

# The Bible on Same-gender Sexual Behavior

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Contrary to what many people have been taught there is nothing in the Bible which condemns people with a homosexual orientation having homosexual relationships. In fact, did you know the word “homosexual”, as we understand it today, does not occur in the Bible at all in the original languages it was written in!

Let’s take a look at the passages which have often been used to oppress the homosexual people:

## Genesis 18-19

The story of Sodom and Gomorrah actually condemns inhospitality and idolatry, not homosexuality. Read the Scriptural cross-references:

Deuteronomy 29:23, Isaiah 1:9, Jeremiah 23:14, Lamentations 4:6, Ezekiel 16:49-50, Amos 4:11, Zephaniah 2:9, Matthew 10:15 / Luke 10:12, Luke 17:29, Romans 9:29, Jude v.7, Revelation 11:8

NOWHERE in the Scriptures does it say that the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was homosexual sex. Even if the specific point of the story was concerning a sexual matter, rather than hospitality, the issue is rape not homosexuality. Jesus claimed the issue was simply one of showing hospitality to strangers (Luke 10:12). How ironic that those who discriminate against homosexuals seem to be the true practitioners of the sin of Sodom.

## Judges 19

Here is a story which parallels the Sodom account. The Sodom account showed the inhospitality of a Gentile city-state but in Judges 19 we see an example of extreme inhospitality among the “children of Israel” themselves. As in the Genesis account the house is surrounded by men and the host of the house offers women in the place of his guest and says “HUMBLE THEM...” (v. 19). This clearly shows the purpose of the attack was to humiliate and most probably to kill the stranger, not to satisfy homosexual “lust.” (20:5)

The guest finally puts his concubine outside and they humiliate him by raping and abusing her all night until she died. This act was an extreme violation of the Hebrew people’s sacred code of hospitality. This act of INHOSPITALITY by people of the tribe of Benjamin so enraged the other Hebrew tribes that they went to war with them.

When interpreting the Genesis 18-19 account fear and prejudice toward homosexuality cause some people to focus on the fact that the rape would have been homosexual rape and they then condemn all homosexual sex acts. Judges 19 is an almost identical account depicting a group of men raping a woman. Should we therefore conclude that the story was a condemnation of all heterosexual sex acts?

After careful study it seems obvious that neither Genesis 18-19 nor Judges 19 were written as tools for condemnation toward homosexuals. The major focus of these stories was the issue of hospitality.

### **Deuteronomy 23:17-18, 1 Kings 14:24 and 1 Kings 15:12**

These passages are often translated as if they refer to homosexuals, however the actual word that is being translated is *qadesh* which means “holy one” or “someone set apart for a holy purpose.” In this case the word is referring to people who commit ritual acts of prostitution in order to honor their deity. The clearest translation of this concept would simply be “temple or ritual prostitute.”

For example, Deuteronomy 23:17 should be translated thusly: “There shall be no ritual prostitute of the daughters of Israel, or a ritual prostitute of the sons of Israel.” Any translation which translates *qadesh* as pervert or sodomite is blatantly mistranslating. An example which shows this clearly is found in the New King James version which translates *qadesh* in its male form as “perverted one” but translates *qadesh* in its female form as “ritual harlot”, both should be “ritual harlot or prostitute!” Another example of this kind of biased translation can be found in the King James version which translates the word for male ritual prostitute as “sodomite.” The fact of the matter is that (as far as I can ascertain) in the original languages of the Bible there isn’t such a word as “sodomite.”

These passages do not condemn homosexuality, for that matter they don’t even condemn prostitution. Instead, they condemn the practice of religious prostitution connected with the worship of a foreign god.

At this point the reader should be able to see a pattern developing. In the Genesis and Judges accounts some people choose to ignore the actual issue of hospitality and construe the accounts to condemn homosexuality. In the Deuteronomy and 1st Kings passages the actual issue of idolatry is ignored in favor of construing them as passages condemning homosexuality.

### **Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13-14**

It is likely that the prohibition thou shall not lie with a male as with a woman came about for one of the following reasons:

1. Only sexual acts which could lead to procreation were valued as the tribes needed to grow in numbers in order to survive.

