

A Scriptural Response to Homosexuality

Lesson 8: Homosexuality and the New Testament (Part 2)

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps we should not be surprised that we do not have a record of Christ speaking directly to the matter of same-sex attraction and behavior, as the majority of his ministry took place in Israel among the Jews, where such practices were neither religiously accepted nor as dominant in the surrounding culture. However, as the gospel spread into the Greco-Roman world this was not the case. While modern terms of “heterosexual” and “homosexual” were unknown in ancient times, homosexual behavior (and sexually promiscuous behavior in general) was not only tolerated but promoted as an available option, especially for men. This meant that Paul in particular, whose primary mission field was the Gentiles, had to address this sin repeatedly and directly, especially among those who had left paganism and converted to faith in Christ. As we examine Paul’s words, we will again see many of the same twists and distortions that had been used to explain away homosexuality as a sin in the Old Testament used again. We will also see that homosexuality is rarely mentioned in isolation (i.e. it is not regarded as the paramount sin with other sins being “less” or less injurious or incompatible with faith).

ROMANS 1

v. 18-25 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. ²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

a.) What can anyone naturally learn about God by observing his creation?

b.) However because of the spiritual darkness, blindness, and corruption into which all humans are born since the fall (i.e. original sin), what critical spiritual error do even the wisest make? (v.21-23,25)

c.) Sinful humanity is in rebellion against God and refuses to obey what is evident from nature and conscience. In response God often allows the pursuit of more sin and wickedness to be its own punishment. What does Paul note as one area where God allowed this moral slide to happen? (v.24)

v. 26-27 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.²⁷ In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women 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.

a.) Note that Paul here is using the natural form and function of male and female anatomy to make his case against the practice and promotion of homosexuality in general.

b.) While v. 26 is the only place in Scripture that lesbianism is directly denounced, how do we know that such attraction and behavior is equally displeasing in God's sight?

c.) Pro-gay authors assert that what Paul is condemning here is heterosexuals engaging in homosexual acts (which would be contrary to their heterosexual "nature"), thereby exchanging "natural relations for unnatural ones." How to respond?

d.) How do we know that Paul is not talking about those who were engaging in homosexual rape or who experimented with homosexuality out of sinful curiosity and then abandoned it?

e.) As we saw with the prohibitions against homosexuality in the Old Testament (cf. Leviticus 18 and 20), some authors claim that Paul's disapproval is not of homosexuality itself, but rather in as far as this practice was connected with idol worship. The same response applies.

f.) There are natural negative consequences of engaging in homosexual behavior (v. 27). While by no means limited to practicing homosexuals, they do by virtue of the involved behaviors face elevated rates of STD's, HIV, cancer, and other infections, which along with a higher rate of suicide, result in a significantly decreased life expectancy. As with many other sinful behaviors, the pursuit of them brings self-destruction and God's wrath. As Paul writes elsewhere, "God is not mocked. A man reaps what he sows" (Gal. 6:7).

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (NIV 2011)

a.) What does it mean that someone “will not inherit the kingdom of God”?

b.) (Similar to what we saw in God’s Old Testament laws in Leviticus) what do you notice about the list of heaven-excluding sins here?

c.) Do these sins exclude from the kingdom because they are so bad, or so much worse than others Paul could have listed? If not, then what is causing the exclusion?

1 Corinthians 6:11 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.

a.) What reassurance does Paul give the Corinthians who were coming out of these sins and still struggling with them?

b.) Give some real-life examples from Scripture of those who were once lost and enslaved by sin, but through faith and forgiveness in Christ became new and left their sinful past behind.

CONCLUSION: WORDS OF WARNING AND ENCOURAGEMENT

Jude 3-8, 16-25 ³ Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. ⁴ For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

⁵ Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. ⁶ And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. ⁷ In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

⁸ In the very same way, these dreamers pollute their own bodies, reject authority and slander celestial beings. [...] ¹⁶ These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage. ¹⁷ But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. ¹⁸ They said to you, “In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.” ¹⁹ These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.

²⁰ But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. ²¹ Keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. ²² Be merciful to those who doubt; ²³ snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

²⁴ To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—²⁵ to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.