

Assessing Arguments for Homosexuality from the Bible, Part 1

Introduction: The traditional Christian position on practicing homosexuality is that it is sin. That used to be the cultural view of it as well, influenced as our culture was by the Bible and Christianity. However, as our culture has become increasingly separated from and hostile to biblical values, especially in the area of sexuality, it has come to accept and even approve of homosexuality. And so for some time there has been increasing conflict between the culture and the (Bible-believing) Church over homosexuality. But more recently, many churches and Christians professing belief in the Bible, even evangelical ones, have begun to accept homosexuality, claiming that it does not conflict with the Bible after all. You might wonder, how in the world can they do that? Isn't the Bible pretty clear that homosexuality is wrong? Well, that's what we are looking at in this study. What arguments are pro-gay professing Christians making for homosexuality being consistent with the Bible and the Christian faith? What does the Bible actually teach about homosexuality?

- Taking a lot of the information for this study from Preston Sprinkle, “15 Reasons for Affirming Same-Sex Relations – and 15 Responses”

I. Preliminaries

- A. The difference between same-sex attraction/desire and homosexual practice: while same-sex attraction/desire is sinful, it is not sin to have it. But it is sin to commit carry out same-sex attraction/desire engage in homosexual activity.
- B. The use of the terms “homosexual” or “gay” to describe orientation rather than one who practices homosexuality
 1. Relatively recent
 2. Not necessarily right or wrong
 3. But I advise against it.
 - a. When the Bible uses the term “homosexual” or the like, it refers to one who practices it. It can be confusing and harmful for people to think the Bible is saying people with same-sex attraction are sinning or condemned.
 - b. It normalizes same-sex attraction and encourages thinking of it as part of identity.

II. The Fundamental Biblical View

- A. Genesis 1:26-28 – What does this passage contribute to the issue (though it does not address it directly)?
 1. God made humanity with 2 fundamental sexes – male and female.
 2. Is there any indication of sexuality in these verses? → The blessing/command to multiply entails heterosexuality as God's plan and will for humanity. This text sets forth God's intention in creation.
 - Basic anatomy supports this point
- B. Genesis 2:4-7, 18-25 – What does this passage contribute to the issue (though it does not address it directly)?
 - Man and woman are meant for marriage in God's creational design.
 - 1. Does this leave room for homosexuality or gay marriage? Can't it be argued that this is an argument from silence? It does not actually prohibit homosexuality explicitly. It doesn't mention polygamy either, but God allowed that in certain circumstances in the OT.
 - No, not really. Perhaps if this were the only text in the Bible relating to the issue, we would not be able to insist there could be no way homosexuality is ok. But it is only ever treated negatively in the Bible. At the least, this text sets forth heterosexuality as God's design. The nature of this text in the book of beginnings gives it a special, determinative/defining role. The text is clearly relating the origin of one of the most basic aspects of human existence—marriage—and the context of another of the most basic aspects of human existence—reproduction.
 - But what about the polygamy argument? → Polygamy does not differ from the ideal set forth here to the same degree as homosexuality. There is a fundamental difference and complementarity between man and woman that does not exist between 2 men or 2 women. And there is no connection to reproduction in homosexual relationship.

2. There is an old joke that encapsulates this truth, though I do not recommend it as a winsome way of expressing the argument: God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.
- C. Biblical marriage and sexuality are strictly heterosexual.

