

Homosexuality & The Bible



MCC Austin
at Freedom Oaks

What the Bible Does and Does Not Say About Homosexuality

There have always been those who, despite their sincerity, misunderstand faith as a set of legalistic moralisms. Remember, it was these people like that who demanded the death of Jesus. Their complaint was that he took the legalisms of their faith too lightly.

Read literally, certain parts of the Bible support slavery, degrade women as nothing more than property, endorse racial segregation, and support genocide--all on religious grounds. Jesus was different. He believed that God was greater than any words we use to understand God.

People who use a few isolated, culturally and historically conditioned passages to condemn GLBT people ignore time-honored principles of biblical interpretation and miss the Bible's true message.

THE BIBLE AND LGTB PEOPLE

It is unfortunate that a democratic society should base its civil legislation on the Bible or any other sacred writing. And it is unfortunate that well-meaning people of faith think that the Bible justifies making sexual minority people second class citizens. Since both are realities, it is important to know what the Bible does and does not say on this subject. It is only when all of scripture is understood in its literary and historical context that its power and truth are revealed. A few examples:

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

These are the most often quoted verses by those who insist that the Bible condemns homosexuality. One principle of biblical interpretation is consistency. The verses immediately before and after these prohibit eating rabbit, lobster, shrimp and pork. They forbid women from wearing red dresses, and declare abomination for all who wear clothing made of mixed fabrics. They bar from ministry anyone with any physical defect. Shouldn't we question the motives and integrity of those who insist these two verses are the eternal word of God, but ignore everything else in the same document?

Genesis 19:4-11 and Judges 19:22

The best Hebrew scholars are in unanimous agreement that what happened at Sodom was about the violation of the ancient code of hospitality toward strangers involving a threatened homosexual rape. A parallel story in Judges tells the exact same core story except that the rape is heterosexual and actually did happen, resulting in the woman's death. Yet, no one suggests that is a condemnation of

heterosexuality. Another principle of biblical interpretation is: let the Bible interpret itself. The books of the prophets Ezekiel, Isaiah and Jeremiah list the specific sins for which Sodom was destroyed. They list arrogance, adultery, oppression of the poor, insincere religion and political corruption. Homosexuality is not mentioned. In Luke 10:10-13, Jesus clearly states that the sin of Sodom was inhospitality.

Romans 1:26-32

St. Paul was suspicious, fearful and disapproving of all sexual acts. Homosexual acts were no exception. He clearly believed that all people were heterosexual and that those engaged in homosexual acts were doing so as conscious acts of rebellion against God - an idea totally alien to homosexual people. The exact words he uses to declare homosexual acts as "against nature," he also uses to describe men with long hair (even though Jesus, as a first century Jew, would certainly have had long hair). People who take the Bible seriously (as opposed to literally) have long since realized that many of Paul's comments on socio-cultural issues are not meant to be binding on twenty-first century Christians. Who today argues for a return to slavery, or that women are forbidden to speak in church?

I Corinthians 6:9-10 and I Timothy 1:5-10

These two passages include the Greek words "malakoi" and "arsenokoitai." The best Greek scholars now admit that they are not sure what these words meant to the original writers. The word "malakoi" is now considered to have absolutely nothing to do with homosexuality. The word "arsenokoitai" has now been found in extra-biblical literature of the same period and apparently referred to cultic temple prostitutes, not homosexuals. The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, translated by the world's greatest Hebrew and Greek scholars, contains a footnote to these two words which reads, "These Greek terms...do not refer to 'homosexuals,' as in inappropriate older translations."

The Gospels

If homosexuality were as critically important an issue as many seem to think, surely Jesus would have said something about it. He didn't.

Conclusion

Contrary to what you might think from listening to much of the current dialogue on this issue, the Bible is not about homosexuality. It is about a 5,000 year love affair between God and humankind.....a relationship in which God is always faithful, and we sometimes are and sometimes aren't...but in which God still chooses us to participate in bringing about a reign of peace, justice, compassion, love and salvation on the earth, and sent Christ to show us how to do that.

People must realize that to continue to insist that the Bible condemns homosexuality is to participate in the escalating spiritual and physical violence against sexual minority people. When people could not see, Jesus healed them. When they would not see, he condemned them.

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