

# The Homosexual

## Discussion

### Biblical and pastoral considerations



During the last half century, much has been said and written about homosexuality. Some explore possible biological and sociological causes of our different sexual orientations, others discuss the legal rights that humans have to express the sexuality of their choice, and others address the moral implications of homosexual behaviour.

The homosexual debate has moved from the political arena to the church, and now Christians are required to respond to these social and legal developments. How have Christians reacted? Some have displayed irrational fear of homosexuals. Some express their disagreement with disrespect, even with physical violence. Clearly such 'fleshly' reactions meet the disapproval of the Lord Jesus. Surely there is a correct and an incorrect way of being salt and light in this world (Matt. 5:13-16). That said, it has become more and more difficult for a Christian doctor, Bible scholar or church leader to express any degree of concern about current developments without being branded 'unloving,' 'intolerant,' 'homophobic' or a 'religious fundamentalist.' Should Christians express a view? What view? Does the Bible provide enough guidance to understand God's mind on marriage and on homosexual activity?

### Our sexual orientation

The Bible does not distinguish between 'sexual orientation' and 'sexual practice'. This does not mean that the difference is not real. Our sexual orientation could be understood as an internal force, a longing, a pressure, something similar to hunger and thirst. We either please or displease the Lord in the way we allow ourselves to express that force.

We are all tempted in different ways. The intensity of the temptation will also differ

between people depending on their own personal characteristics. A homosexual orientation could be understood as a weakness for a particular set of sins. A man with a homosexual orientation will experience a stronger temptation to sin with men than with women. A man with a heterosexual orientation has a weakness for a different set of sins: he will experience a stronger temptation to sin with women than with men. Since we are not responsible for the temptations we experience neither are we responsible for our sexual orientation. We are responsible for our sexual behaviour and not for our sexual orientation.

### But God made me homosexual

Some say that since God made them gay or lesbian, it is their duty to celebrate the way God made them. Being homosexual is like being left-handed. How can it be wrong for a person to express who he is? This line of thinking has two problems. First, the cause of a homosexual orientation is still unknown. Current literature and most scholars in the field state that sexual orientation is probably not determined by any one factor but by a combination of genetic, hormonal, family dynamics and other environmental influences. Secondly, we are the product not only of God's creation but also of the fall. The Bible makes it clear that the entrance of sin into the world has profoundly affected all of creation. Children are now born with physical as well as mental defects, defects that can cause serious limitations and lead to genuine pain and frustration.

Take note that even if 'homosexual orientation' could be shown to be present at birth, it does not follow that it is 'good', neither that God approves that it should be expressed sexually. We are born, for example, with a tendency to be selfish but God does not approve of the expression of our selfishness. Like selfishness, stubbornness or a hot temper, a 'homosexual orientation' could also be considered a birth defect that requires attention.

### What is the Christian controversy really about?

The traditional Christian position is that sexual intimacy and sexual intercourse are good and receive God's blessing ONLY within the context of a marriage relationship between a man and a woman. Sexual intercourse practised in any other relational context is sin. For example, God strongly disapproves of group sex, casual

sex, sex before marriage, adultery, rape, prostitution, child molestation, sex with animals, sex with dead persons and all forms of homosexual sex.

Those in the Christian camp who support 'same-sex marriage' agree completely with the traditional Christian position with one important difference: the definition of marriage. They claim that a marriage relationship may be heterosexual (if you are heterosexually oriented) or homosexual (if you are homosexually oriented). Does the Bible provide enough guidance for Christians to have certainty about God's mind in this matter? This is the key issue.

## Support for the 'homosexual marriage'

There is a growing number of Christians who support the 'homosexual marriage' and even more who choosing to remain silent on this issue. How do the supporters argue their case? We shall consider now five common arguments, each followed by a response.

(1) We really love each other: "Love comes from God" (1 John 4:7) and is the greatest thing in the world (Mark 12:31). Love can be experienced between two homosexuals. If God has given that gift of love to two persons of the same gender, how can the church brand it as sin?

Love is certainly a gift from God, but it is never the only factor used to determine what is right and wrong. A man may experience deep and genuine love towards another man's wife, but this love does not justify adultery. All love between humans is given by God but the different possible ways this love is expressed is regulated in Scripture. Love needs law to direct it.

(2) In Christ there is no male nor female: In the first creation, God made a difference between male and female. But Christians are part of a new creation, where gender no longer is an issue: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). In Christ it doesn't matter if a person is a man or a woman. In Christ it doesn't matter if a person loves and marries a man or a woman.

The theme Paul is discussing in Galatians 3:26-29 is salvation, not sex and marriage. He is making clear who are "sons of God" (v.26), who have been "baptized into Christ" (v.27), who are "one in Christ Jesus" (v.28), who "belong to Christ... are Abraham's seed" and "heirs according to the promise" (v.29). The apostle's point is that, irrespective of gender, all humans have equal access to salvation.

