



* **The Ethics of
Sexuality**

Biblical Perspectives on Homosexuality

- * To outline the basis for orthodoxy (right teaching)
- * To analyse the Biblical References to Homosexuality
- * To look at ways of ministering to gay people in the congregation
- * To look briefly at the wider impact of the debate

* Objectives of Presentation

- * I begin with Sodom and Gomorrah, because this is often cited as an argument against Homosexuality
- * Genesis 19:1-19 tells the story of Lot and two angels who visit him in the city of Sodom
- * During their visit they come under threat from the men of the city- “the men of Sodom, from the young to the aged, all the people from the outer limits (of the city)” (v4) .

* Sodom and Gomorrah

- * Genesis 19:5 “Where are the men who came to you tonight. Bring them out that we may know (Heb. Yidah) them”.
- * Yidah is the usual word for knowing something. Here, as elsewhere, its meaning is extended to include having sexual relations, both gentle and violent. Other verbs include “lying with someone”.

*The Desire of the Men

- * Sodomy, or anal penetrative sex, was widely known in the ANE as a form of ritual humiliation
- * Prisoners of war in the ANE were often sodomised by their captors
- * The OT laws do not specifically forbid sodomy

* **Sodomy**

- * The primary sin of the men of Sodom is the breach of hospitality. The ANE upheld the protection of guests as an unquestioned obligation on all citizens
- * Lot offers his virgin daughters as a substitute indicating his respect for this obligation
- * Since all the men of Sodom are involved, the issue is not about homosexuality but about ritual sodomy (in this case the rape of the strangers).

* The Sin of the Men

- * Leviticus is a priestly document dealing mainly with sacrifices and ritual purity
- * Almost all of the laws are no longer applied by Christians today, inline with the Christian doctrine that we are not under the Law.
- * Leviticus 18 deals with forbidden sexual relationships - mainly around having sex with certain relatives (Lev 18:6).

* Leviticus 18

- * Any sexual act involved a certain level of ritual impurity because it involved bodily fluids
- * Men were to be careful with their semen, that it was not mixed with other bodily fluids, like blood (Lev 18:19).
- * Having sex with the neighbours wife might result in the mixing of the man's semen with that of his neighbours - “sharing the wife's impurity” (Lev 18:20)

* The Social Context

- * “And you shall not lie with a male as one lies with a woman; it is disgusting (Heb. To'avah)”
- * Note that here there is no punishment attached - it is what we call Apodictic Law like the Ten Commandments (Casuistic Law has punishments attached).

* **Leviticus 18:22**

- * Leviticus 18 deals generally with ‘shameful’ or ‘impure’ mixing of bodily fluids.
- * Male on male sexuality is considered shameful because it involves the mixing of one man’s fluids with another.
- * The next verse deals with sexual relations with animals (v23) and it concludes “It is a [shameful] mixing (Heb. Tevel)”. This gives the clue for interpreting all the laws here

* Literary Context of Lev 18

- * Leviticus 20 is a collection of Casuistic Laws with attached punishments on various (mainly) sexual sins
- * The primary aim is not to behave as the former inhabitants of Canaan have behaved (Lev 20:23, see also Lev 18:30)
- * Once more the mixing of bodily fluids is a factor (Lev 20: 12,18, 20).

* Leviticus 20

- * “Any man (Heb. Ish) who lies with a male (Heb. Zakar) as one lies with a woman (Heb. Ishah) has committed an abomination (Heb. Toevah); they shall be put to death; their blood (guilt) shall be on them”
- * Verse 12 (immediately before) speaks of “a shameful mixture” of blood and semen (cf. v18)
- * The death-verdict includes crimes like having sex with a relative, with an animal, but not uncovering a relative’s nakedness (v17), which merits banishment .

* Leviticus 20:13

- * Leviticus 18 and 20 are the only references to homosexuality as a forbidden practice, if we assume that the sin of Sodom relates to sodomy and rape.
- * Both chapters are conditioned by the notion of ‘forbidden mixing’ in the context of ritual purity
- * We need to decide if Christians are still expected to uphold ritual purity or not?

* Conclusion for the Old Testament

- * The NT has only one undisputed reference to homosexuality (in Romans 1:26) and lesbianism (in Romans 1:27)
- * Other (disputed) references include 1 Tim 1:10 and 1 Cor 6:9
- * There is no Greek or Hebrew word for homosexuals or lesbians so that the practice in the NT is to classify it as 'unnatural intercourse' (Rom 1:26-7).

* New Testament Texts

- * The most common form of Homosexual practice in NT times is that of Adult Males with Youths
- * The Dead Sea scrolls orders women and youths (why youths?) to leave camp before the Holy War, since sexual intercourse would interfere with the ritual purity of the men.
- * Adult male on male was rare, but not unknown.
- * Female on female was known through Greek poetry from the Island of Lesbos

* New Testament Times

- * Paul is developing in this opening chapter the idea that humankind has a natural (inbuilt) knowledge of God and his laws (Rom 1:32).
- * He uses homosexuality as an indication of one of the many sins (see v29-30), including backbiters, gossiping, disobedience to parents and breaking agreements which, in Paul's eyes, typify his generation.
- * He bases his argument on what is natural.

