

Homosexual Marriage: Examining the Texts: Part Two

OUTLINE

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INTRODUCTION

There are several things you will hear when the bible enters into the discussion on homosexual marriage. Firstly, you will hear the comment that there are only a few verses in the bible that address the issue. Secondly, you will hear that the bible is speaking to only certain types of homosexual behaviour but is not addressing life-long loving unions, nor orientation. Thirdly, the trajectory set by the NT if taken to its logical conclusion in fact supports gay marriage. It is only in the last generation with the influence of Liberation theology, reader response theories and other post-modern influences on the reading of the Bible that anyone would even think to say that the bible in fact supports homosexual marriage. The battle has been brought to the very bible and the Christian is being challenged that they are reading it all wrong. If you go onto the internet and this is one of the most common things you will find in the comments sections on the issue of homosexuality. You will often have some vocal person who has read a few liberal scholars spouting that the bible does not condemn homosexual marriage. The common Christian has not spent deliberate time looking at the various texts and can sometimes feel flustered at the apparently valid arguments that are brought against the traditional view. Sadly I have encountered those who are trapped in a homosexual lifestyle and think that the bible in fact condones their activities and the lies they believe about their identities because of these confusing arguments. So today we will be looking at the various texts and putting many fallacies to bed.

Genesis 1-2

To say that the bible only has a few texts that address the issue of homosexuality is like saying the bible doesn't say anything about abortion, euthanasia, nuclear warfare or heroine. The whole worldview of the bible has something to say about sexual behaviour and sexual identity. Many different parts of the bible and doctrines are directly relevant to the issue of homosexual marriage. For example, God in His role and right as Creator who is Holy and places us under law is directly relevant. Our identity as image bearers and being made as male and female comes to bear. The God ordained purpose of marriage to include procreation and to act as a redemptive analogy is relevant. The fall with the entrance of sin and how sin corrupts God's original design and we make ourselves like God in our self-determinations. The long history of human suffering when we step outside of God's design, when we idolise sex, and do our own thing is portrayed graphically in scripture. On and on we could go showing how many parts of the bible and many different doctrines are directly

relevant to this issue. It is only those who refuse to reckon with the bible as a whole and with God who is the author of Scripture who seek to obfuscate the issue by trying to make out that any mention of the issue is miniscule and irrelevant. I hope to show that this view is just plain wrong if not also dishonest.

In Genesis 1:26-2:24 we have the creation and marriage of Adam and Eve. Now you may think that it is irrelevant that I go to the early chapters of Genesis but if we study the ethics of the NT we see that it was common practice to establish proper human and holy behaviour on the basis of Gen. 1-3. We see that Paul establishes male headship in the home and church on these chapters, 1 Cor. 11, 1 Tim. 2. We see James speaking against using our tongues as weapons against others made in God's image; and Christ's view of marriage is found in the gospels where he sees these chapters as normative for marriage and the reason why divorce is sinful, Matt. 19:4-5, 'He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, 5 and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?' Notice that Christ affirms the created identity of man as male and female, and the nature of marriage as a monogamous relationship between one man and one woman.

The book of Genesis begins by introducing the stage and the characters and then kicks off with a wedding. The drama of the event I built up by the detail of Adam having been made on his own without another Gen. 2:7. The drama builds by Adam's recognition that all of God's creatures have a compliment for the purpose of procreation when they are brought to him to name them, Gen. 2:20. We then see God making the perfect sinless partner for Adam, a partner who is like but unlike, complimentary but similar. Adam was not only alone but incapable of fulfilling his purpose in filling the earth, so God made him a wife, Eve. She is the 'helper fit for him' by divine design. Homosexual marriage is a barren counterfeit that cannot produce the offspring intended by God.

