

Homosexuality and the Church

During the past twenty-five years, society has worked hard to convince us that homosexuality is merely a lifestyle choice made by human beings in order for them to express themselves sexually. They have said that it is often the natural inclination of those who have been genetically predisposed to a “same sex” attraction rather than to a heterosexual relationship. As this philosophy has won wide political and intellectual acceptance among those in high places of influence, a new expectation of *tolerance* has emerged that is *intolerant* of those who would profess the traditional values of marriage, family, and a view of homosexuality that sees it as a perversion.

The Christian church often follows the trends of modern society, although perhaps lagging behind by a few years. We have seen this with dress, music, amusements, and even some theological issues. In the discussion of homosexuality, some denominations within mainline Christianity have embraced practicing gays and lesbians, welcoming them with open arms into the assembly and affirming them as members in good standing, even ordaining them to the clergy. Others, generally within the evangelical community, have held to the biblical view of homosexuality and opposed the inclusion of practicing gays and lesbians within their ranks.

Yet, regardless of the whims and trends of society, Christians must understand and follow the clear teachings of scripture. Although not a popular question among many liberal religious followers, true believers must ask, “What does the Bible teach about homosexuality?” Then, when the truth is discovered, we need to hold it forth as the standard for our practice as obedient servants of God, regardless of the accusations of intolerance and bigotry we will attract - even from within the Church.

It was clearly God’s intention from the beginning that the human race be created male and female. Genesis 1:27, 28 reads:

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Chapter 2 describes in more detail the relationship between the man and the woman, and God pronounces them a perfectly joined unit, each supplying what was lacking in the other. In Genesis 2:24 we read:

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

This became the example for all of mankind for the duration of their time on earth. One man, one woman, created in the image of God and declared by Him to be *very good* (Gen. 1:31).

When sin entered the human race, through the temptation of Eve and Adam in the Garden, that image became diminished, not only in the first parents but in their descendants throughout the human race. We became slaves to sin, according to Romans 6:6.

Knowing fully the propensity of fallen man, God, in His infinite grace and mercy, gave them a Law to govern themselves according to His will and good pleasure. This Law reflected His character and clearly established *His unchangeable standard for right and wrong*.

Specifically, to Moses and the children of Israel, He mandated that this Law be written down, observed, and obeyed. The Law contained moral, civil, and ceremonial components that His chosen ones were obliged to keep - often under the penalty of death if broken!

Fortunately, the revealed mind of God exists for us today in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. These inspired scriptures are given to equip us for a life of godliness when appropriately interpreted and consistently applied. They contain positive commands for what we are to do, and negative prohibitions for the sins from which we are to flee. Within God's will for mankind there is a great deal revealed about the sin of homosexuality. Some are express commands and others are examples of immoral conduct, expressing its wickedness in God's eyes. While these commands were expressly given to Israel, their *moral components* were later reiterated within the epistles for the Church of Jesus Christ (although the death penalty is no longer prescribed).

In Old Testament times, there was no question about God's view of homosexuality. In Leviticus 18:22 we read:

You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination.

Leviticus 20:13 goes on to say:

If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them.

Within the vocabulary for sin, note the strong use of the terms *abomination* and *detestable act*. There is not even the hint of acceptance of this as a lifestyle choice or a genetically pre-disposed behavior.

Later, we read in the Book of the Judges, a period characterized by the phrase, "*everyone did what was right in his own eyes*," about a fierce slaughter that nearly annihilated the tribe of Benjamin by the other tribes of Israel. All because the perverted men of the city of Gibeah wanted to sexually assault a visiting Levite. Judges 19:22ff records the scene:

While they were making merry, behold, the men of the city, certain perverted men, surrounded the house, pounding the door; and they spoke to the owner of the house, the old man, saying, "Bring out the man who came into your house that we may have relations with him." Then the man, the owner of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my fellows, please do not act so wickedly; since this man has come into my house, do not commit this act of folly. Here is my virgin daughter and his concubine. Please let me bring them out that you may ravish them and do to them whatever you wish. But do not commit such an act of folly against this man."

The Book of 1 Kings reveals that there were male temple prostitutes at that time. Male prostitutes in Old Testament times worked for their male patrons, not for females. Listen to what God says concerning them in 1 Kings 14:24:

And there were also male cult prostitutes in the land. They did according to all the abominations of the nations which the LORD dispossessed before the sons of Israel.

