



Lesson 10 – “Born This Way?”

Homosexuality

On August 17, 2008 presidential candidate Barack Obama stated: “I believe that marriage is the union between a man and a woman. Now, for me as a Christian – for me – for me as a Christian, it is also a sacred union. God’s in the mix.”¹ Less than 15 years later NPR reported in June of 2021 that for the first time ever a majority of Republicans approved of same-sex marriage. 70 % of Americans polled said they were in favor of same-sex marriage, including 55% of Republicans.² In the span of four presidential elections America went from a Democratic presidential candidate opposing same-sex marriage to a majority of Republicans approving it.

Why do you think public opinion was able to be swayed so quickly on this issue?

So how should believers live in a world where saying “I won’t bake a cake for a gay wedding” may result in a massive court case or where saying something as benign as “Homosexuality is a sin before God” might cost someone their job? Not only that, there is now a large segment of Christianity arguing that homosexuality itself is not a sin. So, does the Bible condemn homosexuality? Can gay people be saved? Can Christians ever be tempted by homosexuality? The Bible has answers to all these questions, and in this lesson we will 1) Show what the Bible has to say about the topic of homosexuality 2) Share the Bible’s teaching for Christians who might be struggling with these temptations and 3) See how these issues will impact our evangelism.

What might it cost Christians to hold to biblical truth on this issue today?

¹ <https://justfacts.votesmart.org/public-statement/658545/full-transcript-saddleback-presidential-forum-sen-barack-obama-john-mccain-moderated-by-rick-warren/#.VSbObJTF938> Accessed October 13, 2022.

² <https://www.npr.org/2021/06/09/1004629612/a-record-number-of-americans-including-republicans-support-same-sex-marriage> Accessed October 13, 2022.

The Biblical Case against Homosexuality

We can look at what the Bible has to say about homosexuality both negatively and positively. Negatively, some passages say, “Homosexuality is wrong.” Positively, some passages say, “This is what marriages is,” and the lack of any reference to homosexuality should demonstrate to us that homosexuality is outside of God’s creational pattern. We’ll first look at what the Bible has to say about marriage, and then see what it has to say against homosexuality.

The Bible’s View of Marriage

One of the favorite statements of those arguing God accepts homosexuality is “Jesus never condemned homosexuality.” While this is technically true, it misses the point. There are a lot of things Jesus never condemned, including many sexual sins, but which we can be sure He would never have approved of. Jesus never directly condemned pedophilia, bestiality, or incest, and yet we realize those things are clearly wrong. And Jesus did, in fact, address the issue of homosexuality, although indirectly.

Can you remember from a previous lesson where Jesus addresses the question of marriage?

When asked about divorce, Jesus was clear that God’s intent was never divorce. While the Pharisees came with a technical question about the law,³ Jesus didn’t debate the structure or logic or grammar of the passage (Deuteronomy 24:1), but instead went to a different passage altogether – Genesis 1 and 2. He shows them that the real answer to their question can be found by looking back to God’s ideal – creation. Jesus goes out of His way to include that this creational account includes “male and female,” pointing out that God’s pattern includes a man and a woman.

Why do you think that Jesus didn’t directly address homosexuality?

The Bible’s Prohibitions against Homosexuality

Seven passages are hotly debated regarding whether or not God forbids homosexuality. Several of these passages overlap, so we will examine them under four headings:

1. Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19 and Jude 7)
2. Mosaic prohibitions (Leviticus 18:22; 20:18)
3. Paul’s description of homosexuality (Romans 1)
4. Homosexuals? (1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10)

For each of these, we will show how those arguing for the LGBTQ understand them, and then how we can respond.

³ In a previous lesson we explained that this was likely a result of a debate over the meaning of “indecency of a thing” as a grounds of divorce. Did this mean “sexual immorality” or simply “a thing”? One was restrictive, the other was essentially a no-fault divorce.

1. Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19 and Jude 7)

Those arguing the Bible has no problem with homosexuality will argue the real problem with Sodom and Gomorrah wasn't that they were after men, the real crime was attempted rape and inhospitality. They will point to other places in Scripture that call out Sodom and Gomorrah's sins as pride, idleness, and inhospitality (cf Ezekiel 16:49-50; Luke 17:28-29) and will argue that nowhere in Scripture is the Sodom's sin connected to homosexuality. As for Jude 7, the argument is made that this is tied with the angels mentioned in Jude 6 by the phrase "in like manner," thereby calling out the men of Sodom for pursuing angels, not men.

How would you respond to these arguments?

The problem is that Jews from the time of Christ frequently read condemned homosexuality in part on the basis of Sodom. Josephus and Philo, as well as other Pseudepigraphal works condemned Sodom for their unnatural behaviors.⁴ Ezekiel may not describe homosexuality, but the "abomination" of 16:50 is the same word used to describe homosexuality in Leviticus. Finally, the men in Sodom did not know their guests were angels, so they did not go after angels, they went after what they believed were men.