III. The Main Passages

A. Leviticus 18:22; 20:13

1. What do these verses tell us? → Both verses condemn male same-sex sexual behavior.
 - What do you think of God decreeing the death penalty for homosexual practice?
2. **Pro-gay argument #1:** Old Testament laws are no longer binding on Christians. Sure, it was wrong for Israel to engage in same-sex sexual behavior. But it was also wrong for Israel to eat pork, trim their beards, and gather sticks on Saturday. Christians, however, don't need to abide by these laws. They were for Israel. And they've been fulfilled and done away with in Christ.
 - What do you make of this argument? Is it convincing? If not, why not?
 - a. No. In fact, many pro-gay “Christians” have abandoned this argument.
 - b. Just because some laws in the Old Testament are no longer binding on Christians doesn't mean that no laws are. There are many Old Testament laws that are still binding on Christians, including several prohibitions right here in Leviticus: incest (18:6-18; 20:11-14, 17, 19-21), adultery (18:20; 20:10), child sacrifice (18:21; 20:1-5), bestiality (18:23; 20:15-16), theft (19:11), lying (19:11), taking the Lord's name in vain (19:20), oppressing your neighbor (19:13), and many others—all written within one chapter of the laws prohibiting same-sex sexual behavior.
 - c. Ancient Jews used the Greek word *porneia* to describe all these sexual sins, and *porneia* is roundly condemned by New Testament writers (e.g. Matt. 5:32; 15:19).
 - d. When Paul prohibits same-sex behavior in 1 Cor. 6:9, he uses a word that formed from the same-sex prohibition in Lev. 18:22 and 20:13. According to Paul, then, the Leviticus prohibitions carry authority for new covenant believers.
 - e. The continuing validity of the OT ban on homosexual practice accords with God's creation design for sexuality revealed in Genesis, and its repeal would be at odds with it.
 - f. The NT also condemns homosexuality.
3. **Pro-gay argument #2:** The OT was patriarchal and did not value women. Male homosexuality was prohibited because it involved one of the men having to act like a woman, which would be disgraceful because women were considered not valuable.
 - What do you make of this argument? Is it convincing? If not, why not? → No!
 - a. While the Old Testament world was deeply misogynistic (that is, it devalued women), the OT itself is not. Is God and his word anti-woman?
 1. Considered against the backdrop of the rest of the ancient world, the Old Testament is quite liberating towards women.
 2. Several women are held up as heroes of the faith in the OT, more courageous than the men around them (e.g., Rahab, Ruth, Deborah, and Abigail).
 3. The creation account of Genesis 1 makes the claim—radical for that time—that women and men equally possess the image of God. And many ancients believed only kings possessed God's image.
 4. Perhaps it could be countered, but God gave that law so that the surrounding misogynistic world was not offended and Israel's witness would not be hindered.
 - What would you say to that? → God does not accommodate his word and law to the opinions of men. When he shows concern for the behavior of believers tarnishing their witness, it involves compromising his actual will/truth/word rather than the standards of the world.
 - b. Critically, there's nothing in the actual text of Scripture (in Leviticus or elsewhere) suggesting that the reason men shouldn't have sex with each other is that they shouldn't act like “mere” women because women are less valuable. The pro-gay argument is just reading assumptions into the text without any justification.

c. God's creation design for sexuality, explicitly recorded in Genesis (part of the Pentateuch with Leviticus) is a much more likely foundation for the prohibition against male homosexuality.

4. **Pro-gay argument #3:** Same-sex prohibitions were really about domination and exploitation.

Consensual, monogamous, same-sex relations didn't exist in the ancient world. So what is really prohibited is exploitative/abusive same-sex acts.

– What do you make of this argument? Is it convincing? If not, why not? → No!

a. There's nothing in the biblical text that limits the prohibition of homosexual acts to sexual exploitation. The pro-gay argument is just reading assumptions into the text without any justification again.

b. It is not true that every same-sex relationship in the ancient world was exploitative/non-consensual.

1. We know very little about same-sex relations in the ancient world. But the evidence we do have is somewhat diverse. We have evidence of exploitative same-sex relations and consensual relations as well.

– There are, in fact, many examples of consensual homosexual relations in antiquity. See Chris C. Caragounis, *Homoeroticism: Ancient and Modern—and the Christian Church*, 43-47

c. Again, God's creation design for sexuality, explicitly recorded in Genesis (part of the Pentateuch with Leviticus) is a much more likely foundation for the prohibition against male homosexuality.

B. Genesis 19

1. Background: God explained to Abraham in Genesis 18 that he had heard that Sodom and Gomorrah were exceedingly evil, and that he would go and check it out. So he sent 2 angels to Sodom. Abraham intercedes on behalf of Sodom, and gets God to agree to spare the city if there are as few as 10 righteous people in the city. Genesis 19 tells the story of the angels' investigative visit.

2. The story of Sodom in Genesis 19 has traditionally been taken to show that God condemns homosexuality. See if you can catch why.

3. Read Gen 19:1-26

– Why might this be thought to show that God condemns homosexuality? → Because the men of the city attempt to have sex with what they believe to be are 2 men.

4. **Pro-gay argument regarding Genesis 19/Sodom:** The sin of Sodom was not homosexuality.

a. This is not a critical text. It does not hurt the traditional view if it does not highlight homosexuality as the main sin of Sodom. There is no claim that it supports homosexuality.

b. Why would pro-gay advocates make this claim? Does there seem to be any support for it?