2. Male homosexual sex may have been connected in the Hebrew mind with idolatry. Notice that Lev. 18:2 deals with idolatry. In fact many of the prohibitions in the Holiness Code were probably connected with idolatrous practices, see 19:26-29.
3. Women were second class citizens in the Hebrew culture and were generally treated as property. If a man was penetrated in sexual intercourse he was being treated like a woman and so was degraded in the Hebrew mind. The offense was not that this was a homosexual act, the offense was that a *man* was treated like a *woman*. If this line of thinking is correct it would serve to explain why there is no prohibition against female homosexual acts in the Old Testament. Women could not be degraded by such an act as they were already not held in high esteem.
4. There is a theory that the Hebrew people believed in a perfect order of creation and anything that violated that order was considered unclean or an abomination. A probable example would be that fish were considered the perfect sea animal, hence anything in the sea that did not have scales and fins was unclean. (Lev. 11:9-10) Cattle were the perfect cud chewing animal, hence anything that chewed cud, but didn't have hooves was unclean. (Lev. 11:6). If this theory is correct then the prohibition against male sex acts would be violating the role of the perfect ideal human: man. It would seem to mix the sex role of the imperfect woman with the ideal role of the man.

Even if the reader disagrees with the theories stated above they should take note that these verses are a part of the Hebrew scriptures often called the "Holiness Code." This "code" is no longer followed by the Christian church.

- In Leviticus 18:19 (which is just a few verses before the prohibition "thou shall not lie with a man as with a woman") having sexual relations with a woman during her period is forbidden yet this is not proclaimed as a binding rule for today.
- Also, 18:8 and 18:18 show that this code allows for polygamy yet this is now considered immoral.
- 19:28 prohibits tattoos yet they are not proclaimed as sinful by the Christian church.
- 19:19 forbids crossbreeding of livestock yet the church allows, farmers who do this very thing to worship in church.
- 19:19 forbids sowing a field with mixed feed, yet farmers are not condemned who plant hay and alfalfa.
- 11:7 forbids the eating of pigs, yet people unashamedly have a side of bacon with their eggs!
- 11:6 forbids the eating of rabbits (hares) because they don't have cloven hooves but they chew cud, yet some Christians love to eat rabbit.
- 11:9-10 forbids the eating of any seafood that doesn't have fins and scales, yet shrimp and lobster lovers are not told to repent by Christians, nor is Red Lobster picketed!
- 23:3 instructs that the seventh day of the week is to be the Sabbath, not Sunday, yet the Christian church disregards this.

- Deut 22 states that a woman is not telling the truth if she says she was raped but no one heard her scream.

It is clear that the Christian church does not abide by the Holiness Code. It was a set of regulations which governed the Hebrew tribes but is not considered binding on the Christian church because there is now a NEW COVENANT IN JESUS CHRIST! The following verses talk about this New Covenant:

- Colossians 2:16-17 “Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is Christ.”
- Hebrews 8:18 “For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect.”
- Hebrews 8:13 “In that Christ says ‘a new covenant,’ Christ has made the first obsolete.”
- Hebrews 9:9-10 The Old Covenant “was symbolic...concerned only with foods and drink, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.”

There are those who recognize that Christians are under a New Covenant and yet state that the Old Covenant was divided into three parts, civil, ceremonial and moral. They then insist that the moral part of the Old Covenant remain in force. This distinction can nowhere be found in the Old Covenant itself. In fact, many guidelines clearly have both a civil/ceremonial use AND a moral one (See Leviticus 19:13). Who, then, has the authority to decide “this is morality, but this is civil procedure and this is ceremonial...”?

Since the Christian church does not follow the Holiness Code it has no right to arbitrarily pick Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13-14 as still binding just because it seems to support a particular prejudice.

At this point the reader may be thinking, “Well that may be true about the Old Covenant but there are New Testament verses which forbid homosexual acts.” Well, let’s take a look at those passages.

### **Romans 1:24-27**

This passage has been used by some Christians to make an issue over how “unrighteous” and sinful homosexuals are. In fact, it has been used to support the view that AIDS is the “penalty of their error which was due.” What is fascinating about this kind of application is that it is totally at odds with what, I believe, Paul was really saying. IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND THE POINT OF ROMANS CHAPTER ONE YOU MUST READ ROMANS CHAPTERS ONE THROUGH THREE. The outline is as follows:

- I. The Gospel is for EVERYONE, Jews and Gentiles. (1:16)
- II. Why? Because God’s wrath is against ALL unrighteousness. (verse 18).