Apparently, they remained on duty until King Jehoshaphat banished them as recorded in 1 Kings 22:46:

And the remnant of the sodomites who remained in the days of his father Asa, he (Jehoshaphat) expelled from the land.

As we move in the New Testament, we find the Apostle Paul describing the severely fallen condition of man who blindly rejects God, the Creator of heaven and earth as well as the living Christ. As a penalty for stubborn unbelief, we read that God gave them over to their own lusts that burn within them. Read Roman 1:24-27:

Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

Homosexuality is also categorically dealt with in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Here he classifies it within a list of life-dominating, habitual sins that cannot coexist with the Christian faith. Note 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

We know that the Body of Christ contains many reformed sinners who have repented of their sins and denounced their own sinful tendencies. Although the temptation to sin is still real, we are no longer under its bondage. Even the sins listed in the passage quoted above can be washed away and new life can result. Otherwise, how could Paul claim what he does in verse 11?

And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

The truly repentant will inherit the kingdom of God! They are forgiven and washed clean by the shed blood of Christ.

Finally, we have Paul's words to Timothy that explain the proper use of the moral law of God for the church today. This law of God will bring conviction where sin persists. It acts as a light to reveal those things that are in the darkest places of the soul. He includes in his letter a variety of immoral acts, including homosexuality. As we read in 1 Timothy 1:8-10:

But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching,

Homosexuality isn't just another lifestyle choice. It is sin, nothing more and nothing less. And it must be dealt with the same way as any other sin is dealt with according to the Bible. It must be confronted and exposed. The Christian church today is given clear instruction as to how sin must be dealt with within the gospels and epistles of the New Testament. The doctrine of church discipline must apply to this issue as well as to any other persistent sin, and each local assembly is obligated to seek the restoration of sinners through repentance and forgiveness. This can often be the greatest expression of love that can be offered to the erring one. However, embracing homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle degrades the Scriptures and invites God to mete out justice directly upon both the sinner and the assembly that ignores God's Word.

Can a homosexual change? Of course. Those mentioned above in 1 Corinthians 6:11 must have changed! Let's not allow the world to redefine what God calls sin. Sin occurs when our self-will ignores or opposes God's will. By confessing our sins, God will forgive us and cleanse us (1 John 1:9). By ignoring our sins, we invite His chastening (Hebrews 12:6).

All Christians struggle with their thought lives, both heterosexuals as well as homosexuals. But we know that we can change our thought lives. Ephesians 4:22-24 gives us the process that can be continually applied when temptation to sin occurs:

that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Renewing the mind takes place as we apply Colossians 3:1,2:

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

Should professing homosexuals be allowed to worship freely within the body of Christ? This must obviously depend upon their spiritual condition. If they are not professing believers, by all means, invite them in and evangelize them! Just like any other sinner in need of salvation, they deserve to hear the gospel. Furthermore, we can't expect them to obey the Word of God if they are not in the family of God. Wouldn't we welcome people with sinful pasts to come to the cross where they can find forgiveness for their sins and true peace?

But, suppose they profess to be saved and believe that the church that teaches homosexuality as sin is doctrinally incorrect? They believe that God made them the way they are, and they celebrate their diversity within the Body of Christ. (In addition, they think that we should, too.) Are we to welcome them into the assembly?

Let's ask ourselves, How would we handle a "Christian" in the midst of an adulterous affair who sought to attend worship? Would we welcome them with open arms and ignore their sin? What about a practicing "Christian" child molester who believes that sex between adults and children is perfectly fine? I am sure that we would all answer that we would get these people away from the assembly as soon as possible. Why would we treat a "Christian" homosexual any different?

The Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 5:10-11:

I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner--not even to eat with such a person.

The Bible gives clear guidelines for the errant professing Christian who fails to hear the truth. As church leaders, we are required and empowered to uphold the word of truth and to take whatever measures necessary to see it carried out in a timely fashion.

As the world continues to gain ground in the battle for the truth, let's renew our efforts to be people of THE truth, upholding biblical values and standards. Let's pray that God would bless us as we do His will, and that He would give us the courage to deal with sin in a manner that exalts His Holy Name.

