

What Does the Bible Tell Us About Homosexuality?

Franklin Church of Christ
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Introduction:

On November 18, 2007, *The Tennessean*, had a front page article with the headline “Film questions biblical justification for anti-gay views.” The article was brief, merely letting the readers know of a new film released in Nashville on November 19 that discusses what the Bible says about homosexuality. However, a side-bar led readers to the Issues section with a three-quarters front-page spread and further article on the inside about the film. The story was titled “Does the Bible always tell us so?” and it discussed the new film by Daniel Karlake entitled *For the Bible Tells Me So*. The film “explores the intersection of biblical teachings and sexual orientation through the experiences of people like U.S. Rep. Dick Gephardt, whose daughter Chrissy is a lesbian, and the Rev. Gene Robinson, the nation’s first openly gay Episcopal bishop.”¹ In essence, the point of the article and, reportedly, the film is that the common understanding that the Bible is opposed to homosexuality is actually the result of proof-texting, ripping verses out of their biblical and historical contexts, and a multi-generational smear campaign against homosexuality. In the movie’s trailer, as seen at the website www.forthebibletellsmeso.org, while showing film of evangelists speaking and just before showing President George W. Bush’s declaration that marriage cannot be separated from its cultural and religious roots, an unnamed commentator says, “Like Goebel said, working for Hitler, you tell a lie enough times, the whole world will believe it.” The same commentator later said in the trailer, “For a long time the Bible has been misused to support prejudice, apartheid, segregation, slavery, the second class citizenship of women. Now it’s being misused to condemn gay people. It’s an old trick. Fundamentalist Christians have been using it throughout the ages and now they’re doing it again.”

This article and this movie beg us to ask the question, “What exactly does the Bible tell us about homosexuality?” Is it a sin? Is it only a sin in some forms? How should Christians relate to homosexuals? Are Christians allowed to participate in homosexuality? Will those who practice homosexuality be allowed into the kingdom of heaven? What does the Bible tell us?

Discussion:

- I. The Bible tells us Jews are not allowed to practice homosexuality.
 - A. **Leviticus 18:22** says, “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination” (ESV). **Leviticus 20:13** says, “If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.”
 - B. *The Tennessean* tacitly deals with these passages by starting its article saying:

The Bible says that eating shrimp is an abomination and that working on the Sabbath is punishable by death. Not even the most devout Christian, though, thinks twice about ordering shrimp scampi or checking their office e-mail from home on a Sunday afternoon.

Biblical literalists know that the customs and circumstances that gave rise to such injunctions were rooted in historical and cultural contexts very different from our own.

So why do so many Christians cling to the handful of Scriptures that cast aspersions on sexual relationships between people of the same gender?²
 - C. We will ignore the fact that the author is unaware that the Sabbath is Saturday and not Sunday. However we will point out that he made the mistake so many make today. It is true that the Old Covenant declared eating shrimp unlawful in **Leviticus 11:10**. **Exodus 20:8-11** says the Jews must keep the Sabbath. The article’s author says Christians do not worry about these laws because of historical and cultural contexts. Apparently he doesn’t understand the difference between the covenants. According to **Hebrews 7:12; 8:13**, we are under a new covenant, not the old. Christians do not have to follow the laws about shrimp and Sabbath because we are not under that covenant. Therefore the fact that we do not keep the Sabbath and the fact that we eat shrimp is not an indication of inconsistency as this author is attempting to suggest. It is a recognition of a new law and new covenant.

¹ Ryan Underwood, *The Tennessean*, November 18, 2007, “Film questions biblical justification for anti-gay views”, p 1.

² Bill Friskics-Warren, *The Tennessean*, November 18, 2007, “Does the Bible always tell us so?”, p 21A.

