

Homosexuality: The Critical Issue of Our Day

The climate of our country, even in our churches, has changed dramatically over the past forty years, especially in recent years. Homosexuality used to be seen as a deviancy even by secular psychologists and a sin by most in the church, but this is not the case any longer. Christians who continue to hold onto the old view are being charged with hatred and ignorance. Is the belief that homosexuality is a sin a hate crime? Is homosexuality simply an alternate lifestyle? What should be the stance of a modern Christian? Let's look at the Bible.

First, the Old Testament condemns homosexuality. Genesis 19 describes God's wrath being poured out on Sodom and Gomorrah because of their depravity, which included homosexuality. Some have suggested that it was only forced homosexuality that is condemned, but this is not the case as seen in the ensuing laws of Moses in Leviticus 18:22; 20:13. Leviticus 18:22 states: "You are not to sleep with a man as with a woman; it is detestable." The Hebrew word used in this passage (תוֹעֵבָה) means abomination. It is an abomination, detestable to God. Homosexuality is an offense to God. Some have suggested that since these laws are interspersed with laws against eating pork and mixing fabrics, it cannot be seen as applicable to us today. Technically the passage in Leviticus 18 does not include these prohibitions. It is prohibiting the pagan practices of Canaan for which God "vomited" the inhabitants out of the land (24-28). The sins included are mainly sexual sins. Those who argue that these laws are only temporary find themselves needing to advocate incest and bestiality, both of which are also included as prohibited practices in this passage.

How do we know what laws are applicable today and which ones are outmoded? Jesus gave us the "fulfillment principle" in Matthew 5:17-20. He didn't come to abolish the Law of Moses, but to fulfill it. We know from the book of Hebrews that some of the laws were no longer applicable because Jesus fulfilled them in such a way that they were no longer necessary (e.g. sacrificial laws). It can be helpful to separate the Old Testament laws into four categories: sacrificial, ceremonial, judicial and moral laws. The sacrificial laws were fulfilled by Jesus in such a way that they are no longer applicable because he was the final sacrifice (Hebrews 7:12; 10:1-14). The ceremonial laws are also no longer necessary because they served only to separate the nation of Israel from its surrounding neighbors, to make them distinct (Mark 7:19; Acts 10); this would also be true of the judicial laws because they were for the nation of Israel particularly, but now God is working through a transnational people, rather than just one nation (Matthew 28:18-20). The last category is the moral law. Jesus fulfilled the moral laws by dying on the cross for our forgiveness when we break these laws, but of course God doesn't change His moral nature (Malachi 3:6; James 1:17; Hebrews 13:8). He is still opposed to murder, theft, lying and all sexual sin.

Another attempt to reveal that the Old Testament laws are no longer applicable today is the appeal to Jesus' words that in the Old Testament God accommodated to the people with some of His laws. This is a very important point. In Matthew 19 Jesus is asked about divorce. He says the original intention of God for marriage was one woman and one man for life in the covenant of marriage (4-5). He specifically says God made humans "male and female." There is an emphasis being made by Jesus here. In Genesis 2:18 it states, "Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper as his complement.'" The Hebrew word for "complement" is *neged* (נֶגֶד). This word literally means *opposite*. God's original plan was for a man and a woman to complement each other in an equal relationship of love, where as opposites they fulfill each other. Homosexuality is unnatural because a man and a man or a woman and a woman are not opposites; they cannot complement each other the way God intended. Contrary to the unisex movement of our day, men and women are very different from each other and it is by God's design; it is good! God did accommodate the law of divorce as He did with slavery and other issues. God is opposed to divorce and slavery, but He chose to gradually reveal

His ways to us in what theologians call progressive revelation as seen in Hebrews 1:1-3. Jesus did say in Matthew 19:8 that Moses “permitted” divorce, but that it was not God’s original intention. But accommodation does not fit the question concerning homosexuality. God never advocated divorce or slavery or other issues of accommodation; he permitted them until the full revelation of Christ. He didn’t say concerning these issues, “It is an abomination” and then say “it is good.” With homosexuality He said it was an abomination and continued to say this in the New Testament. God did not change His moral character and is still opposed to homosexuality because it goes directly against His original plan for humans.

The New Testament also condemns homosexuality in no uncertain terms. Romans 1:26-27 states:

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 in their lust for one another. Males committed shameless acts with males and received in their own persons the appropriate penalty of their error.