The defined purpose for marriage where Adam's aloneness and purpose of filling the earth is met by an Eve is very different to modern views on marriage. Rob Bell's latest book is called 'The ZimZum of Love: A New Way of Understanding Marriage.' During an interview with Oprah Winfrey Kristen Bell read from the book, 'Marriage, gay and straight, is a gift to the world because the world needs more not less love, fidelity, commitment, devotion and sacrifice.' Marriage here is no longer defined by God's original purpose but a vague notion of love that essentially idolizes romantic feeling not holiness. Following this logic one would have to then say that polygamous marriage would be good for the same reasons, or incestuous marriage. When asked by Oprah why Bell included gay marriage in his book he answered, 'One of the oldest aches in the bones of humanity is loneliness...Loneliness is not good for the world. Whoever you are, gay or straight, it is totally normal, natural and healthy to want someone to go through life with. It's central to our humanity. We want someone to go on the journey with.' The trouble is that God also wants to solve the loneliness problem, and He did this with Eve not by endorsing homosexual marriage but creating heterosexual marriage. Homosexual marriage is the denial of God's best and His authority to design and order our lives and be our own creators ignoring God.

The bible not only begins with a wedding it also ends with a wedding, the marriage supper of the Lamb where Christ and His bride the Church are joined in a never ending union. The marriage of Adam and Eve, and of all men and women is a picture, a parable, a redemptive analogy. The union of man and wife into one flesh is a picture of the Spiritual union of Christ and the Church. Homosexual marriage is a violation of this picture, a sordid and satanic mockery obscuring another view of Christ and His work of salvation.

For many who read the bible on this issue they overlook the positive teaching on marriage and try and find prohibitions against homosexual marriage. This is to miss most of what the bible teaches on the issue. God's intentional design is as good as a law. God is perfect, He does not make mistakes, He is God and His authority must not be spurned, and He made marriage to be between men and women. This must lie as a foundation for all our thinking on this issue.

Sodom and Gomorrah

The attempt is then made by those trying to use the bible to support homosexual marriage to find a way of nullifying those texts that do speak against it. For example in the famous stories of God's judging of Sodom and Gomorrah the attempt is made to deny that Sodom and Gomorrah is against loving, committed consenting relationships but is against violent rape, being inhospitable, or attempting to have relations with angels. Those seeking to overturn the traditional view then also appeal to Ezekiel 16:49-50, seeking to deny that Sodom's sin was primarily homosexual in nature, 'Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. 50 They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it.' They attempt to say that the main problem was one of social justice not sexual sin. However, the bible is quite clear about their sexual sin and these sins attributed to Israel are in addition to the obvious sexual sins born by the reference. Jude 7 is a good example of how the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was not merely one of social justice but of unnatural sexuality, 'just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.'

The sins of these twin cities is paradigmatic in Scripture and we see a repeat of the pattern of Sodom and Gomorrah in judges 19. This is the story of the Levite and his concubine who were travelling through Benjamin and needing boarding for the night. The parallels to Sodom are many. The issue of no hospitality, the danger of sleeping in the city square, only one man showing hospitality, attempted homosexual gang rape, and the offer of a virgin daughter are some of the similarities. This chapter in judges which marks a terrible sin where Israel has declined into such a state so as to become just like Sodom and Gomorrah is a clear message about what the bible thinks about such sexual activities. It is clear from this parallel that the issue is not one of having relations with angels that is the problem.

Levitical Law

There are some very clear commands against homosexual activity in the Levitical law, 18:22, 'You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.' Lev. 20:13, '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.' The main ways in which some have tried to disarm these texts is by claiming that the law is only condemning certain forms of homosexual practice, specifically idolatrous prostitution; or they claim they no longer apply along with many other ceremonial laws. Firstly, it should be noted that the NT quotes Leviticus several times, famously in the case of loving your neighbour as yourself, Lev. 19:18. Secondly, other aspects of the Leviticus sexual code are upheld, for example, Paul in 1 Cor. 5 speaks against incest. It must be stressed that although there are certain ceremonial laws that no longer apply in the NT there are many laws that do apply. How do we tell the difference between laws that endure and those that don't? If they are repeated in the NT they endure, and the NT clearly speaks against homosexuality in Rom. 1:24-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 1 Tim. 1:10; and Jude 7. To try and claim that these laws no longer apply because they are part of the OT ceremonial law and fall away along with having relations with a woman during menstruation is a poor argument that is ignoring the NT use of the OT. Thirdly, the argument that tries to particularise these laws to addressing idolatrous practices will have a hard time of it. The verses are put in the most general terms along with all the other sexual sins in the chapters. The details of the verses speak about the act altogether not only the act in some situations. Fourthly, it is only in relation to this action that the word 'abomination' is used in the singular for any action in the ceremonial codes. It is singled out for the label abomination. Although the list ends with a pronouncement upon all the listed practices as abominable, 18:22 gets a special and explicit mention to make the point most clear. Fifthly, Paul's use of the Greek word 'arsenokoites' which he uses in 1 Cor. 6:9-11 and 1 Tim. 1:10 is a Greek word unknown before Paul and seems to be the union of two words, men and bed borrowed from the Greek translation of Lev. 20:13. In other words, he uses a word based squarely on Lev. 20:13 as it is read in Greek. We must not doubt that these verses are relevant for our discussion. The NT uses the Jewish sexual ethic. Every time you hear a condemnation of sexual immorality, this is a broad umbrella term which would include all immoral sexual activity including homosexual activity.