1. What's happening in Genesis 19 is not consensual same-sex love; it's attempted sexual violence / gang rape. That's more serious/worse than consensual homosexual activity.

– What do you think of that argument? Is it convincing? → No, not ultimately.

→ It is true that the Bible does not seem to depict it as THE main issue in the Sodom affair. But since homosexuality was against God's creation and law in the OT, it is surely meant to be seen as part of the problem, conveying that their actions were especially perverse, not only violent and coercive, but also unnatural and extra-perverted because of the homosexual aspect. That is how the original audience would have reacted to it. Indeed, the first century Jewish author Philo attributed God's destruction of the people of Sodom to their homosexuality. But the Sodom passage does not by itself show God's condemnation of homosexuality.

2. It is claimed that no biblical texts that refer to Sodom's sin mention homosexuality specifically, and that their sin is identified as other things, such as in-hospitality, pride, lack of care for the needy, and intent of sexual assault.

– What do you think of that argument? Is it convincing in combination with the previous one?

a. The response given to the previous reason for the pro-gay claim would still hold.

b. Most passages that mention Sodom don't specify its sin. But most if not all that do, include sexual immorality, which would have included their homosexual intent in light of Genesis 1-2 and the OT Law, which prohibited homosexual activity.

c. Ezek 16:49-50 – What does this verse identify as Sodom's sin?

1. Does that mean homosexual intent was not? → No, an author might highlight something

especially relevant without meaning to exclude other things. Notice the text does not specify attempted gang rape.

2. However, notice Ezekiel's use of the word "abomination" (= NIV's "did detestable things"). That is the word that Leviticus uses of homosexual practice in Lev 18:22 and 20:13. It is likely that this word includes Sodom's homosexual intent along with its attempted gang rape, especially as this is particularly linked with God destroying them in Ezek 16:50 and in Genesis 19.

– This is strengthened further by these facts: Ezekiel refers to Leviticus a lot in his book; the Hebrew word for abomination is used 6 times in Leviticus, but in the singular only twice, both times of homosexuality; Ezekiel uses the singular.

d. 2 Pet 2:6-7

1. The relevant term in this passage is *ἀσέλγεια*. Translated variously as sensual, filthy, debauched, licentious, lascivious, etc. The sense of the word is, as one Greek lexicon (Louw/Nida) puts it, "behavior completely lacking in moral restraint, usually with the implication of sexual licentiousness - 'licentious behavior, extreme immorality.'" This almost certainly has reference to Sodom's outrageous sexual behavior as exemplified by the incident with the angels, and would include any homosexuality (at least that which occurred in that incident) in light of Genesis and the Law, but not limited to the angel incident.

– Why not limited to that incident (see v. 8)? Verse 8 speaks about Lot's ongoing experience while living in Sodom.

e. Jude 7

1. Jude indicates Sodom's sin was sexual immorality.
 - Does that in itself give any insight? → Most who argue against homosexuality being in view tend to not think of the problem as sexual, but as violence, assault, exploitation, etc. However, rape can certainly be thought of as a form of sexual immorality.
2. The most critical part of the verse is reference to going after literally "other flesh."
 - a. What do you think the pro-gay view would say this refers to? → Angels
 - Can you think of any problems with that?
 1. The Sodomites did not know they were angels, but thought they were men and refer to them that way (Gen 19:5).
 2. Gomorrah and the surrounding cities are said to have gone after other flesh too. But the angel incident only happened in Sodom. So this must refer to an ongoing type of immorality rather than sex with angels.
 - b. This likely refers to going after other flesh than the norm, i.e., men going after men for sex rather than women.
3. Jude 7, then, seems to explicitly include homosexuality as part of Sodom's sin that brought God's judgment/destruction upon them.
4. The NASB and ESV are probably correct in translating the verse with something like "since they in the same way as these," with "they" referring to the surrounding cities and "these" referring to Sodom and Gomorrah.
 - Some think "these" refers to the angels of v. 6, but a closer reference is more likely.

IV. Questions? Thoughts?

Conclusion: Attempts to justify homosexuality as allowed by the Bible are incredibly weak. The basic teaching of the OT is that homosexual practice is sin, detestable to God. That is just as true, and perhaps more so, in the NT as in the OT. We will look at the NT evidence next time.

(If this does not come up in this study, add this note to the conclusion: We are just nailing down what Scripture says about whether homosexuality is sin or not at this point. We should talk about how to view homosexuals and to talk about the issue next time.)