Many have attempted to twist this passage into condemning only certain types of homosexual practices, but the clear intent is obvious. Some suggest that it is only condemning homosexual rape. They point out that Roman leaders would use slave boys in perverse ways. There are two problems with this interpretation: First, the most natural way to interpret Romans is to see it as describing mutual consent, just like the Old Testament passages. Second, women in particular are pointed out as sinful and unnatural. Studies of first century Rome reveal that female homosexuality or lesbianism was always by mutual consent. In the context Paul is showing how people become spiritually ignorant when they reject the true God and His ways; sin makes you stupid (Romans 1:18-23; Ephesians 4:17-19). Because of this spiritual foolishness God gives them over to what they want to believe. It mentions three times in this passage that God gives them over (24, 26 and 28). God allows them to abandon His truth and does not pursue them; this is the most dangerous place a person could be in. Since God is our only hope, if He abandons us to our own devices and will, we are without hope. People who attempt to find alternate interpretations of this passage need to sincerely ask themselves, “Am I looking for a different way to interpret this passage because it is the obvious Biblical way to interpret this passage, or am I going against the traditional interpretation because I don’t want to believe it?” When our personal feelings, desires, etc. get in the way of our interpretation by keeping us from being objective, we are in dangerous territory.

It is clear from this passage in Romans that Paul is saying all homosexual activity is condemned by God and unnatural. The passage even says that God will punish these people “in their own persons.” The Greek says literally “receiving in themselves.” They receive in themselves their punishment for homosexual sin. Could this be partially fulfilled through the HIV virus? Whatever this phrase means, it is stating that people will be punished in this life for the sin of homosexuality and that somehow the punishment will be a natural consequence of the sin (Psalm 31:10; 32:3-5; 38:3). We should note that this passage is not saying that homosexuality is the unpardonable sin or that it is somehow worse than other sexual sins. God is merciful and has sent His son to die for us, including homosexuals. The only thing standing in the way is a lack of repentance. Psalm 32:3-5 concerns David’s sin of adultery, but would equally be applicable to the sin of homosexuality or any other sexual sin:

When I kept silent, my bones became brittle from my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy on me; my strength was drained as in the summer’s heat. Then I acknowledged my sin to You and did not conceal my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,’ and You took away the guilt of my sin.

The only barrier for the sinner is an unwillingness to repent. This is why it is so dangerous to try to exonerate homosexuality as an alternate lifestyle. Satan's vicious progression is first to get us to sin, then get us to excuse our sin as a weakness and then get us to deny that it is sinful, but rather is good. Isaiah 5:20-21 warns us: "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness, who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Woe to those who are wise in their own opinion and clever in their own sight." To be wise in our own opinion and clever in our own sight is to embrace irrational, arrogant autonomy. Who are we to say to God He is wrong and we are right? It is extremely dangerous to call that which is evil (homosexuality) good; we forfeit our only means of forgiveness, because forgiveness only comes with repentance (Luke 24:46-47; Acts 2:37-38; 3:19-20).

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 declares that "anyone practicing homosexuality" will not inherit God's kingdom. Homosexuality is listed with other sins such as "sexually immoral people," "thieves" and "greedy people." Paul is definitely not saying anyone who commits these sins is necessarily an unbeliever and cannot be forgiven. He is saying that anyone who lives any of these lifestyles and refuses to repent is not a Christian and will not go to heaven (1 Timothy 1:10). God is full of mercy toward the weak who call out to Him for help, but He will not forgive the unrepentant. Proverbs 29:1 is a strong warning that fits the Romans 1 passage: "One who becomes stiff-necked, after many reprimands will be shattered instantly – beyond recovery."

So in light of the clear teaching of Scripture what should we do? If you are tempted with homosexuality, get help. There are groups and churches that are there to show mercy and give help to people who struggle with homosexuality. Some suggest that homosexuals are born that way; this is highly doubtful since our sexuality doesn't develop until puberty, but even if it were true, it is no excuse. We are all born with a sinful nature and therefore sinful tendencies. We need Christ to set us free from these temptations, not excuse them. We may struggle with certain temptations all of our life, but we must continue to choose to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily and follow Jesus (Luke 9:23-24). Repent, ask God to forgive you and seek help. What about Christians who are being persecuted for their opposition to homosexual practice? We must love homosexuals. I have seen four people come to Christ who were homosexuals because I loved them as friends. I didn't advocate their sin, but I didn't treat them as a leper either. We should be the first to declare that any form of bullying, even if it is on a homosexual, is sinful and justice must be served. We must realize that some people simply don't have an attraction for the opposite sex and therefore should embrace Paul's calling of celibacy; this is a high calling and those persons are very valuable to the Kingdom (1 Corinthians 7). We cannot advocate legislation that condones homosexual marriages because Proverbs 14:34 states, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people." We are to treat all people with dignity and respect because they are made in the image of God. It looks like we are in for persecution in the near future. Evangelical Christianity is the only minority status that doesn't have any rights in our country. But that is ok. We don't need to respond to hatred with hatred. God will give us the strength to endure anything that might come our way. Romans 12:21 says, "Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good." Jesus taught that when we are persecuted we should "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! Take note – your reward is great in heaven." He also said, "Love your enemies, do what is good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." The most loving thing we could do for those caught in the trap of homosexuality is share the truth of God's grace that is available in Jesus. If they repent of their sins, place their faith in Christ and are baptized they will receive God's power to overcome sin and be set free from Satan's bondages (Acts 2:37-40; Ephesians 2:8-10; Romans 6).