

## **The Bible & Homosexuality**

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It is often true that the debate surrounding the issue of homosexuality and the church has produced more heat than light. Certainly as custodians of God's word, the church has a tremendous responsibility to address current issues, like homosexuality, in a biblically responsible way. We constantly need to remind ourselves that we must hold truth in one hand while clutching compassion in the other hand. The danger here is imbalance in either direction.

The popular maxim "What would Jesus do?" certainly applies to the issue of homosexuality. The problem today is that there are contrasting views and dissonant voices regarding just exactly what Jesus would do in response to homosexuals.

So why is there now confusion on an issue that has been fairly cut-and-dried for over 2000 years? What has changed? The answer is fairly simple and can be found in the advent of a new method of interpretation. Over the last 40 years there has been a subtle paradigm shift in the way some professing evangelicals interpret the Bible. As western society has become more postmodern, segments of the church, like the emerging church, have followed suite. In the process a New Hermeneutic has emerged to replace the literal and plain sense approach to God's word.

One of the predominate characteristics of this new approach is that it does not simply refine the traditional method, but it completely revises it by starting with the interpreter's context instead of the original author's. This produces a high degree of subjectivity and suspicion, which is then injected into the text as the interpreter seeks a revised understanding of what has been plainly understood for centuries.

The postmodern interpretation gave rise to the pro-gay interpretation (PGI) of the Bible. The PGI is heavily reliant on current culture and various philosophical streams of existential thought. This leads to the exchange of word meanings while critical aspects of a verses' context are ignored. Sodom in Genesis 19:5 illustrates this well : PGI advocates erroneously claim the phrase "that we might know them" (*yada*) refers to hospitality.

Yet, 19:8 uses *yada* in an obvious context of sexuality. The PGI conveniently avoid 19:8.

As it relates to homosexuality, the PGI begins with two cardinal presuppositions which clouds their interpretation and application of related verses : The first assumption PGI practitioners begin with is that homosexuality is a result of genetic orientation. This has never been satisfactorily proven. The science used to promote this idea is dubious at best. While it might be that some are *inclined* toward homosexuality that is not the same as saying one is *consigned* to that lifestyle. If one is only *inclined*, then change is possible for a new creature in Christ! Science, whether good or bad, should never serve as the launching pad for our interpretation.

The second assumption of the PGI approach supposes since homosexuality is a result of orientation, then surely there must be some allowance in scripture for those of same-sex persuasion to be true to themselves. The caveat here specifies a “loving and monogamous relationship”. Never mind that the term monogamous refers to marriage (*gamos*) not a stable live-in situation.

This whole idea runs directly counter to the many studies done regarding “monogamous” homosexual relationships. In the study *The Male Couple* 156 male couples were studied and only 7 couples had a totally exclusive sexual relationship. Interestingly, all 7 couples had been together less than 5 years. The research suggests that monogamy is quite rare in homosexual couples and is the exception rather than the rule. It is therefore unrealistic to entertain the notion of relational fidelity among same-sex couples in the church.

Rather than relying on the two fallow assumptions above, we want to take our queue from one bedrock passage, Genesis 1-3. For in Genesis God established His unchanging boundaries for human sexuality within the context of a heterosexual marriage. This, combined with an understanding of the role of the Old Testament (OT) law in the New Testament (NT), should form the basis for rightly evaluating pro-gay arguments in the rest of scripture.

Genesis 1-3 is often overlooked by PGI advocates. Yet, we ignore this essential passage and its foundational forming truths to our own detriment.

Though these three chapters do not speak directly of homosexuality, the foundation for understanding God's parameters for human sexuality and gender distinction are well established here. Let us consider six contextual observations from creation that directly impact the rest of scripture. These should serve to frame the homosexual debate:

- **Creation order** : The first two chapters of Genesis quickly establish a pattern of creation order (1:1-2:24). The ancient Hebrew acquired his view of order based on the creative and sustaining power of Yahweh. The "goodness" in creation lies in its ordered state. An example of this principle is found in the sexual prohibitions of Leviticus 18: 1-30, which were given to restore and preserve God's "good" order. Leviticus 18 details how social order in Israel was only "good" when the social network of familial relationships is properly ordered. Therefore, incest violates the order of kinship (18:6-18); homosexuality violates the order of gender distinction (18:22); and bestiality violates the order of species (18:23). These sexual boundaries were established at creation. Any violation here introduces chaos and confusion into human relationships, as our own age amply testifies.
- **Gender distinction** : Genesis 1:26-28 uses specific terminology to establish the distinction between the sexes—male (*ish*) and female (*issha*). The general term used for "man" in the OT is *adam* (1:26), which speaks of humankind as a species. Genesis 1:27 uniquely differentiates *adam* into specific genders of male and female. Both unique biology and chromosomal distinction bear witness to this. This vital distinction is maintained throughout the whole of scripture.
- **God's image** : As a subsequent corollary, Genesis 1:26-28 declares that man is distinct from the rest of creation because humanity is created in the image of God. Both genders reflect that image in very different, yet, complementary ways. A man and a woman together in a marital relationship mirror the image of God in ways the rest of creation can not. Any attempt to change this image through the androgynizing effects (merging of the sexes) of homosexuality, transexuality, or transvestism results in marring God's image.
- **Procreation** : In Genesis 1:28 the man and the woman are blessed with the task of being the progenitors of the human race. In this,