Paul

Paul was a man of the world who had travelled all over the then known world and was at home in Roman culture, Jewish culture and Greek. And he speaks most explicitly to the issue of homosexuality in his writings. The most common form of argument is that Paul is condemning first century abuses but not 21st century practices. It is claimed that Paul is against pederasty—that is older men with younger boys; masters taking advantage of slaves; as well as temple prostitution. It is claimed that Paul knew nothing of long term homosexual relationships, or of homosexual orientation and identity. This is of course wrong. There is a lot of evidence pointing to the same diverse expression of homosexuality in the ancient world as we have it today. It is true that they did not live after Freud who defined humanity primarily in terms of sexuality, nor were they as biologically informed as to

the various mechanisms of the human body, but nevertheless they had every variety we have today. This is important to know because when Paul condemns homosexuality as unnatural and as a judgement where God hands us over to our debased hearts so that we express the worst of ourselves in judgement upon ourselves. Paul is including all the then known forms of homosexuality as he speaks to it in the most general terms. It is not limited to prostitutes, certain classes, or small groups. Therefore there is no impassable cultural distance that prevents us from applying Paul's words directly to the issue of homosexual marriage.

Romans 1:24-27, 'Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about 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 up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.'

We see that because mankind will not abide the knowledge of God and insist on replacing the Creator with creation God responds in judgement. The judgement is a passive hardening whereby God hands us over to the potential within our own hearts. He does not make anyone gay it is the potential of our sinfulness to be so. Please note that the form of judgement is not in the form of homosexual desire, but the pervasive social practice and acceptance of it. These verses are not implying that the recovering homosexual struggling with desires is under God's judgement! A society that practices and approves of it is proof of God's passive judicial hardening.

Secondly, notice that Paul condemns the practice of male and female homosexuality. This destroys the argument that only Pederasty is being condemned.

Thirdly, notice the way in which Paul describes not only the acts but the desires as unnatural, impure and the result of a debased mind. In this way Paul shows that not only the act, but also the desires are wrong. Homosexual lust along with all other forms of sinful lust must be resisted and put to death.

Other references in Paul are 1 Cor. 6:9-11, 'Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. 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.'

And, 1 Tim. 1:10, 'Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, 9 understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, 10 the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine.' Of special interest is that in 1 Cor. 6:9-11 under our English words, 'nor men who practice homosexuality' there are two Greek words which cover the range of active and passive

partners. If Paul were seeking a way to condemn the actions wholesale it would be harder to find a better way than this.

There should be no doubt that there would have been prostitutes, those who had committed pederasty, and been active in all the other forms of homosexuality in Corinth. However we must note the triumph in v11 that holds out the hope of being set free from this bondage. Paul specifically speaks in the past tense of that identity, 'such were some of you.' He speaks of having been made clean and fully forgiven. But he also speaks about being repurposed for holy purposes when he speaks about them being sanctified. And he reminds them of the Spirit who did the work—It was not a work of our own faltering hands; and who now dwells within them to aid them in holiness.

I hope you have learnt something of how to use the bible to answer today's questions. I hope you have seen that the bible is fully sufficient to equip you for every good work. In principle or in precept we can find the will of God for our daily lives including the apparently confusing issues of sexual identity. The devil came to Christ misquoting Scripture, Christ quoted the bible correctly interpreted back to him. We must not give up the ground because people appear to be using the bible, this has been the tactic of the enemy from the beginning, to cast doubt over God's word.