

HOMOSEXUALITY, THE BIBLE, AND A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

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In this essay I would like us to consider what the Bible actually says about the issue of sexual relations between people of the same gender. We will also consider the Biblical definition of marriage, and finally, how we as faithful followers of Jesus are to respond to the cultural issues and pressures created by the Gay and Lesbian Agenda. We need to know this. Now more than ever we need to know what we believe and why we believe it, and we need to have thought through how, and in what manner, we are going to engage with our culture on these issues.

WHAT THE BIBLE ACTUALLY SAYS:

The Bible provides us with a complete theology on human sexuality. It addresses the full range of possibilities beginning with heterosexual relations within marriage as the norm, and then covering things like adultery, incest, group sex, bestiality, masturbation, homosexuality, and a range of other possibilities. Being people of the book, people who attempt to view and understand the world around us from a Biblical perspective, we have to base our understanding and practice of human sexuality on what the Bible itself actually says. That includes this subject of same-sex relations and same-sex marriage.

There are six primary passages in the Bible which speak to the issue of same-sex relations, three in the Old Testament and three in the New Testament.

“Then the Lord said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is immense, and their sin is extremely serious.” Genesis 18:20

Some modern-day advocates of the Gay and Lesbian agenda, and of same-sex marriage, try to make the argument that the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah were something other than homosexuality. Some have actually argued that what God was angry with them about was the fact that they were being inhospitable to their guests. But no serious and reliable Bible scholars would agree with that. For almost 3500 years it has been the near unanimous consensus among Bible scholars in general and Hebrew language scholars in particular, that the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was homosexuality.

“You are not to sleep with a man as with a woman; it is detestable.” “If a man sleeps with a man as with a woman, they have both committed a detestable thing.” Leviticus 18:22; 20:13

This pertains to females too (as Paul clarifies in Romans 1). Now, if you read a little further in the text in Leviticus you will discover that the penalty for homosexuality (in that day and among those people), was death. But please hear me clearly on this - nobody is advocating today that those who practice homosexuality should be put to death. Nobody is saying that. That was the penalty that was to be imposed *on the Israelites* if *they* engaged in such behavior.

Romans 1:26-27 is probably the clearest and most applicable passage of Scripture for us in New Testament times:

“This is why God delivered them over to degrading passions. For even their females exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. The males in the same way also left natural relations with females and were inflamed with lust for one another. Males committed shameless acts with males and received in their own persons the appropriate penalty of their error.” Romans 1:26-27

And then there is 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 which lends a little more clarity to the issue:

“Don’t you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God’s kingdom? Do not be deceived: No sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, or anyone practicing homosexuality, no thieves, greedy people, drunkards, verbally abusive people, or swindlers will inherit God’s kingdom.” 1 Corinthians 6:9-10

We see here in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 that Paul has given us a laundry list of sins, but the point to get is that homosexuality is listed as one of the behaviors God classifies as being unacceptable. Please also don’t miss the fact that it is just one of the behaviors that God says is unacceptable. Sometimes Christians attempt to make homosexuality a special sin all its own. But the Bible doesn’t do that. The Bible lists it right along with the others and therefore greed, gluttony, drunkenness, adultery, and the others are just as bad in the eyes of God as is homosexuality.

The primary reason Christians are so actively opposed to and outspoken about homosexuality is because it’s the only sin that has a well-funded and highly organized advocacy group promoting it as normal, and insisting that the rest of us have to accept it as normal as well. If the sin of murder had a similar advocacy group then we would have to be just as vocal and active about it as well.

“In the same way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them committed sexual immorality and practiced perversions.” Jude 7

We can see just from the three passages in the Old Testament that God very clearly condemned and forbade the practice of same-gender sexual relations among the Jews. He reiterated that prohibition in the New Testament which was for all people, Jew and Gentile alike.

Some people point out that the Gospels themselves don’t record any instance of Jesus having ever spoken to the issue. They then attempt to make the case that if this really was a big deal with God, then surely Jesus would have said something about it. Here’s why that argument doesn’t stand-up:

The primary reason Jesus didn't speak to the issue of homosexuality is because there was no need for Him to. Jesus was born, lived, ministered, and died within the confines of the Jewish world as it existed in His day, and the practice of homosexuality wasn't an issue among the people He was ministering to. Although there probably was some of it going on in secret, the practice had been outlawed from the earliest days of God's people; it was vehemently condemned by the religious leaders and Jewish society in general; the penalty for it was severe; and therefore it was not accepted or commonly practiced among the people Jesus was ministering to. In the Gospels, the teachings of Jesus are all given within the cultural context of the people He was actually with – the Jews; and since homosexuality was not an issue for those people, there was no need for Jesus to speak to it.

