</sup> I wish that all were as I myself am [celibate]. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.

**Comments:** The apostle Paul’s encouragement to a celibate lifestyle is a helpful antidote to the current culture’s insistence that sexual expression is necessary to a fulfilling life.

## SEXUAL IMMORALITY WITHIN THE CHURCH

**1 Corinthians 5:1** It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father’s wife.

**Comments:** The church is intended to be a community where sexual expression is practiced according to God’s intention. Members of the church have a responsibility to keep each other accountable in regards to their sexual practices.

This applies to all the various range of sexual issues: pornography, adultery, violence, damaging attitudes regarding sex within marriage, and same sex activity.

This passage goes on (quoted in the next section of this booklet) to clarify that the church's concern regarding sexual immorality is limited to the church community, not to the outside world.

# Other Interpretations

As we attempt to understand how the Bible addresses the issue of same sex identity and activity, it is important to interact with other interpretations of the text. Arguments drawn from culture or experience are not authoritative, but textual arguments must be understood and interacted with.

There are at least three interpretive issues that are helpful to understand and interact with.

- The Bible addresses a different kind of same sex activity than is present in our contemporary culture.

While this observation may be mostly correct, the question remains as to how best to apply biblical theology to contemporary questions. This is the reason that the prohibition passages are not the strongest arguments against same sex activity today. A far clearer picture of God's intention for sexuality is given in the normative expression of sex rather than the acts which are explicitly prohibited.

- The fact that all people are created in the “image of God” makes the civil rights issue primary.

It is absolutely accurate that the Bible insists on respect for all people. Members of the LGBTQ community have not, in contemporary culture, been treated with such respect as bearers of the image of God. Where believers encounter this reality or worse, cause it, actions must be taken to repent and restore dignity for all people. Christians have rarely been known for defending the dignity of LGBTQ individuals. For that, the church has a lot of work to do.

However, the particular issue of marriage as an example of a civil right is a more complicated matter. Issues relating to notions of government and religious freedom make this discussion about far more than civil rights.

- The Bible portrays same sex relationships, particularly David and Jonathan.

Many people claim that the story of David and Jonathan is an example of a same sex relationship in the Old Testament. 2 Samuel 1:26 is often quoted, “I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant have

you been to me; your love to me was extraordinary, surpassing the love of women.” Other verses are similar.

However, to read David and Jonathan’s relationship as sexual is to completely misunderstand the flow of the narrative within 1 and 2 Samuel. Most of the material prior to David’s complete ascension to the throne over the united kingdom of Israel has the purpose of legitimizing his claim and right to be king. Particularly because he was not the natural heir to Saul’s kingship, the author goes to great lengths to establish him as God’s choice for king over Israel.

To portray him as involved in a same sex relationship with Jonathan would have been completely counter-productive to that goal in an ancient near eastern context. Male friendships were far more affectionate in that culture than in contemporary Western culture. Statements such as these must be read within their cultural context as expressions of deep, nonsexual friendship.

# Cultural Engagement

Closely related to the issue of biblical norms for sexuality is the question of how the church ought to interact with the world and culture at large. Too often the church's dominant attitude has been one of judgment, condemnation, attack, and opposition.

The relationship between church and the prevailing culture has often been a complicated one. Early in the history of the church, the Christian community was a minority that existed in stark contrast to the surrounding culture. For over a millennium, the church became a dominant cultural force in Western civilization. That phenomenon led to some positive developments along with some unintended consequences. The church has not always wielded its cultural power responsibly.

It seems that a new season has begun in which the church is becoming more of a cultural minority. That may not be an entirely negative change. God has worked powerfully in and through his people when they have not wielded cultural power. Perhaps we are being invited to rethink how we relate to the world around us and refocus our emphasis.

The goal of the Christian community is not to change culture through political action, collective influence, condemnation, or government regulation. The goal of the church is to proclaim Christ and to bring his healing transformation to the world. Our personal attitudes ought to be filled with humility. Our primary moral concern is for the church community, not the world.

## Biblical Passages

### OUR RESPONSE IS CONVICTION AND HUMILITY

**Romans 2:1** Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things.

**Comments:** The purpose of the description in Romans 1 (as well as most of the vice lists in the New Testament) is to describe the universal affliction of sin. The conclusion is that the reader, along with everyone else in the world, is utterly affected by the brokenness of the world. God's broken creation is completely without the resources to fix itself. God's intervention is the only hope.

The response to such passages ought to primarily be that of conviction and humility. We are to be convinced of our own brokenness first and foremost rather than judging the sin of others. The New Testament passages which address same sex activity were generally not written with the purpose of answering contemporary questions of sexual identity. They are to convince all people that they are under the reign of sin apart from the redemption offered through Christ.

