

The Biblical View when it comes to Same Sex attraction.

Two weeks ago we began a two part exploration of what Scripture teaches about sexuality. We began by looking first at God's overarching purpose for human sexuality and its expression and regulation through an in depth look at the pre-fall Genesis creation narratives. These narratives lay out what you might call a Jewish or Christian world view, expressing the core beliefs of our faith, detailing the question of origins, the nature of God, the purpose of humanity, the standing of other life, and so on. And included in the portrayal of humanity are some key details around human sexuality and how that is meant to be worked out. Details which Christ also affirmed in the gospels when he spoke on marriage.

In short Genesis 1 and 2 put forward just one standard, and there are no alternatives or variations to that standard. Human beings were created male and female as complementary heterosexual beings. Furthermore while our sexuality can be expressed in many ways, from our choice of clothing to our use of language, the highest form of that expression is in physical sexual intimacy. Genesis makes it clear that that level of expressed sexuality is the sole preserve of the marriage relationship. And marriage is defined as covenantal heterosexual union of one man and one woman for life. A union designed to provide a deepfelt level of partnership and companionship in their highest forms. It is also therefore the only context in which children can be produced and is thereby seen as primary context in which children are to be raised and nurtured to adulthood. Marriage is the foundation upon which families are formed and society prospers.

And it is this standard or norm which forms the basis by which the texts we call prohibitive take their stance. It is clearly recognised that the texts that stand against same-sex acts must have a reason for doing so. And that reason can only be that those acts contravene the overarching will and purposes of God for human sexuality as revealed to us within those same Genesis creation narratives and gospel accounts of Jesus' teaching. And you need to keep that thought in mind as we look at the prohibitive texts this morning.

However, having said that, it is worth taking a look at the prohibitive texts because there are many who would argue that they don't really say what they seem to be saying and so I want to prepare you for some of the arguments you might hear from time to time.

There are about a dozen passages in the Bible that refer to same sex activity. Eight in the Old Testament and four in the new. Some would argue this is not a very large number of texts against same-sex activity and so it is a topic of minor importance. In reality though, to have a topic mentioned at least a dozen times across the Bible in both the New and the Old Testaments is actually quite a lot when compared to many other topics. But that aside it is in fact very dangerous to try and ascertain a subjects importance on the basis of how often it is mentioned in Scripture. The Bible is not an encyclopedia that lists topics alphabetically outlining God's view on them. It is the story of God as he brings our world into existence and deals with the pain of it going wrong. The frequency of topics addressed therefore is going to be quite variable due to a number of factors including the purposes of the various books of the Bible and the various contexts in which the writers were writing.

To give one example: it is often argued that because Jesus never spoke against same-sex activity in the gospels that it wasn't therefore a problem for him. Well to begin with it's intellectually dishonest to try and draw a conclusion or deduce someone's position from silence, especially when in this case it could equally be argued that he never spoke *for* it either. But, be that as it may, the one key reason why Jesus did not speak against homosexuality was because he was ministering in a Jewish context where it had always been very clearly understood that homosexuality contravened the purposes of God for sexual expression and therefore there was actually no need for him to address the topic. It wasn't an issue that needed dealing with. The Torah, Talmud, Mishnah and Rabbinic literature, wherever homosexuality is mentioned, always take a negative position against it. The reality is that homosexuality has never ever been an accepted practice in Judaism, as opposed to the Greek or Gentile environment in which Paul was working. Hence the reason why Paul speaks against it in his writings and why Jesus never does, it just wasn't an issue for him.

To give one example: in the Mishnah (which was a collection of oral debates between Rabbinic sages from 100 BC to 200 AD), we have the record of a debate between the Sages and Rabbi Judah. In the debate Rabbi Judah writes that a bachelor should not herd animals, nor should two bachelors share a single blanket for fear of homosexuality. The sages countered that it is permissible because the Talmud says, "Israel is not suspected of homosexuality." In other words it was a safe thing to do because homosexuality was considered to be absent from Judaism.