procreation is portrayed in a positive and normative light. This heterosexual union is the standard relationship for achieving this according to Genesis 2:24. Though procreation is not the only reason for sexuality, it is a very good reason which is often neglected and scoffed at in our pansexual age.

- **Marriage** : The first marriage is recorded in Genesis 2:18-25. The only aspect of God's pre-fall creation that was "not good" was Adam being alone. So God blessed Adam with a complement (help meet) who made up that which was lacking in Adam! Though Eve was very different from Adam, she was still much like him. She was the perfect corresponding opposite for Adam. It is this relationship that ultimately serves to mirror and illustrate the relationship that Christ has with His bride, the Church (Ephesians 5:22-33). To reinforce his argument, Paul reaffirms the creation ideal as he makes this comparison (Gen.2:24; Matt.19:5; Mark 10:7ff)! Clearly, same-sex relationships can never adequately reflect the relationship Christ has with His Bride.

John Piper summarizes the original purpose for marriage well, "Eve was like Adam yet very unlike him ... this provides a unique opportunity for profound unity, and intimacy to exist. In this we see that God created heterosexuality not homosexuality. God's first institution was marriage not fraternity."

- **Reaffirmed** : One might rightly ask if the creation account is maintained throughout scripture? Did God ever amend His plan? Significantly, when Christ was being grilled by the Pharisees on the issue of divorce, how did He respond? In Matthew 19:4-6 and Mark 10:5-9, Jesus reasserted the creation mandate from Genesis 1:26-28 and 2:24! Even in light of the fall, God's original blueprint remains unaltered. The fall and the resulting curse just make it more difficult to maintain. This highlights the need for redemption.

Those who maintain that Jesus never condemned homosexuality rely on unconvincing arguments from silence. Christ never condemned other forms of sexual deviancy either--like bestiality, pedophilia, incest, necrophilia, or fornication. But when He underscored the Genesis account for marriage He said all that ever needed to be said on the issue. By reaffirming the creation ideal of heterosexual

monogamy, Jesus covered all the potential bases in one succinct and definitive statement!

Another biblical context that is often summarily dismissed in the PGI scheme is the place of OT law in the NT. PGI logic assumes that passages like Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 are just as irrelevant as dietary laws and the mixing of fabrics. Yet, Romans 10:4 declares that “Christ is the end of the law.” This means Christ was the crescendo of the law. He did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. In view of His finished work on the cross, Christ is now superimposed over the Mosaic law and has transformed it into the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2).

So the law remains an authoritative part of scripture. But now law must be read through the lens of the cross. For example, we do not need animal sacrifice to stand in the presence of God, but we do need sacrifice—the sacrifice of Christ. Likewise, the husband who loves his wife, as Christ does the Church, will duly consider his menstruating wife’s (Leviticus 20:18) needs and condition above and beyond his own.

The law of Christ insures moral unity exists between the OT and NT. It has always been wrong to murder, rape, steal, to have sexual relations with an animal, to commit adultery, and to commit homosexual acts. God’s standard of righteousness has never been altered, but these righteous demands were met by Christ.

In light of His affirmation of the creation account, plus His perspective on the law, how would Christ respond to homosexuality today (WWJD)? The literal method of interpretation can confidently assert that Jesus would unashamedly preach the gospel, as He did to the woman at the well in John 4 and the adulterous woman in John 8:1-11. Upon repentance, He would utter these glorious words of liberty, “Neither do I condemn you; go your way. From now on sin no more.”! How can His church do any less?

*(Note: Due the space limitations it was not possible to deal with many arguments often marshaled by the pro-gay advocates. Those wanting a summary paper answering many of arguments can download this summary at [www.lhbc.co.za](http://www.lhbc.co.za) . Just follow the link Papers and Booklets.)*