* Context of Romans 1

- * Verse 26: “That is why [see v25], God gave them up to passions (Gr. Pathos) of dishonour (Gr. Atimia - literally no-honour); for the females of them exchanged the natural (Gr. Phusike) use for the one against (Gr. Para) nature”.
- * Verse 27: “Likewise also the males, having let go of the natural (Gr. Phusike) use of the female, burned out in the lust (Gr. Oretzeus) of them for one another, males for males, the indecency working down and receiving, in themselves, the return reward of their error.”

* Romans 1:26+27

- * There is no doubt that Paul is speaking about lesbianism and homosexuality and that he considers both of them to be a sin, comparable to disobedience to parents and gossiping.
- * In the detail of these verses, there is a double action - both men and women have given up the natural relations in preference for unnatural relations.

* Interpretation of Rom 1:26-7

What does Paul say?

- * Paul sees the sin of both men and women as acting against the natural (God given) order of life. But is it an unnatural inclination?
- * Paul sees the men, in particular, as ‘burning with lust’ - lust is considered a sin by Jesus.

* **Going Deeper 1**

What Paul does not say!

- * Paul is not speaking about homosexuality involving children (boys)
- * Paul is not speaking about sodomy

Presumably

- * Paul is not speaking about relationships built on love and affection, but on lust
- * Paul is not speaking about Gay People but heterosexual people, who also have gay sex.

*** Going Deeper 2**

- * Asks “How did Paul understand the homosexual behaviour he condemned? (Rom 1:27)
- * Answers, “Evidently he understood it as freely chosen by people for whom heterosexual relations were ‘natural,’ and as chosen (by heterosexual people) because of their lust (‘consumed with passion’).
- * Continues, “The question is whether Paul condemns all homosexual behaviour or only that which is freely chosen, because of their insatiable lust, by people with a heterosexual orientation”.

*** International Standard
Bible Encyclopaedia
(1988) Vol. 4, P437**

- * I Corinthians 6:9 lists unrighteous people and includes “fornicators (Gr. Pornoi), idolaters, adulterers, soft men (Gr. Malakoi) and people who have anal sex (Gr. Arsenokoitai)”.
- * The NIV translates the last two as “male prostitutes” and “homosexual offenders”.
- * REB has “sexual pervert” to cover both
- * RSV has “homosexuals”
- * ISBE as passive and active partners in male homosexual sexual practice (Vol. 4, p437).

* I Corinthians 6:9

- *The term ‘malakoi’ in the major Liddell and Scott Greek Dictionary has several translations, based on the core meaning of ‘softness’, including most commonly “cowards” and in rare cases “the effeminate”.
- *The term ‘arsenokoitai’ covers all forms of anal sex including violent sodomy.
- *So on the basis of the Greek to limit either word to homosexuals would be contrary to the basic rules of translation.

*The Greek Version

- * People who act like this will not be allowed into God's Kingdom
- * However, even some of the Corinthians were like that, but have been purified by Christ and forgiven
- * Paul states that all things are permissible but not everything is beneficial
- * He concludes that the body is not meant for sexual immorality but to be the temple of God.

*** Paul concludes**

- * Once again, the disputed term occurs in a list of sins preceded by fornicators and followed by liars and oath-breakers
- * The term is again ‘arsenokoitai’ or people who have anal sex.
- * NIV and NEB have ‘perverts’
- * NASV has ‘homosexuals’

* **I Timothy 1:10**

- * There are three passages (two in the OT and one in the NT) which clearly refer to male homosexuality and one to female homosexuality
- * There is no doubt that the Bible considered some forms of homosexuality to be sinful and unnatural
- * If homosexuality is unnatural it is a sin, but if there is a natural explanation, it changes the argument.

* Conclusions on the Biblical Passages

So we now ask, how should we respond to gay people, especially those in our congregations? I suggest the following:

- * We start with the fact that we are all ‘sinners’ and need God’s forgiveness
- * Gay people are not more sinful than any other category of Christians
- * We all need to strive for a holy life and to ensure that our practices are directed to that end.

* Responding to Gay People

Personal Suggestions out of my experience of counselling gay people:

- * Establish where the person is in terms of their faith and their life-style
- * Encourage them to move to the next level of holiness: if they are clubbing, then to find a single partner: if they are in a loving relationship to remain faithful: if they have not yet become sexually active, to remain celibate.

* Counselling Gay People

- * Anglicans have a history of 'live and let live' which has stood them in good stead in the past
- * The Covenant document has not brought unity because of its controversial section on the extended powers of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC)
- * The potential divisions (Gafcon and Southern Cone) are already in place and will not go away
- * The contention is no longer just homosexuality but now includes the authority of Scripture.

* The Situation across the Commune