(3) Scripture is culturally conditioned: The writers of Scripture were limited in knowledge and wrote within their cultural context. The few scriptures that present homosexual relations in a negative light are a reflection of the culture of the writer. Since today homosexual partnerships and 'homosexual marriages' are accepted by government and culture, the church must also learn to accept them.

It is true that the Holy Spirit inspired the writing of Scripture using the human characteristics of each writer. Cultural expressions are clearly evident in Scripture. But God instituted heterosexual monogamous marriage in the beginning (Gen. 2:24) before cultures began. What God has spoken in the beginning and the Lord Jesus has later endorsed (Matt. 19:4-6) we have no authority to change.

(4) To discriminate against homosexuals is an act of injustice: In the past the church and society in general discriminated against slaves, black people and women. Thankfully in many parts of the world these groups have been liberated. The current battle is to set the homosexual community free. Their rights have been suppressed for too long. The 'homosexual marriage' should receive complete approval and treated as normal and equal to the 'heterosexual marriage' in every society and also in the Christian church.

The word 'liberation' suggests some form of oppression. From what form of oppression do practising homosexual men and women need liberating? Christians would strongly agree that homosexuals should be loved and accepted like fellow human beings, and that they should be free from the effects of hostility and homophobia. But the same Christians are in no position to encourage freedom from God's revealed will. To break free from what is true or morally right is no genuine liberation. It is confusion. The word 'justice' is not meaningful in this context.

(5) God is positively active in gay-affirming churches: The Christian churches that welcome and accept the 'homosexual marriage' as a valid alternative also show clear evidence that God is working among them. People are genuinely saved in those churches, and salvation requires the work of the Holy Spirit. Prayer is answered in such churches. The fact that God has chosen to bless such churches and bless the ministry of actively homosexual Christian ministers, is clear evidence that God also approves of the 'homosexual marriage.'

The God of the Bible seeks to save every lost sinner because He loves the lost sinner. He is also a Holy God. He disapproves and condemns sin wherever it is found. How can God act in a world so tainted by sin? If God were to require absence of all sin in order to bless a ministry He would bless no one. Evidently God blesses even when sin is present. But the fact that God blesses defective humans does not mean that He approves of their defects. Sin remains sin. When Moses disobeyed and hit the rock, the Lord God responded by splitting the rock and proving a stream of water. God's grace motivated Him to perform this miracle and satisfy the thirst of Israel. God blessed in spite of Moses' disobedience. The blessings of God that we may see in a church are no evidence that God approves all its theology or the lifestyle of its leaders. All blessings are only evidence of God's amazing grace.

## **The positive Biblical view of marriage**

The Biblical notion of marriage and sexual intercourse is not defined in terms of a collection of prohibitions. They are presented in Scripture in a positive way. They are gifts to be celebrated. The texts that restrict sexual activity to within a marriage relationship between a man and a woman and forbid in all other relational contexts are given by God to protect something good.

(a) Moses and the Old Testament: In Genesis we read of God's initial design for marriage: a heterosexual union. The Song of Solomon describes a husband and a wife finding pleasure in each other's bodies. The prophets also uphold the heterosexual marriage. Malachi, for example, reminds his readers that it is God who joins a husband and a wife (Mal.

2:14-15) and Isaiah uses the physical enjoyment experienced between a husband and a wife to illustrate God's delight over His own people (Is. 62:5).

(b) Paul and the Apostolic teaching: In the New Testament marriage and sex are presented in a very positive light. Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus was in no way degraded by experiencing sexual intimacy with Joseph after the Lord Jesus was born (Mat 1:24-25). The apostle Peter had a wife (Mat. 8:14) and so did a number of the other apostles (1 Cor. 9:5). Among the requirements for elders and deacons in the local church was that, if they were married, they should have a monogamous heterosexual relationship (1 Tim. 3: 2, 8-11; Titus 1:6). Instructions for the Christian households take for granted the presence of heterosexual couples (Col. 3:18-4:1; 1 Pet. 3:1-7). In 1 Corinthians 7 and in Ephesians 5 the apostle Paul devotes considerable attention to the husband-wife relationship.

(c) The teaching of Jesus: Whatever your view on the teachings of Moses and of the apostle Paul, the words of our Lord Jesus Christ should be defining for all who call themselves Christians. When the Pharisees tried to engage the Lord Jesus in a debate on marriage and divorce, He responded with clear and positive teaching about marriage: "Haven't you read," he 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'" (Mat. 19:4-6).