The truth is that Judaism was unique in the ancient world in its stance against homosexuality. But one last point about Jesus. Although it is clear from his context why he had no need to speak about homosexuality, you can often deduce or infer a person's position from what they say about related topics. And in Jesus' discussions on marriage in the synoptic gospels he makes it pretty clear that he understood marriage between a man and a woman to be the right, proper and only domain for sexual activity, and thereby implicitly rejected everything else, including homosexuality.

We're now going to look at four passages. Two in the Old and two in the New Testament where same-sex activity is mentioned. And the first passage to consider is Gen 19:1-17. The story of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Two angels are sent to investigate the level of sin in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Sin so great that there was a universal outcry against the cities. The angels arrive and are met by Lot who asks them to stay with him. The angels want to spend the night in the street but Lot was insistent that they stay with him. They go to his house but just before sitting down to the meal all the men of the city surround the house and demand that the men be brought out to them that they may know them, rape them homosexually. Lot goes out to reason with them and offers instead his daughters which is also a deplorable act but one that shows both the sense of responsibility that Lot felt towards his guests as a host of the Ancient Near East, and also the low estimation of women in that society. As a host Lot was responsible for the safety and dignity of his guests. To allow a guest to be raped by other men (an act used to demean and degrade prisoners of war) was unthinkable in Lot's eyes, so much so that he was willing to offer his daughters, also a deplorable act, but less so than homosexual rape. The townsfolk react badly to his refusal and offer and begin to rough him up but Lot is then rescued by the two angels who blind the men outside. In the morning they all leave and the town is destroyed.

So what's going on here? Well Sodom and Gomorrah were two cities that had become corrupt and evil in their behaviour and practices. According to Ezekiel chapter 16 they were prosperous trading cities that thought so highly of themselves and their achievements that they had become arrogant, gluttons, materialistic, had lost compassion for those in need, and had drifted into detestable practices. Like many societies in the past and present it seems to be a common truth that as a society becomes wealthy and self-sufficient it can develop a sense of superiority, a form of condescension or haughtiness towards others that causes them to look down on those less fortunate than themselves. They see themselves as masters of their own destiny and reject any restraint - divine, moral or otherwise upon their activities and yearnings - and as their basic human needs are met there can be a tendency (especially where there is no moral restraint) to explore other ways of bringing pleasure and excitement into a life that seems to be missing something. And there begins a drift into what we might call a decadent, indulgent and hedonistic life. You see it today, often in those who become very wealthy and move away from their roots like rock stars and film stars. And history is full of examples of such people's utter moral collapse. Failed marriages, drugs, alcohol, gluttony, sexual promiscuity, perversion and so on. And this it seemed was what was happening in the cities of the plains. Jude 1:7 in the New Testament speaks of it when he tells us that Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion.

And so when the two male visitors arrived in the town the menfolk of the town wanted to have these strangers brought out so that they could rape them, have homosexual sex with them. Now some try and argue that the word *yada* ("to know") doesn't refer to sexual activity here but rather to a desire to get to know the two visitors much as a neighbour might like to meet guests we have staying in our own homes. Now while *yada* can also be translated in this way, it doesn't fit the context here. Why was Lot so afraid to let the men sleep on the street for a start? He certainly wasn't afraid of them being offered cups of tea and muffins was he? Why does he offer his daughters in an obviously sexual manner? Why does Jude state that the city is condemned for sexual immorality and perversion, and what are the detestable practices mentioned in Ezekiel if not early exemplars of the sexual immorality condemned later in Leviticus. It is fairly obvious that the reason the men of the town wanted the visitors brought out was not so that they could do a meet and greet but so that they could sexually violate them.

