

THE BIBLE AND HOMOSEXUAL ACTIVITY

The Bible addresses a wide variety of sexual immorality issues, including homosexual activity. Contrary to what some claim, the prohibitions on homosexual activity are not singling out the rape of young boys. Rather, they address any kind of same-sex sexual contact.

Now for some interrelated issues:

First, the Bible gives most commands using masculine language, even if you cannot tell that in English. Most Hebrew verbs are masculine or feminine, but English does not make that distinction. Thus the 10 Commandments (and most laws, for that matter) are given using masculine language. However, these commands apply equally to women, and the ancients clearly understood that. When Lev 18:22 and 20:13 say "you shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination" or "if a man lies with a male as those who lie with a woman", masculine language is used. However, Paul, addressing an audience who might not have understood this in Rome, made it clear that the principle applies to women with women as well (Rom 1:26) as men (Rom 1:27).

Second, people are also pretty sloppy when it comes to their usage of "man/male/woman/female". Hebrew has distinct terms, and this becomes important when interpreting the texts. In Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 it uses the term *zakar*, which means "male" of any age. It says nothing about commitment, fidelity to that partner, or age of that partner. It is the ACT of intercourse of a male with a male in any and every form which is forbidden.

Third, the Bible assumes people will have close friends of the same sex. That is not the same as homosexual marriage or homosexual activity (for the sake of this discussion I am including lesbian activity, which, by definition, is female homosexual activity). The Bible is filled with people who have friends and neighbors who they love.

Fourth, all sexual activity outside of marriage is condemned in the Bible, whether it be fornication, rape, incest, homosexual activity, adultery, bestiality, prostitution, sacred prostitution—you get the picture (Lev 18; Lev 20:10-21; Exod 20:14; Deut 5:18; Ps 50:18; Rev 2:22; Rev 21:8; James 2:11; Heb 13:4; Mark 7:20-23).

Fifth, creation accounts and reflections on them (e.g., Gen 1-2; Mark 10) all indicate that God's design was (and is) male-female marriage, and nothing else—the two (male and female) shall become one.

Sixth, the Bible uses some terms which are like we Americans saying "two people slept together", meaning they had sexual intercourse, and might not have slept at all. So also "sleeping around" means "having sex with multiple partners". "Uncover the nakedness of X" or "lie with" both mean have sex. "Know" can mean "have sex", but clearly does not always. So also "enter" can be quite literal (cf. the superscription to Psalm 51—see more literal translations). When the OT was translated into Greek, a different euphemism was used for Leviticus to mean "have intercourse". In both Leviticus 18 and 20 we get the terms "man+bed" (= sexual intercourse of a male with a male). Paul takes these terms and turns them into the equivalent of "man-bedder" in Greek (1 Cor 6; 1 Tim 1:10) to describe men who have sex with men. People try to twist this into describing pederasty/paederasty, when that is not at all what is going on.

Seventh, some people argue that we disregard dietary laws in Leviticus, so we are hypocrites if we eat shrimp and yet do not affirm homosexuality. However, this comparison is problematic in at least three ways. :

A. The penalties in the OT for violating these commands is vastly different, which shows that they are not seen as equivalent offenses:

Eating forbidden food: you are unclean until evening .

Homosexual activity: execution.

B. The NT cancels dietary laws (Mark 7:19), while enforcing (Mark 7:21; 1 Cor 5; Acts 15:29) or amplifying OT laws concerning sexual immorality (Matt 5:28). Jesus made all foods clean, not all activities.

C. When one sees OT commands enforced across a number of cultures, it is difficult to rule them out as binding on people in our culture. Homosexual activity was condemned in ancient Canaan, Israel was forbidden to do it, homosexual cult prostitutes were forbidden, and the NT addresses this in the Greco-Roman world. We do not have much evidence that it was common in ancient Judaea in Jesus' day, so it would not make sense to address that. Rather, Jesus affirmed OT laws in general, and was stricter with many others (cf. Matt 5-7, the Sermon on the Mount). Food laws were not seen as binding on Christians (except for not eating blood [Acts 15:29]).

The bottom line is that the Bible consistently treats homosexual activity as forbidden activity which, if not repented of, will cost people their opportunity for eternal life, and will instead result in eternal punishment.

Some argue that condemning homosexual activity is an act of hate, and that we must love people by affirming their sexuality. On the contrary, encouraging people in sin, sin which will result in their eternal damnation, is not an act of love, but an act of hate. Further, affirming sinners in their activity is condemned by God (Rom 1:32; Ezek 3:16-21; 33:1-9). A mark of false prophets/teachers is to encourage sinners and condemn those who love and obediently serve God and keep His commands (Ezek 13:10,22-23; Jude 4-16). The Bible does not affirm people in their sin, but calls them to repent and be forgiven (Mark 1:4,15; Luke 24:47; Acts 5:31).

Even in the Old Testament God offered people the opportunity to repent of sin and be forgiven, even forgiven of crimes for which the OT called for the death penalty (cf. idolatry & many passages in Judges; Ezek 18). See what it says in Ezekiel 18:

21 "But if the wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed and observes all My statutes and practices justice and righteousness, he shall surely live; he shall not die.

22 All his transgressions which he has committed will not be remembered against him; because of his righteousness which he has practiced, he will live.

23 Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked," declares the Lord Yahweh, "rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?"

24 But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity and does according to all the abominations that a wicked man does, will he live? All his righteous deeds which he has done will not be remembered for his treachery which he has committed and his sin which he has committed; for them he will die.

25 Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not right.' Hear now, O house of Israel! Is My way not right? Is it not your ways that are not right?

26 When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity and dies because of it, for his iniquity which he has committed he will die.

27 Again, when a wicked man turns away from his wickedness which he has committed and practices justice and righteousness, he will save his life.

28 Because he considered and turned away from all his transgressions which he had committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die.

29 But the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not right.' Are My ways not right, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways that are not right?

30 Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct," declares the Lord Yahweh. "Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you.

31 Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel?

32 For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares the Lord Yahweh. "Therefore, repent and live."

William P. Griffin, Ph.D.

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