Notice that the teaching of the Lord Jesus on sex and marriage is built on three affirmations. First, God Himself created two humans, male and female. Secondly, God Himself invented and instituted marriage. And thirdly, God Himself joins a man and a woman together. In this third affirmation, the Lord Jesus makes it clear that marriage is not merely a human contract or agreement but a Divine act in which God changes its participants: they are no longer two but one flesh. He intervenes and in some way 'joins' a man and a woman. This special, unique and Divine 'joining' is only mentioned in connection with a man and a woman.

What God has said in the beginning, what the Lord Jesus has endorsed, no Christian, no church, no group of Christians has the authority to change or contradict.

## Which Scriptures disapprove of homosexual practice?

The prohibition Bible texts that are normally used in the Christian homosexual discussion may be arranged in five clusters. We shall look at all these restrictive texts, cluster by cluster.

(1) Events at Sodom and Gibeah: In Sodom Lot offers hospitality to two male visitors (Gen. 19:1-11). In Gibeah an old man offers hospitality to some travellers (Judges 19:14-30). In both stories a mob of men arrive at night and demand that the host bring out the male guests so that they may 'know' them. God strongly condemned the actions of the men in both cities.

The sin in Sodom and Gibeah clearly had a homosexual component; but these incidents were more complex because they included the violation of hospitality rules and the intention to group-rape the guests. If the visitors in Sodom had been women, it would have also been strongly condemned. These sad stories illustrate God's disapproval of sexual perversion but do not prove that a homosexual act is always wrong. Christians who support the 'homosexual marriage' also strongly condemn all forms of rape. Since the evidence of these two stories is inconclusive, it would be better not to use them in the current homosexual discussion.

(2) References to male shrine prostitutes: Canaanite fertility cults included male and female prostitution as part of the services offered to worshippers at their shrines. We read that the corrupt kings of Israel and Judah promoted such practices among God's people and that this was displeasing to the Lord (1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7). In Deut. 23:17-18 we read a clear prohibition: "No Israelite man or woman is to become a shrine-prostitute."

Since it is not possible to show that the role of male and female shrine prostitutes was to offer worshippers gay and lesbian sex, these texts cannot be used to show that God condemns homosexual activity. It is most likely that these shrine prostitutes offered both homosexual and

heterosexual services; but in these texts God is clearly forbidding idolatry and prostitution. Homosexual activity is not explicitly condemned. Christians who support the 'homosexual marriage' also strongly condemn all forms of prostitution and idolatry. Since the evidence of these shrine-prostitute texts is inconclusive, it would be better not to use them in the current homosexual discussion.

(3) Prohibitions in the Mosaic Law: The nation of Israel was exposed to the corruptions of Egypt and Canaan, with practices such as idolatry, child sacrifice and a variety of sexual deviations. Among the laws given by God to Moses, we find a couple of laws that explicitly prohibit some forms of sexual activity. These include a clear prohibition on homosexual practice: "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable" (Lev. 18:22), and "If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads" (Lev. 20:13).

How should a Christian view these Old Testament Laws? We read that Christ has abolished "in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations" so that we may now serve Him "in the new way of the spirit" (Eph. 2:15; Rom. 7:6). It is in the New Testament that God speaks directly to the Christian, it is there that He unfolds his plans for the Church, the new community. Since God always has a good, loving and sometimes educational reason behind all His requirements, it is not surprising that, after discovering God's moral standards in the New Testament, the Christian will spot some clear similarities with that expressed in the Old Testament. God's requirements in both Testaments are never capricious. He will also discover that the motivation to obey is different between the Testaments, and that the moral standard in the New Testament is higher. Let's turn now to the New Testament texts.

(4) The 'unnatural' relations in Romans 1: In the first chapter of Romans, the apostle Paul describes the pagans of his day. They were aware of God as creator but suppressed the measure of truth they had in order to live wickedly and without external restrictions. We are told that God gave them over to think and practise perversion, including 'unnatural' sex.

This 'unnatural' behaviour, together with a list of other sins, is strongly condemned by God.

As you read Romans 1:24-32, you will note the following: (a) The sin in view is not pederasty (sex with young boys) but that of men engaging in sin with men. (b) The sin in view is not violent or forced but by mutual agreement, since they "were inflamed with lust for one another" (v. 27). (c) Nothing in this chapter suggests the sins in view were of the 'occasional or irresponsible' type. In this chapter the apostle Paul refers to all lesbian and homosexual activity as unnatural regardless of its relational context, and tells us that it is sinful. In time, local cultures may change, public opinion may change, the law of the land may change, but homosexual intercourse will remain 'unnatural;' it will remain a deviation of God's creation order. It will remain, therefore, a sinful act.

(5) Activities that are contrary to Christian conduct: The New Testament provides us with two list of ugly activities that conflict with the normal and healthy Christian behaviour. Both these lists include a reference to homosexual activity. Two Greek words are used: *malakos*, literally "soft of touch," referring to the male who plays a passive role in homosexual intercourse, and *arsenokoites*, literally "male in bed," refereeing to the male who plays the active role.