So is this passage a condemnation of same sex activity? The answer is yes and no. The sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was wider than just the sexual perversion that was occurring in those cities. As they had become wealthy they had turned increasingly away from God and into more and more hedonistic and decadent styles of living, looking down on others and ignoring the plight of those less well off. But *part* of that self indulgent lifestyle was a growing level of sexual immorality that would have expressed itself in many forms from promiscuity through to homosexual practices and all of these would have been among the detestable practices mentioned in Ezekiel. So sexual immorality including homosexual practices were part of the reason the cities were being judged, because all those practices stood in contrast to how Israel understood the right ordering of human sexuality from the Genesis accounts.

It is worth noting or understanding that homosexuality was an accepted part all the surrounding cultures of that time as can be readily read in the preserved writings of the Egyptian, Assyrian, and Canaanite cultures. Therefore it would have already been present in Canaanite society in a variety of forms from temple prostitution through to homosexual relationships between consenting adults that were of a more long term and committed nature. That same-sex relationships of this sort existed is confirmed in the Midrash, where in Sifra Aharei Mot 8:8-9 it is stated, "What did they do? A man married a man, and a woman married a woman, and a woman married two men." which the Jewish scholar Maimonides summarised in this way. For women to be sexually active with one another is forbidden, as this is the practice of Egypt, which we were warned against: "Like the practice of the land of Egypt . . . you shall not do, nor shall you do as they do in the land of Canaan." (Leviticus 18:3).

But in Sodom and Gomorrah it had gone beyond temple homosexuality and homosexual sex between consenting partners to homosexual rape. The moral breakdown in that society was nearing the point of collapse, hence the outcry that had gone up to God about those places.

The second set of verses worth looking at occur in Leviticus.

Lev 18:22 "Do not lie with a male as one lies with a woman; that is detestable, and Lev 20:13 "If a man lies with a male as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.

We know that the cultures surrounding Israel at that time were accepting of homosexuality in many forms, and in their law codes it is only mentioned in a punitive way when there was, for example, a case of homosexual rape or a false accusation of being the passive partner. But when we come to the laws laid down in Leviticus we find something very different.

Lev 18:22 states: 'You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination'.

What is interesting here is that the prohibition is very broad. In wording it as it does (by describing the passive partner simply as male) what the passage condemns is every form of homosexuality possible from temple prostitution, to pederasty, right through to same-sex acts between consenting adults. In other words, by using the very generic term 'male' instead of specifying temple prostitute, or catamite or consenting partner, what it condemns is every single one of those practices. The writer has kept the prohibition very broad because in his eyes, in contrast to the surrounding cultures, there is no form of homosexuality that is acceptable.

What's more the practice is condemned as an 'abomination' (*ebhah*) punishable by death, the strongest of three words translated as abomination in the Old Testament, and used for offences deemed specially heinous in God's sight like idolatry and sexual immorality. Sometimes people argue that 'abomination' is not a strong condemnation because it is also used to describe prohibited animals, birds or fish that should not be eaten, or for eating sacrificial food after a prescribed time. While it is true that the word 'abomination' is used in those contexts, it actually translates two different Hebrew words *Sheqets* and *Pigool* which are less strong in the level of

condemnation they convey. *Ebhah*, the strongest word, is in general reserved for idolatry and sexual immorality.

And then, when we come to Lev 20:13, we read: 'If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them'.

Here homosexuality attracts the death penalty, which puts it on a par with adultery (Lev 20:10) or the worst cases of incest (Lev 20:11, 12), which says something of the seriousness with which it was viewed.

It should also be noticed that both parties involved in homosexual intercourse are punished here: the passive partner and the active are both put to death. The implication being that the act of homosexual sex is between consenting partners for if it were a question of homosexual rape as in the case of heterosexual rape only the rapist would have been executed. This is supported by the fact that wherever a non-consenting sexual act has occurred it is qualified by both the context and the use of a term like "seize and lie" as in Deut 22:23-27 where a young woman caught out in the field and raped is not killed along with the rapist because no-one could hear her screams as opposed to one caught in the act in town who did not cry out, implying consent.