However, the gospels are just four of the sixty-six books in the Bible. God didn't give us just the gospels He gave us the whole Bible; and we find that in those times and cultural situations where homosexuality was an issue for the people of God the Bible does speak about it. In the time of Abraham and Lot homosexuality was widespread and considered by God to be a great scourge on the land. So in Genesis 18 and 19 we read about how He dealt with it in Sodom and Gomorrah. In the time of Moses it was also a widespread practice among the pagan nations all around Israel, and so God had Moses give His people very specific instructions on the subject. During the time of Jesus, among the people Jesus was with, homosexuality was not an issue and therefore Jesus evidently didn't speak about it. But after the time of Jesus, once the gospel spread out of Jerusalem and to the Greek and Roman worlds where homosexuality was being commonly and even openly practiced, it needed to be addressed again. So God had the Apostle Paul take care of that and Paul re-taught for the Gentile world what God had already made plain to the Jews on this issue.

You and I today don't live in Jerusalem or Biblical Palestine like Jesus and the disciples did, we live in the Gentile world where the Apostle Paul took the gospel to. So the fact that Jesus didn't speak about homosexuality, but Paul did, is what matters to us. We have all the Biblical counsel we need on the subject to know God's thoughts about it.

So where does that leave us now? As Christians, as people who believe the Bible and try to live by a Biblical worldview, what are we to think about this issue of same-gender sexual relations? Our culture is putting tremendous pressure on us to conform to societal norms and to go along with the politically correct thinking on the issue. And if you don't, well then as far as society is concerned you are simply intolerant, hateful, and bigoted. But if we are people of the book then we have to base our belief and practice on what the *Bible* says, not on what the culture says.

So far as we have considered what the Old and New Testaments teach about homosexual practice in general. Now we need to turn our attention to the subject of same-sex marriage.

The BIBLICAL MODEL FOR MARRIAGE:

“Haven’t you read,” He replied, “that He who created them in the beginning made them male and female,” and He also said: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, man must not separate.” Matthew 19:4-6

In the pre-sin world of Eden, God established His divinely ordained sexual ethic for the human race. He created them male and female. He then instructed that the man and woman should come together as one flesh and thereby procreate. In the beginning this was the standard and there was no other. Every other expression of human sexuality outside of the male/female relationship of husband and wife came about after the fall and as a result of sin. And, notably, every other expression which humans have experimented with since then is described in the Bible as being sinful.

In Matthew 19:4-6, in the middle of a discourse to the Pharisees which pertained largely to the issue of divorce, Jesus affirmed the Biblical standard for sexual ethics as being between a man and a woman within the bonds of marriage. Nowhere in this passage or in any other passage do the words of Jesus, or the words of any Biblical writer (anywhere in the Bible), allow for any other expression of human sexuality. God could have provided us with examples of other forms of sexual expression which are approved by Him, but He didn’t.

This is instructive for us. Remember, the Bible provides a complete theology of human sexuality, often in uncomfortable detail. It addresses the full range of possibilities including and beginning with, heterosexual relations between a husband and wife. It also describes all of the other possible sexual activities which are not God-ordained including sex outside of marriage, adultery, group sex, incest, bestiality, homosexuality, masturbation, and more. In all cases the teaching is based upon and derived from the core sexual ethic established by God in the beginning. And in all cases, any deviation from that core ethic is labeled in the Bible as sin.

We cannot understand and apply the teachings of Moses, Jesus, Paul, or any of the Biblical writers on this issue of sexual ethics, without relating it back to Genesis chapter two. The beginning chapters of Genesis are the source from which all the rest of Scripture flows. With respect to the subject of marriage, it is the standard upon which Moses, Jesus, and Paul based their teaching on the subject. The only sexual pairing portrayed in the Bible as being from God and approved by God, is that of a man and a woman within the bonds of marriage. Every other expression of human sexuality is labeled as being sinful and outside of the will of God.

So, now that we know what the Bible actually says about homosexuality, and we are clear about the fact that a God-ordained marriage is that of one man and one woman united in a life-long relationship, what is an appropriate Christian response to issues of sexual ethics in general, and to the Gay and Lesbian Agenda in particular?