2. Mosaic Prohibitions (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13)

Twice in Leviticus prohibitions against homosexuality: "Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination" (18:22) and "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" (20:13). Those who try to argue that homosexuality is acceptable will argue 1) that this is the Old Testament law, so it isn't binding today; 2) this reflects a patriarchal society which thought that treating a man like a woman dishonored the man; 3) this was prohibiting prostitution that went along with false worship.

How would you respond to these arguments?

Two primary responses can be made to these arguments. First, the passages themselves are not limited in any way and show up in lists that condemn all kinds of sexual sins, such as bestiality and incest. While it is true that homosexuality often went along with the worship of pagan gods, specific language for that isn't used here, although it could have been since it is used elsewhere (cf Deuteronomy 23:17; 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12⁵). Rather, this language is as general as could be – it is wrong for a man to lie with a man as with a woman. Similarly, the claim that this is a result of the patriarchal thinking of an earlier culture reads a lot into this passage that isn't there, and ignores the fact that Jews (and Christians) throughout the centuries have read this as an ironclad prohibition.

⁴ Thomas Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude* (New American Commentary Series), 452-3.

⁵ The KJV uses the translation "sodomites." The Hebrew is *qadesh*, which comes from the root for "holy" (Hebrew *qadash*) and so these are "holy ones." Yet it is clear that these "holy ones" are consecrated male prostitutes, and most modern translations bring this out with some phrase such as "male cult prostitute."

Beyond this glaring problem, however, is the question of whether God ever forbid these actions. If God did indeed make some people “gay,” as is now argued, did he for 1,500 years under the law forbid people from acting out on that identity that He gave them? It’s one thing for God to forbid tasty shrimp and bacon for 1,500 years, but what would it say about God if He did actually make some people “gay” and then forbid them from “living authentically.”

3. Paul’s description of homosexuality (Romans 1:24-27)

Romans 1 is clearest biblical condemnation of homosexuality. Paul explicitly states both male and female homosexuality is a perversion against nature. Whereas some tried to get around this by saying that Paul was concerned about *heterosexuals* going against *their* nature and engaging in homosexuality, more recently scholars have been honest and admitted that this is not what is going on. One such author wrote this:

“Though he does not say it, he may well have in mind what his contemporaries railed against: [drunk orgies and pedophilia]... Nothing, however, indicates that he is exempting some same-sex intercourse as acceptable. It is all an abomination for Paul...”

“Paul shared with his contemporaries the view that human beings were either male or female. He would have agreed with Philo... in laughing off Aristophanes’ myth which claimed that some people are naturally inclined towards members of their own sex. While in Paul’s world that idea comes to the surface occasionally, though rarely, we can be fairly confident that Paul and his fellow Jews would have rejected the notion...”⁶

Sadly, this same author goes on to affirm homosexual relationships, arguing that we know more than Paul and that he got it wrong here. When summarizing his position in a book about multiple views on the question of homosexuality and the church, the editor summarized his view this way:

“Dr. William Loader is widely regarded as the foremost scholar on sexuality in ancient Judaism and Christianity... Bill argues for an affirming view of same-sex relations; however, *he fervently believes that we must take the Bible seriously and that the Bible prohibits all forms of same-sex relations.* What the Bible says and what the Bible means are very clear – same-sex relations are wrong. But every faithful application of the Bible to contemporary ethics must consider advancements in biology, anthropology, sociology, and other fields related to sexuality and gender. For hermeneutical and ethical reasons, Loader affirms the sanctity of faithful, monogamous, same-sex relations.”⁷

What is wrong with Dr. Loader’s view? Where does the ultimate authority of right and wrong rest in such a view?

We are in a very dangerous place when we say “Yes, this is what the Bible said, but the biblical author got this wrong.” Doing so ultimately puts us in power over God’s Word and will permit us to distort Scripture so we can match the spirit of our age.

⁶ William Loader, *Making Sense of Sex: Attitudes towards Sexuality in Early Jewish and Christian Literature*, 137-139.

⁷ Preston Sprinkle, “Introduction” in *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church*, 13. Emphasis added.

4. Homosexuals? (1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10)

Does the Bible ever use the word “homosexual?” Modern proponents of homosexuality will say no word should be translated as “homosexual” because that word wasn’t invented until the late nineteenth century. But none of the English words we use were around when the Bible was written, so the real question is, “Was there a Greek word that meant then what we mean today by homosexual?” And there does appear to be such a word: *arsenokoitai* (1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10).