- II. The Gentiles need the Gospel. (1:28-32) The examples of their “uncleanness” include idolatry and homosexual acts which are either connected to or resulting from idolatry.
- III. But the Jews are just as unrighteous as the Gentiles. (2:3)
- IV. “All have sinned” and are “justified (made right with God) FREELY by God’s grace (unearned love) through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ.” (3:23-24)

While Paul is certainly not favorable toward the homosexual acts that he is writing about it is interesting to note that Paul classifies them “unclean” which is not necessarily a “moral” precept. (According to the Holiness Code lobsters and shrimp are “unclean” also.) He may be pointing out that though the Jews are different than the Gentiles in that they are ritually “clean” (according to the Old Covenant) they are still just as much in need of the grace of the New Covenant.

Let’s look at some of the verses in this section:

- Verse 27b “And receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.” Is Paul here saying that those who committed homosexual acts were punished in some physical way...as in venereal disease? Or could “uncleanness”, being cut off from the Old Hebrew Covenant, be the penalty of the Gentile’s error?
- 28 “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting...” People often take this to mean one of the following things:
  - Since homosexuals didn’t retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind.
  - Since the Gentiles were idolatrous God gave them over to a debased mind of homosexuality.

However, I believe that Paul was saying the following:

Since the Gentiles did not retain God in their knowledge God gave them over to a debased mind. The debased mind is NOT homosexuality but a mind that is centered on unrighteousness, hence the listing of what the Gentile mind is full of in verse 29.

- 29-32 This list of “unrighteousness” is being applied to all Gentiles, not Gentiles that commit homosexual sex acts. It is the Gentiles “who are worthy of death.” These verses are really just an exposition of verse 18.
- 26-27 Another interesting point to consider is that people often use verses 26-27 to prove that Paul used an argument from “nature” to prove that homosexual activity was wrong. However that kind of usage of the word “nature” is highly unlikely as Paul usually uses the word “nature” or “natural” to mean not what “Mother Nature” does but instead he means “the previously accepted common usage.” Nature is not a great teacher about ethics and humans are nowhere called

in scripture to emulate it. What is more, homosexual activity DOES go on in the animal world.

It must be remembered also that Paul was referring to homosexual ACTS, not homosexuals. AND NO ONE KNOWS WHAT HOMOSEXUAL ACTS PAUL WAS TALKING ABOUT... NO ONE KNOWS THE BACKGROUND... We must ask ourselves “what type of homosexual acts was Paul talking about?” Was he talking exclusively about homosexual acts connected with idolatry? (Perhaps that was the only kind of homosexual activity he was familiar with.) Was he talking about pederasty? Was he talking about homosexual acts committed with slaves? Was he talking about people of heterosexual orientation committing homosexual acts? Just exactly what type of homosexual acts was he concerned with? Do people have the Right to just ASSUME that these verses were a blanket condemnation of homosexual sex in every context?

In my personal opinion Paul was referring to same sex sexual acts committed in idolatrous worship by people he regarded as heterosexual. Even the most conservative theologian can only give their opinion as to what type of same sex acts Paul was referring to. No one can state that God clearly condemns all homosexuality activity based upon these verses. It is just too vague.

As for me, based on the context of Paul’s writing in Romans chapters 1-3 I choose to believe that God’s New Covenant of grace embraces those who believe in Jesus; being a Jew doesn’t make you better than a Gentile; being a heterosexual doesn’t make you any better than a homosexual. Romans chapters one through three strike at the very heart of self-righteous pride. It is amazing that some Christians continue to lord their own sense of righteousness over gays and lesbians as if their heterosexual sex acts make them somehow better, or less in need of grace. We are all in need of grace and we ALL have that grace in Jesus Christ.

### **1 Corinthians 6:9-10**

It is amazing the number of times that you will see the word “sodomite” or “homosexual” or “pervert” in different translations concerning this text. It is amazing because no one knows exactly what the words of the original text mean! The layperson, unfortunately, has no way of knowing that interpreters are guessing as to the exact meaning of these words. Pastors and laypersons often have to rely upon the authority of those who have written lexicons (dictionaries explaining the meaning of words) of Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic words. The authors of scriptural lexicons search for the meaning of the word within the scriptures themselves and also go outside of scripture and research literature written around the same time the scriptures were written. If the interpreter is already prejudiced against homosexuality they can translate these words as condemning homosexual sex even based upon little usage of that word in the Scriptures and little if any contemporaneous usage of that word.