- D. With this in mind, it is true Christians cannot base their view of homosexuality solely on these passages. We need to see what the New Testament says. However, what we must note is the Old Covenant said practicing homosexuality was unlawful. Further, we must not accept the smoke screen offered by so many modern proponents of homosexuality that this was only dealing with ritual idol worship. Notice the context, these are lists of sexual sins, not lists of idolatrous sins. Those who wish to be Jews must think twice when they order shrimp scampi, when they answer office e-mail on the Sabbath and before they decide to practice homosexuality.
- II. The Bible tells us marriage and sexuality are to be between a man and woman only.
- A. **Hebrews 13:4** explains that marriage is honorable and the marriage bed is undefiled. However, sexual immorality will be judged. The point is sexual activity outside of marriage is immoral. **I Corinthians 7:1-4** demonstrates to avoid sexual immorality a man must have a wife and a wife must have a husband. All else, therefore, is unlawful.
- B. *The Tennessean* says:
 Nowhere, in fact, does the Bible say anything (*sic*), much less condemn, loving and committed partnerships between same-sex adults.
 "Paul never contemplated the monogamous, long-term sexual relationships that take place among people today," explained Jack Rogers, former moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).
 "There is no analogue for our contemporary understanding of sexual identity in the Bible, neither for heterosexuals nor homosexuals," added Armour. "It's simply not there."³
- C. Actually it is there. These guys just don't like what it says. It says that monogamous, long-term sexual relationships are supposed to take place between a man and a woman who are married and refuse to separate until death parts them. All else is sexual immorality. I cannot pass by this point without making a corollary. When people make these arguments, they are actually arguing against the divine inspiration of Scripture. Their point is that Paul didn't understand the truth about homosexuality as we have supposedly discovered through our modern scientific endeavors. Since Paul wrote these passages, we are only seeing his misunderstandings. However, if one believes the Bible actually came from God, one cannot make these arguments at all. If God, who created man and woman, is the originator of Scripture, then we must recognize that God perfectly well understood everything about our sexuality and knew exactly what homosexuality was and is. He knew perfectly well how to teach against very specific forms of homosexuality, but instead, in every case spoke in blanket terms against it. He knew perfectly well what kind of sexuality we need and He said, through Paul and other writers, one man, one woman for life. You must recognize to make the argument this article makes you have to deny inspiration.
- III. The Bible tells us homosexual behavior is contrary to nature.
- A. **Romans 1:26-27** says because the early Gentiles had exchanged the truth about God for a lie, He gave them over to depravity which allowed them to exchange the normal sexual function of the opposite gender for the abnormal sexual function of the same gender. Note very carefully that this passage mentions both men and women participating in homosexual activity and both are declared unnatural.
- B. While the article doesn't deal with this passage. I have heard some of the modern arguments about it. The claim made by some today is that Paul was unaware of the supposed hereditary nature of homosexuality. Paul did not know, we are told, that people are born homosexual. He was, supposedly, only condemning those who were born naturally to be heterosexual participating in homosexual activity. However, how does anyone claim to be born homosexual? Is it not because of their desires to participate in homosexual activity? If they have a strong desire, we are told they must have been born that way. They have a different kind of desire from the norm, so they must have been born an exception to the norm.
- C. However, this passage does not merely speak against practicing homosexuality; it also speaks against those who are consumed with homosexual desire. Today, when people are consumed with desire for one another, we are told they were born that way. Paul actually condemns the very thing we are told about today. Homosexuality is opposed to nature, according to the Bible.

³ *ibid.* p 24A

IV. The Bible tells us homosexuality is unlawful.

- A. According to **I Timothy 1:8-11**, practicing homosexuality is linked with being lawless and disobedient, ungodly and sinful, unholy and profane. The passage goes on to say it is opposed to sound doctrine and not in accord with the gospel of glory.
- B. Keep in mind what this means. This is not Christians being judgmental. This is merely saying homosexual activity is unlawful and sinful. We are not saying people cannot practice homosexuality if they want. We are merely saying they can't do it and be righteous before God. If they participate in this activity, they are sinning. Keep in mind we have to say this about a great many things. In fact, if you are tempted by homosexual desires, please do not act like we have somehow singled you out for judgment on this issue. We have actually had to say this very thing about every single one of us on one issue or another. As **Ephesians 2:1-3** says, we have all been dead in trespasses and sins. We have all been told that we must stop certain behaviors if we wish to be righteous. No one thinks it is judgmental to tell people they need to quit sleeping around if they want to be righteous. No one thinks it is judgmental to tell people they have to quit stealing, lying, murdering, coveting, etc. if they wish to be righteous. If the sin with which you struggle is homosexuality, we are not saying you have to stop to please us. We are simply passing on that God says you have to stop if you wish to be pleasing to Him.

V. The Bible tells us those who practice homosexuality will not inherit the kingdom of God.

- A. **I Corinthians 6:9-10** demonstrates that those who practice homosexuality, like those who practice all sexual immorality, theft, greed or drunkenness will not inherit the kingdom of God. The passage says this is unrighteousness. Further, it encourages us not to be deceived. We live in a society where it has become increasingly easy to be deceived. We are told that many of those who practice homosexuality are very moral. Perhaps they do not commit any other immoralities, but the passage says homosexual activity is immoral all by itself.

- B. *The Tennesseans* deal with this passage and the one in **I Timothy** by saying:

Pronouncements decrying prostitution in the first books of Corinthians and Timothy likewise are not about sexual orientation but about the exploitation of underage males, a practice tantamount to what we now call human trafficking.

These Scriptures address ritual wrong as opposed to something innately immoral.⁴

The point being made is that these passages aren't condemning all homosexual behavior. Rather, we are supposed to believe Paul was only dealing with two kinds of homosexuality here. One being the use of young boys, sometimes even slaves. The other being the use of homosexual activity in idol worship rituals. Paul couldn't possibly have been referring to someone being born that way or someone being involved in a long-term relationship filled with love.