The first list is found in **1 Corinthians 6:9-11**, it includes both Greek words, and describes those who will not inherit the kingdom of God. "Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes [*malakoi*] nor homosexual offenders [*arsenokoitai*] 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."

The second list is found in **1 Timothy 1:9-10** and it describes such behaviour that is contrary to the sound doctrine. "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 [*arsenokoitai*], for slave traders and

liars and perjurers, and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine."

It is evident from these two texts, that those who engage in homosexual activity are not singled out for special attention. Complete forgiveness is God's response to every repentant sinner, regardless of their sin. But those who persist in living in a lifestyle that is "contrary to the sound doctrine" and refuse to repent and turn away from their sin, will stand among those who "will not inherit the kingdom of God." Our loving heavenly Father takes sin seriously. So should we.

## There is good news for the Homosexual

The message many homosexuals hear is that they are hated by Christians and their God, that they are not welcome in the church, that there is no hope for them. We Christians need to repent of any judgemental or hostile attitude towards any group of sinners. The gospel is for all! Jesus also passionately loves homosexuals as much as anyone else. He came to seek and save them. The blood of Jesus can also wash their away (1 John 1:7). They can also be indwelt by the Holy Spirit. They can also belong to the family of God. This is good news for the homosexual!

Some Christians give testimony of having experienced a change in sexual orientation, some instantly, some gradually. Others have stopped their homosexual lifestyle to please the Lord Jesus, but continue to experience a homosexual orientation. The temptations and internal struggles remain. Regardless of your particular struggle, remember that the Lord knows the pain you are going through. Even as Christians we experience the pain of living in a fallen world. Some have lost a limb or their eyesight. Some live with a husband or wife who is now confined to a wheelchair or a bed. Others are exhausted raising a handicapped child. Life contains many 'unfair' or 'inexplicable' painful frustrating limitations. Why doesn't the Lord intervene and change all this now? We are not told. But He has told us about a new world, a new home – a home that the Lord Jesus Himself has gone to prepare for us, where the frustrating effects of sin shall no longer be felt, where our hearts will never again be troubled, and where we shall enjoy the Lord for ever (John 14:1-4).

## Should one Christian judge another?

Some suggest that our Christian life is a private matter and that no Christian is in a position to judge another. Jesus Himself said: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged" (Matt. 7:1). Is it best to remain silent on this issue of homosexuality? Should Bible teachers, Church leaders and Christian councillors present the application of these Biblical texts as matters of personal conscience and private interpretation?

When the Lord Jesus told His disciples not to judge, he was not instructing them to be passive. He was correcting their attitude as they sought to help or instruct others. His advice was, "first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (Matt. 7:2-5). A speck in an eye is no asset! It may be painful to remove, it may take some time, but it is a *positive act*. It is a friendly and a loving act. The eye and the whole body will benefit. To ignore it would be unkind.

## Response to an enduring homosexual relationship

Once a person testifies that they have become a Christian, in time certain changes are to be expected. Biblical guidance and Godlike patience will be necessary, but if some serious changes don't occur, at some point Scriptural boundaries will be met (2 Thes. 3:14-15). This will most likely be uncomfortable and painful for all concerned. But it is the way the Lord would have it in His church. "I have written to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people - not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat" (1 Cor. 5:9-11). At some point, when a Christian persist in refusing Scriptural correction, a church will be required to distance themselves. Under serious conditions, even hospitals temporarily isolate some patients – while longing for healthy signs of recovery. Such a temporal period of isolation can also be understood as an expression of God's abundant grace.

## Conclusion

The Bible presents marriage and sexuality in a positive way. In both the Old and the New Testaments marriage is presented as a unique bond between a man and a woman, *united* by God Himself. Sexual intimacy and sexual intercourse are good and receive God's blessing *only* within the context of a marriage relationship between a man and a woman. Sexual contact in any other relational context is sin and receives God's strong disapproval. Because the guidelines for Christian behaviour are described in the New Testament, the restrictive passages concerning homosexual practice among Christians are found in Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1.

The Bible lists homosexual offenders in the same category as the greedy, drunkards, slanderers and adulterers. The Christian community faces the challenge of how to help such men and women find Jesus and live in a way that pleases Him. Jesus loved and accepted all sinners but also exposed and confronted sinful acts and lifestyles. He still saves and transforms lives today. If we are to follow our Master's good example, we must first remove the planks from our own eye. Then we shall be able to see these men and women, including those with same-sex orientation, as God sees them. Only then shall we be in a position to be used by the Lord to remove the speck from their eye.

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[ A more complete treatment of this topic is contained in the eBook titled: 'Homosexual Partnerships', also freely available from [www.philipnunn.com](http://www.philipnunn.com). ]