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE:

“We must obey God rather than men.” Acts 5:29

First and foremost we have to resolve that we are going to be faithful to what God told us in the Bible and we are going to simply stand on that. Regardless of the pressures our society brings to bear on us, we base our faith and practice on what God says not on what society says.

Sometimes that will put us in an uncomfortable position. Sometimes obeying God rather than giving-in and conforming to culture will bring us criticism or worse. But that's nothing new for the people of God. Regardless of the age of history they live in, and regardless of their society, Christians have always found themselves to be at odds with the culture around them, and often that has brought with it persecution. That's exactly what the Apostles were faced with when they made that statement in Acts 5:29. It's exactly what the early Christians faced in setting after setting as they proclaimed the Gospel and faced opposition for it. It's exactly what our brothers and sisters in China face today, as well as Christians in Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, North Korea, and in many other places. It's not uncommon for Christians to be at odds with society over cultural issues but regardless of the issue, the answer is always the same: "We must obey God rather than men."

So as we have to deal with the cultural pressures brought upon us by our society regarding the Gay and Lesbian Agenda; as we are pressed to endorse same-sex marriages; as we're called intolerant and narrow-minded; as we find ourselves in increasingly hostile work environments because of our views; we simply hold onto Biblical truth and refuse to budge. What we're experiencing here today in our society is really no different from what Christians have always experienced in whatever age of history they lived in and in whatever society they were a part of. There are always issues. There are always pressures. But the answer for us is always the same: Be faithful to what God has told us.

But with all of that said, and with the firm resolve to simply hold to Biblical truth regardless of the pressures our society brings to bear on us, we also need to recognize that attitude matters. On the one hand we are not free to give-in to the pressures and endorse something which God Himself has clearly labeled as being unacceptable. But on the other hand we need to realize that much of the rhetoric coming out of the Christian community on this issue is over-heated and hateful. That's never ok and it's not how Jesus would handle this issue. How do we know that? Because it's not how He *ever* handled an issue like this. Whether He was dealing with prostitutes, or tax collectors, or a thief on the cross, Jesus was kind and compassionate and respectful. He was bold and direct, but in a manner that clearly communicated His love and concern for them. The only time we see Jesus angry or using supercharged language was when He was dealing with religious hypocrites.

So we are to stand firm on what we know to be true, but we are to do it in a way that is kind, caring, respectful, and compassionate. Hurtful, hateful, condemning language is never going to win anyone to faith in Jesus Christ. It will only make the divisions between us even greater. We are to win and convince people with the love of Christ.

Finally let's not act as if the sky is falling, because it's not. We have far too many Christians running around acting as if the advance of the Gay and Lesbian Agenda is going to be the death of us all and therefore we need to be circling the wagons and running for cover. Nonsense! The Gay and Lesbian Agenda may be the hot-button social issue in our society in this day, but it's just the current issue, nothing

more. As I said before, Christians have always faced difficult issues that ran counter to Biblical principles. Most of the time those issues were much worse than what we're dealing with today. In ages past, and in other places today, Christians have had to deal with being arrested, being beaten, having their homes destroyed, being tortured and murdered, and much more.

This difficult social issue that we have to contend with at this moment pales in comparison to what our brothers and sisters have had to contend with in ages past, and are contending with even today in other places around the world. But one thing we know from 2000 years of history is that issues come and issues go; world leaders come and world leaders go; entire nations rise and then they fall; but the Word of God lives on and the kingdom of God continues to grow. There are more Christians on planet earth today than at any other time in history and that number will continue to increase. God is not dead and His cause has not been defeated.

Someday the world leaders of today will be dead and gone and the issues they are promoting will just be entries in the history books. The day will even come when the Gay and Lesbian agenda, which is giving us such fits right now, will just be looked upon as yesterday's issue and society will have moved on to something else. But in that day, 20, 30, 50 years from now, the Bible will still be the Bible and the kingdom of God will still be growing. The sky is not falling! Jesus is still on the throne! The Bible is still the Bible! And that will continue to be the case regardless of what society says or does. Yes, we do need to stand up and be heard about the issues of our day. Yes, we do need to contend for Biblical truth. And yes, that is going to create some problems for us. But so what? We are the people of God. We are in possession of His eternal Word. We know the truth of the matter as given by the Creator Himself – and that's all we need.

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