The truth is that the word some translators “transform” into “sodomite/homosexual/pervert” in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 is actually TWO words. Some

translators combine them because they “think” they go together but they DO NOT KNOW. This uncertainty is reflected in the fact that other translators keep the words separate and translate them “effeminate” and “abusers of themselves with mankind.”

The two words in the original Greek are *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*. *Malakoi* is a very common Greek word. It literally means “soft.” It is used in Matthew 11:7-18 and Luke 7:24-25 in reference to soft clothing. Scholars have to look at material outside of the Bible in order to try and figure out just what this means. The early church Fathers used the word to mean someone who was “weak” or “soft” in their morals and from the time of the reformation to the 20th century it was usually interpreted as masturbation. In Greek this word never is applied to gay people or homosexual acts in general. “No new textual data effected the twentieth-century change in translation of this word: only a shift in popular morality. Since few people any longer regard masturbation as the sort of activity which would preclude entrance to heaven, the condemnation has simply been transferred to a group still so widely despised that their exclusion does not trouble translators or theologians.” (See *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, John Boswell, University of Chicago Press, 1980, page 105-107) *Arsenokoitai* is discussed in the next section as it is found here and in I Timothy 1:8-11.

Note: Greek contained no word which compares to the English noun “homosexual” meaning someone of homosexual orientation. In fact the word “homosexual” (meaning someone of homosexual orientation) was not even coined until the late 1800’s by German psychologists, and introduced into English only at the beginning of the 1900s. (See *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and homosexuality*, John Boswell, University of Chicago Press, 1980, page 42) However, during scriptural times there were a number of Greek words to describe homosexual sex acts and the two words *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* do not appear among them (on *arsenokoitai* see Boswell, pp 345-346.)

### **1 Timothy 1: 8-11**

The word *arsenokoitai* (sometimes translated “abusers of themselves with mankind”) literally means male-bed. “Bed” is a euphemism for copulating. This word is extremely rare in Greek. Paul was apparently the first author to use this word. The word taken literally (male-copulator) is very ambiguous. Take, for example, the word “lady-killer.” Does it mean “a lady who kills” or “someone who kills ladies”? In our language it means the latter, but even then it is not clear because we do not mean that someone literally kills ladies but that their charm “kills” them. So taking the word “arsenokoitai” or “male-copulator”, does it mean “a male who copulates men”; does it mean “a man who copulates with women”; does it mean “a man who is copulated”?

The Bible does not clarify. These are the only two passages in the whole Bible where this word is used... Apparently there is no known contemporaneous literature in which this word is used. However, relatively close to the time Paul wrote it was used to refer to a male copulator connected with temple prostitution. It probably had this meaning until the late fourth century after which it came to mean a lot of different things, including homosexual activity. (See *The Bible and Homosexuality*, Michael England and

*Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, John Boswell, University of Chicago Press, 1980, page 42)

Even IF the words “malakoi” and “arsenokoitai” COULD be connected with a male homosexual sex acts it STILL would not tell us WHAT KIND OF HOMOSEXUAL SEX ACT IS BEING CONDEMNED. They could refer to sex practices connected with the worship of idols, pederasty or some other sexual act which is exploitive.

It is clear that the translation of these two words as “sodomite”, “pervert” or “homosexual” has very little, if any, sound basis and is a result of homophobia.

### **Jude verse 7**

Some people ASSUME that this verse refers to the account of what happened in Genesis chapters 18 and 19. However this verse says that people in Sodom and Gomorrah went after “strange flesh.” It does NOT say that they are talking about the account in Genesis 18-19. Some scholars believe that this passage actually refers to a Jewish legend, as contained in the apocryphal Naphtali 3.3.4-5 in *The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, that the WOMEN of Sodom had intercourse with angels. (*Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, p. 97, Professor John Boswell and *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*, Derrick Sherwin Bailey, pp 11-16). It would not be unprecedented to believe that the author of Jude would refer to extrabiblical stories as he does so in Jude 6 (referring to a passage in the apocryphal Enoch 1:6-8) and in Jude 9 (referring to a Jewish tradition that the archangel Michael argued with Satan over the body of Moses). Even if one chooses to believe that this passage DOES refer to Genesis 18-19 one can not ASSUME that “strange flesh” means a “man going after a man”, after all Lot’s guests were NOT MEN but ANGELS, “strange flesh” indeed. The context of this passage is condemning a new teaching which did not honor angels (see Jude verse 8) an example of people attempting to dishonor angels is simply brought up here to illustrate the point.