This Greek word is a combination of two other words: *arsen*, which means “male” or “men,” and *koite*, which means “bed.” An *arsenokoitai* would then be a “male-bedder.” Paul was the first person to coin this term, and he was borrowing from the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) because the Levitical prohibitions on homosexuality (18:22; 20:13) uses these exact same words: “you shall not lie (*koite*) with a male (*arsen*) as with a woman. Once again, those arguing for the legitimacy of same-sex relationships will try to say this was referring to a special kind of homosexuality, that which was abusive and coercive. But Paul very clearly seems to be pulling from the Old Testament, and as we’ve seen that command was a general command to all. Further, we saw early from Romans 1 that Paul saw all same-sex relationships as wrong, so it would make sense that this word was a catch all for all types of relationships of this nature, both coerced and consensual.⁸

Why do you think there is so much debate over these passages?

Which passage appears to you to be the clearest in prohibiting homosexuality?

Helping Believers Think Rightly about Homosexuality

What do you do if you have a friend or loved one who claims to be a Christian and seems to be seeking the Lord but one day confides in you: “I think I might be gay”? Such language is common in the world today, but is it biblical?

What would be the first thing you say back to someone who claims to be a Christian and tells you “I think I might be gay”?

Thinking Rightly about Identity

In a previous lesson we saw the whole focus of identity is a fairly recent and modern obsession, and that our true identity is found in who God created us to be (male and female) and for believers our new status (in Christ).

When someone says they “are gay,” what are they using to define their identity? How is this similar or different from the Bible’s understanding of identity?

⁸ For a very deep dive on the translation of this word, see “The Story of Arsenokoites according to BDAG” by Mark Ward. <https://byfaithweunderstand.com/2019/06/26/the-story-of-%E1%BC%80%CF%81%CF%83%CE%B5%CE%BD%CE%BF%CE%BA%CE%BF%E1%BD%B7%CF%84%CE%B7%CF%82-according-to-bdag/>

The Bible defines us, not by our broken desires, but by our position in Christ. And those who are in Christ have been cleansed from their past sins and have been made new (2 Corinthians 5:17). 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 in particular states that “such were some of you,” and that includes those who had engaged in homosexual behavior. This does not mean a person will never again struggle with the temptation to sin, and our temptations to sin will be different from person to person (James 1:13-15). But it does mean that those temptations don’t define who we are, rather we must find our identity in who God declares us to be in Christ.

What is lost if a Christian continues to identify as “gay,” even if they vow never to act on such desires and even to fight them out of a love for Christ?

Thinking Rightly about Discipleship

Romans 1 teaches homosexuality is perversion, but it doesn’t teach it is an unpardonable sin. Paul holds it up as the classic example of replacing the truth of God with a lie, but he includes a long list of other sins that also flow from this core error of rejecting God (Romans 1:28-32). As we saw earlier, the Corinthian church included some who practiced homosexuality before coming to Christ (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Once we stop seeing homosexuality as an ironclad identity or as an unpardonable sin, we can begin to see it for what it really is: another area in which we must die to self so that we can walk by the Spirit (Matthew 16:24-25; Galatians 5:16-17).

Why do you think homosexuality is often held up as a uniquely terrible sin? Is there any value to this way of thinking? Is there danger in this way of thinking?

If overcoming homosexual desire is viewed like any other sin, what would you say to someone who confided in you that they were struggling with such desires?

Sharing the Gospel with Homosexuals

In our last section we argued that there is no such thing as a “gay identity.” People have a sin nature, they desire what God has forbidden, and some of them act on those desires. This is true for lying, stealing, murder, and homosexuality. If this is the case, how should we think about sharing the gospel with those who are living contrary to God’s plan.

Homosexuals are not beyond the reach of the gospel (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

No sin is so bad that someone cannot be saved. Those who have thrown themselves into the LGBTQ movement can still be saved. When we meet people who are living a gay lifestyle, we should pray and hold out hope that they, too, can be saved.

Why do we think that some people are too far gone to be saved? What does this show us about our understanding of God’s power?

Homosexuals' greatest problem is their rebellion against God (Romans 3:23; 6:23).

How would you respond if someone asked, "Will God send me to hell for being gay?"

Is homosexuality a sin? Yes. Will homosexuality send someone to hell? Yes. But homosexuality is one sin among many, and a person's greatest need is not to stop being gay, but to turn from their sin to the Savior. When sharing the gospel, we need to realize that we are calling on rebels to lay down their arms and accept Christ's free offer of salvation by faith. We don't want to hide that one of those sins is homosexuality, but we also don't want them to think the only problem in their life is that they are following this particular lust.

Homosexuals are saved like everyone else (Romans 10:13)

Sharing the gospel with someone who claims to be gay is at its core not different from sharing the gospel with someone who is proudly living in an affair, or who is a well-known blasphemer, or who has made a living on embezzlement. All sinners need to recognize their sin and turn in faith to Christ for forgiveness of sin.