## OUR MORAL CONCERN IS WITH THE CHURCH, NOT THE WORLD

**1 Corinthians 5:9-13** I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—10 not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? 13 God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”

**Comments:** In this passage, the apostle Paul states that the moral concern of the church with regards to sexual practices is for its own community. Non-believers who are not familiar with the transformative work of Christ cannot be judged for violating Christian sexual ethics.

The role that the church plays in the moral character of the culture around them is ambiguous. The church is not instructed to impose Christian ethics on culture. It is always assumed that the culture will be morally deficient. It is the church that must be different and call each other to live with biblical sexual ethics.



## OUR CALL IS TO PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

**2 Corinthians 4:5** For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

**Comments:** The primary role of the church in the world is to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ as a witness to the identity of God. Our posture toward the world should not be one of judgment, but of invitation and proclamation. The church is the vehicle through which God offers the opportunity for a redeemed life in Christ to anyone who would accept it.

When the church becomes focused on a particular moral, political, or cultural agenda, its witness for Jesus Christ is overshadowed. We must be diligent to avoid this scenario and renew our focus when it occurs.

This does not prevent the church from participating in public life. In fact, living the Gospel requires followers of Christ to be faithful witnesses to the revelation of God. However, Christians must participate in the public arena with respect and love. The church can be a prophetic voice, but must be willing to suffer for its proclamation of truth rather than imposing its will on culture through force.



# Conclusions

We live in a culture that is deeply confused about sexuality. That confusion is not limited to questions of same sex activity or sexual identity. Nor is it limited to people outside the church. Everyone is affected by cultural assumptions, models, and experiences.

Several passages in the Old and New Testament condemn same sex sexual activity. However, each of those passages has a unique purpose within its context. Drawing direct application to contemporary questions of sexual practice or identity is difficult.

A better approach for addressing contemporary issues is to start with the biblical picture of marriage. Sexual activity and marriage are inextricable in the biblical mindset. The Bible consistently portrays heterosexual marriage as the normative practice for God's people. Marriage is designed as the unity of two distinctly different genders. The theological analogy of marriage to worship further confirms this emphasis.

In considering sexuality, the Bible always locates it within the marriage relationship. Any sexual practice outside of marriage is a violation of God's intention. Even more importantly, sex is to be understood as a relational experience between spouses, not as a personal appetite or identity to fulfill. Sexual activity is not a requirement for a fulfilling life. There is much to be learned from submission to sexual patience and discretion.

While others have offered alternate interpretations, they are not compelling in their synthesis of all of Scripture. They do not show how the biblical example of sex within a heterosexual marriage could translate in a different culture into godly same sex relationships.

In the midst of these ideas, the church is struggling to relate to a world where sexual ethics are rapidly shifting. But the call of the church in the world is always to proclaim the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This proclamation happens through word and deed. Christians do have a voice in the public sphere, but need to be careful of forcing their will on a resistant culture.

The biblical interpretive issues are fairly clear. The Bible clearly presents heterosexual, monogamous marriage as the only intended expression of sexual relationship. However, the cultural issues of how the church relates to the world, our interaction and involvement with government, and our relationships with those who disagree with us are incredibly complex.

May God guide his people as they strive to always speak the truth in love.

# Additional Resources

## Helpful Books:

### POPULAR

*God and Gay Christian*, by Matthew Vines. An extremely popular argument in favor of biblical support for same-sex relationships.

*What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?* by Kevin DeYoung. A conservative approach defending a traditional view of biblical sexuality.

### MEMOIRS

*Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*, by Wesley Hill. A memoir of a Christian struggling with same sex attraction but living in celibacy.

*Out of a Far Country*, by Christopher Yuan and Angela Yuan. The story of an evangelical son who struggled with same sex attraction co-written by he and his mother.

### APPLICATION

*Love Into Light: The Gospel, The Homosexual, and the Church*, by Peter Hubbard. A guide for Christians wanting to relate better to people who struggle with same-sex attraction.

*Torn: Rescuing The Gospel From the Gays-vs-Christians Debate*, by Justin Lee. Written from the perspective of a gay Christian trying to elevate the discussion to be centered on the Gospel.

*The End of Sexual Identity: Why Sex is Too Important To Define Who We Are*, by Jenell Williams Paris. A scholarly approach to the issue of sexual identity and the deficiency of contemporary expressions.

## ACADEMIC

*Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*, by James V. Brownson. A scholarly work arguing for a holistic biblical approach that condones same sex relationships.

*Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis*, by William Webb. A comprehensive scholarly work on issues of culture and biblical interpretation that addresses slavery, same sex relationships and the role of women.

*The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*, by Robert Gagnon. A scholarly work defending a traditional view of sexuality from a holistic biblical perspective.