In other words these two passages in Leviticus condemn every form of homosexual practice as being outside the norms for the right ordering of human sexuality given to us by God.

Some try and argue that these passages are only condemning temple homosexual prostitution. But the generic wording of these passages prevents us from accepting that definition. Furthermore temple homosexual prostitution is itself specifically condemned elsewhere in Deut 23:17 as a stand-alone practice that was detestable, but here in Leviticus it is clear from the language that all forms of homosexual practice are being condemned.

Others try and argue that these passages are irrelevant to us today because the Levitical laws were primarily designed to help distinguish Israel from the nations around them and that the laws were more arbitrary in nature than moral or absolute. They point to laws on things like not blending two different fibres together, not eating rabbit, shellfish and so on. They argue that because we *do* wear mixed fibres today, *do* eat shellfish and rabbit, that we can therefore ignore the laws of Leviticus as only being relevant to the people of Israel of that time and not for us today.

However there is not much truth in this. As you read through Leviticus what you discover is a plethora or multitude of laws covering many and diverse areas of interest. There were laws on how to operate the tabernacle, laws on priestly duties, how to offer sacrifices, clean and unclean foods, sexual purity, ethical behaviour and more. Taken together the practice of these laws did make the nation of Israel stand apart from the nations around them but that was not their primary purpose, it was a secondary or side benefit that resulted from their practice. The primary purpose of the various laws was to define Israel as a nation, to shape their behaviour and practice as a people devoted to Yahweh and to the principles of right living.

As a result there would have been laws that were only relevant to that time and place but there would have also been universal truths, absolutes that stand across time. Laws on how to manage temple sacrifices, on the observances of feasts, on various Sabbaths, on priestly duties etc. are obviously laws that were peculiar to Israel alone and do not apply to us today. But then there are laws on ethical behaviour like not defrauding or slandering others, not lying, cheating or stealing, bearing grudges and so on, and it would be wrong to suggest that these are not relevant today. Indeed we find their counterparts in many places in the New Testament. Laws like those defining clean and unclean foods are based more upon distinctions between wild and domestic animals, carnivorous and herbivorous creatures and because of an understanding about how various creatures were meant to behave in their allotted environments. There is no evidence to suggest that they were there simply to create a point of difference with the surrounding nations. The laws on not mixing crops, fibres and animals in breeding reflects the Genesis concept of everything being created according to it's kind and that we should not disturb that created order.

So the idea that these laws were arbitrary and written primarily to distinguish the nation of Israel from the nations around them is plainly wrong. And nowhere is this more the case than in chapter 18 of Leviticus, the chapter on sexual purity.

Chapter 18 stands apart as a clear section of teaching introduced with a clear injunction not to do as the nations around them did and finishing with a warning that not obeying these instructions will result in their being defiled, being cut off, and being vomited out of the land as had happened and was happening to the surrounding nations. The implication here is that unlike some of the other laws that were distinctly for Israel's practice alone, the laws on sexual purity applied to God's expectation of how everyone should behave sexually. In other words, these laws were not peculiar to Israel but had a universal application. This is also reflected in the fact that many of these laws on sexual purity were also reflected in the laws, although not always the behaviour, of the nations surrounding Israel. Adultery, pre-marital sex and incest were all condemned. Indeed early Canaanite laws proscribed either death or banishment for most forms of incest, but by the fourteenth century BC, the penalties were reduced to no more than the payment of a fine. So you can't say that these laws on sexual purity were only written to distinguish Israel from the surrounding nations because they too had similar laws, even if they were now being watered down or ignored as their cultures slid into depravity.