### **IN CONCLUSION:**

There is an extreme amount of prejudice and hatred directed toward gay people. In my opinion this bias has had an influence in the translations of the Bible. Words with uncertain meaning are translated as if there is no doubt that they refer to homosexuals. Words that quite obviously do not mean “homosexual” are blatantly mistranslated, as in the transformation of “male temple prostitute” into “sodomite” or “perverted one.” Even the New Covenant of grace in Jesus Christ is ignored in favor of being condemnatory through the use of the Old Covenant.

It would seem to me to be a violation of the basic beliefs of “conservative” theology or “fundamentalism” to use verses or words as blanket condemnations without regard as to why the verses/words were written in the FIRST place; or without accurately reflecting the meaning of a word; or without admitting when they don’t know or are unsure of the meaning of a word.

The fact of the matter is that there is no clear condemnation of people of homosexual orientation living out their lives fully expressing their orientation, sexually or otherwise, anywhere in the Scriptures. The most that can be said is that there are some verses which seem to condemn some homosexual acts under circumstances that we are not aware of. This extreme ambiguity on the part of the few Scriptures concerned, coupled with the clear proclamation of the Gospel for all people leads me to believe that gay people are affirmed by God in their orientation and in their living out that orientation. Please take a moment and read the following section talking about God's...

### **GOOD NEWS FOR ALL PEOPLE!**

You, and all people, are created in God's image! (Gen. 1:27) You are special! (Ps 8:4-5) There is NOTHING that can separate you from the love of God. (Romans 8:39) WHOSOEVER believes has eternal life. (John 3:16, 6:51, Romans 1:16-17, 10:13) God is with you-challenging oppression and injustice! (Isaiah 42: 6-7, 58:6, Amos 5:24, Micah 6:8, Luke 4:18-22)

You are a part of the New Covenant! The New Covenant is one of grace (which means unearned love) in Jesus Christ. It is not concerned with gender roles or sexual orientation for in Christ there is "neither male nor female." (Gal. 3:28) In fact, do you know what Jesus had to say about homosexuality? NOTHING!—not one word! It was a non-issue not even worth mentioning!

The New Covenant accepts even those who had formerly not been acceptable because of their sexual or reproductive status. You do not have to bear children in order to be included in God's family! (Isaiah 56:1-5, Matt 19:12) The Old Covenant was very concerned about such things. Deuteronomy 23:1 would not allow castrated men to be a part of the Old Covenant yet in Acts 8 we are shown that the New Covenant sets that prohibition aside. The Ethiopian Eunuch was baptized, accepted into the New Covenant, while still being a foreigner and a eunuch! God didn't have to change this person in order to love and accept this person fully!

The New Covenant did away with distinctions of clean and unclean, which opened the door for ALL people to be a part of the New Covenant. (Acts 10) The Gentiles were treated by the Jews the way that many Christians of today treat homosexuals, yet God revealed to Peter that he had to set aside his prejudice and could no longer condemn and exclude others because they didn't fit into the rules of the Old Covenant.

God loves you and affirms the love of heterosexual and same-gender relationships! The same-gender relationships of Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1:16) and of David and Jonathan (II Samuel 1:26 - "Jonathan...your love for me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women.") are respected and honored.

God tells all people who have felt alienated because of the pain of prejudice and hatred, "in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near... You are no

longer strangers, foreigners or aliens, but fellow citizens with all God's people."  
(Ephesians 2:11-22)

Finally, God reminds us that no matter what our orientation is, or what our beliefs are on homosexuality, we need to remember that "God is love." (I John 4). We need to follow the law of love: "LOVE GOD, LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF, LOVE ONE ANOTHER!" (Lev. 19:18, Matt 19:19, Mark 12:31, 33, Luke 10:27, John 15:12, 17, Romans 12:9-10, Galatians 5:14, James 2:8)

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