- C. Later in the article, the author decries the awful approach to Bible study called proof texting, that is, pulling verses out of their Biblical context to make them say what we want. They say that in order to claim history says these two kinds of bad homosexuality mentioned above were really the only one's Paul knew about and those were wrong. Had Paul known about real loving homosexuality, he would have approved. Thus the historical context makes these passages mean something other than what they seem to say on the surface. If we were neglecting the historical or biblical context of the passages and twisting them to say what we want, we would be wrong. However, just as wrong is adding context into the Biblical passages. Read them again and again and you see nothing in the contexts that says Paul was only dealing with prostitution, human trafficking or ritual homosexuality. These may have been done in the first century and these passages would condemn them. However, there is nothing either historically or biblically that says these were the only forms of homosexuality committed at the time of the Bible and there is nothing that says these passages are limited to that. In fact, the first century readers would have gotten from these verses exactly what we do. Homosexual activity in every form is sinful and those who practice it will not enter the kingdom of God.

VI. The Bible tells us those who practice homosexual activity can repent and change.

- A. **I Corinthians 6:9-11** says some of the Corinthians had been involved in the sins mentioned, which included homosexuality. Then it says, "And such were some of you. But you were

⁴ *ibid.*

washed, you were sanctified, you were justified..." (ESV). Some of these Corinthians had practiced homosexuality and yet when they became Christians, they changed. Not that it was easy. It was probably very difficult, yet they did it.

- B. Interestingly, people today act like homosexuality is somehow different from every other sin in the world. They think that because they have great desires and it is very hard to change, they must have been born with it and it must be alright. That is really the height of arrogance. In reality, that is how every sin works. Consider **Romans 7:7-25**. This passage describes what all sin does. Whether the sin is homosexuality or coveting, sin takes over. The person will feel like there is absolutely nothing they can do to overcome. They will want to act differently, but will repeatedly commit sin. We all deal with different major sins in our lives. Some deal with lust, some greed, some drinking, some coveting, some gossiping, some sexual immorality, some theft, etc. We all, in one sin or another, get to the point of saying, "Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (**Romans 7:24**, ESV). And no matter the sin, there is only one answer—Jesus Christ.
- C. Are we to assume that those who struggle with lying are just born liars and it must be alright? What about those who are hooked on pornography and sexual addicts? What about kleptomaniacs and thieves? What about alcoholics and drug addicts? Are these, by the mere fact that they are constantly pulled to their sins even when they don't want to, born that way and thus God wasn't dealing with those issues? Or are all sinners supposed to throw themselves on the mercy of Jesus Christ and allow Him to cleanse them of their sin and free them from it?
- D. I'm not saying ceasing homosexual activity is easy. I'm not saying that once you have become entrapped by Satan's deceptions about it that you will ever be completely free from the temptation of this sin. I'm simply saying that through Jesus Christ, everyone can overcome any sin, including homosexuality.
- E. There is another point we must make here for those Christians who do not struggle with homosexuality. What would we do if someone came into our assembly and they confessed that homosexuality was their struggle? Would we accept them if they repented? Would we want to teach them? Everyone, no matter their sin, needs Jesus. Jesus died for those whose sin is homosexuality as much as He died for those whose sin is something else. Can we love homosexuals enough to do more than vote against it? Can we love them enough to take the gospel to them, pray with them, support them as they struggle to turn from their sins? What would we do when they confessed to us that they had fallen prey to their temptation again, as most will? What do we want people to do when we lied again, had an outburst of wrath again, coveted again, lusted again, drank again, etc? If homosexuality is a sin that people can change, then we must be willing to help them change and be patient as they go through the change process. We must not look on this sin as if it is somehow worse than our own sins. We must look on it as a sin, plain and simple, just like ours and be willing to help just as we want others to help us.

Conclusion:

The Bible is clear. People can add in context, they can twist and distort all they want, however, they won't change what the Bible clearly says. Homosexuality is a sin and no one who practices it impenitently will enter the kingdom of God. This is not being judgmental, this is simply stating what the Judge says. Whatever your sin, whether homosexuality, coveting, lying, gossiping, sexual immorality, bitterness, outbursts of wrath or whatever, turn to Jesus for forgiveness and freedom today. We are here to help no matter what sin you have faced and struggle with. Please simply remember this. You can speak against me. You can call me names. You can tell all kinds of emotional stories about people in all kinds of different situations, but you can't change what the Bible tells us. You can't change what the Judge said. You can throw out the Bible if you want, but you just can't make it say homosexuality is lawful no matter how loving or long-term it is. We will all stand before the Judge one day and our twisting of His word will not change what He is going to say. Let us all be honest with the text and turn ourselves over to Jesus.