But in regards to the laws on homosexuality in chapter 18 and elsewhere the stance taken in Leviticus is striking in comparison to the views of the surrounding nations. Whereas other nations saw homosexual acts as quite acceptable, Leviticus prohibits all forms of homosexual intercourse even where it was consensual. The question that has to be asked is *why?* It cannot be a reaction against the sexual ethics of their neighbours as a whole because many they share in common. Adultery and premarital sex for example were both regarded as wrong by Israel and the ancient near east. So why the clear prohibition against homosexual sex?

The answer comes from a growing awareness that many of the most fundamental principles of Old Testament law are derived from the Genesis creation narratives. When Genesis speaks of the creation of humanity, it states that God deliberately created them male and female in order that they should 'be fruitful and multiply'. Given that homosexual acts are not even potentially reproductive, they

have no place in the thinking of Genesis chapter one. Nor do they have a place in Genesis chapter two where Adam is provided with a helper suitable for him, a woman not another man, a wife not a same sex companion, Eve - the one with whom he will create a one-flesh union.

It seems therefore that Israel's rejection of homosexual acts derives from its doctrine of creation and its view on the right ordering of sexuality. To legitimize homosexual acts would frustrate the divine purpose and deny the perfection of God's provision of two sexes to support and complement one another hence the prohibitions in Leviticus.

But in the end let's be realistic here. The verses prohibiting homosexual sex fall within a list of other prohibited sexual acts. If we apply the rule that allows us to ignore all the teaching of Leviticus as only relevant to that time and place so as to accept homosexuality then it stands to reason we should apply the same rule to the rest of chapter 18 and accept bestiality (sex with animals). It would also mean that incest is now ok. That sex with your mother is acceptable, and sex with your daughter in law. Because these too, like homosexual sex, are all prohibited practices that fall within this chapter. If you're going to accept one then why not all? So let's be real and honest and accept that Leviticus includes both universal and absolute truths that apply across all time as well as some that were distinctive to just that time. Chapter 18 is clearly one that is universal for all time especially when seen in light of the rest of scripture.

I want to now look at two New Testament passages. Romans 1 and then 1 Corinthians 6.

Romans 1:26-27. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Females exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural. In the same way the males abandoned natural intercourse with females and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

Romans chapter one begins by describing how when humanity in general rejects the obvious truth about God there begins a drift into idolatry which is soon followed by a growing level of depravity, degradation, sexual immorality and sinful desires.

But then Paul gets very specific in verses 26 and 27 and starts to describe some of that depravity in more detail. In these verses women and men are described as giving in to shameful lusts where they exchange natural relations for unnatural ones and become inflamed with lust for same-sex activity. Men committing indecent acts with other men.

So what is Paul talking about here?

Giving in to shameful lusts is basically about deliberately violating morally accepted principles of right and wrong where you give in to obsessive and intense, but also inappropriate, sexually-charged desires with little thought as to whether or not this is the right thing to do, and with little attempt to curb the behaviour. And then as an example of this kind of behaviour Paul notes the practice of women and men abandoning or exchanging natural relations for unnatural ones and becoming inflamed with lust for one another. It is clear that he is talking about homosexual activity here.

Significantly the activity is described as unnatural. In other words, this is not something God ordains as the right ordering of human sexuality. This view is enhanced by Paul's use of the Greek words for female and male rather than the words for men and women which immediately takes us back to Genesis 1:27 where the creation of Adam is described. Very deliberately, through his use of the male and female rather than men and women, Paul is implicitly referring back to the Genesis accounts where God made humanity in his image as male and female. This is what is defined as being 'natural' when it comes to sexual activity. The use of male and female also makes the condemnation like Leviticus very generic and not limited to just for example male temple prostitution but all forms of homosexual practice whether consenting or not.

I have to say as I have researched these passages that I find it fascinating how Paul, Jesus and the Levitical code all seem to refer back to the creation narratives of Genesis as the basis for their prohibitions. There is a very clear message here about both what the right ordering of human sexuality is and where these writers derive that view from.

So Romans 1:26-27 clearly condemns homosexual activity as unnatural in any form and contrary to how human sexuality is meant to be expressed.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

The last passage I want to look at is 1 Cor 6:9-11 where are told that persistent, habitual sinful living will result in some not inheriting the Kingdom of God. And then a list is given of particular lifestyles and activities. In relation to what we are discussing today there are three activities and words to take note of.

The first is the Greek word *Porneia* (from which we derive the word pornography) which is well translated by the New International Version as 'sexually immoral' and generally speaking was a generic term used to cover all extra-marital and sexually inappropriate activity from prostitution to sex before marriage, homosexuality and so on. Basically what this passage is saying here, is that choosing deliberately and habitually to act or live in a sexually immoral way will not help you enter the kingdom of God and that is a very hard message for some.

The second word is *malakos* which translated means soft or effeminate and generally speaking was a slang term used to refer to male prostitutes, or boys kept for homosexual sex with an older man or in general the passive partner in a homosexual relationship.

Some have tried to argue that it can just mean effeminate and while this is true I don't see Paul saying that your choice of clothes, posture or style is something that will keep you from the kingdom of God. In this context where the preceding and following terms all relate to sexual sin it

seems pretty obvious which of the two meanings is meant. So again, if you think that being involved in homosexual acts is an acceptable practice for Christians, you're sadly wrong.

The last word however is an interesting one, *arsenokoites*. *Arsenokoites* (ar-sen-ok-oy'-tace) is variously translated as homosexual offenders, those who practice homosexuality or simply as homosexuals.

It appears twice in the New Testament and 73 times in other literature. Literature however that is always later than Paul's writings. And in almost every place that it appears, it is in a vice list like here in 1 Cor 6:9 which means that is a non acceptable practice. The few places it appears outside a vice list it always refers to same-sex activity which would tend to indicate that what is being condemned here is again homosexual practices.

But what is most interesting is that it would seem that this is a word that Paul has coined himself. A new word, a brand new word put together by Paul. Something we call a neologism. And the question we have to ask is how did Paul come up with it because understanding how the word came to be will give us even greater insight into its intended meaning.

So how did Paul come up with this word? In Lev 18:22 and Lev 20:13 which we have already discussed, we are told that a man should not lie with another male as with a woman. Paul as a Greek-educated Jew writing to Gentiles in the Greek language would most likely have used the Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint as his source of Scripture quotations.

The Septuagint condemns in the Leviticus passages a man lying sexually (Greek word *koitai*) with a male (Greek word *arseno*) as with a woman. It seems very likely therefore that Paul has simply combined *arseno* with *koitai* to produce *arsenokoites* like we do with words like "foot ball", "copy right" or "home work", creating as it were a brand new word. In this case to describe simply the activity condemned in Leviticus. By doing this Paul is condemning exactly what Leviticus condemns, homosexual acts of any kind as being unnatural and contrary to Genesis.

So in summary Genesis 19, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, Leviticus, Rom and 1 Corinthians all condemn homosexual activity of any kind not limited to just male temple prostitution or pederasty but all forms of homosexual sex and relationships as unnatural and contrary to what God has ordained as the right ordering of sexual relations in Genesis 1 and 2.

In fact what I found interesting is that in all cases it seems that sexual immorality is a sign of a culture that is moving further and further away from God. I found it interesting too that in some quarters people describe Christianity as being sexually repressive and that modern society is in fact freeing itself from this repression and entering into a new era of sexual liberation. The really sad thing is that this is both false propaganda and delusional because on every measure I can find the Christian approach to sex produces people who are healthier, wealthier and happier with families that consistently score above the average in terms of succeeding at life.

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A sermon by Rev. Tim Mora

So the Biblical picture both in what it affirms as the right ordering of human sexuality and in those places in what it condemns as wrong sends a very clear message that homosexual practices are incompatible with God's view of sexual expression and that heterosexuality is more than just the norm, it is the only acceptable practice.