



The homosexuality debate in view of Holy Scripture

Introduction

Recently the issue of homosexuality and same-sex marriages has received considerable attention in the secular Canadian media. Among other things the Ontario Divisional Court ordered a redefinition of marriage to include same-sex couples. Since then the federal Justice Minister announced that Ottawa would appeal the Ontario Court decision. Martin Cauchon, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, explained the decision saying: *“there are important reasons why we as a society must consider carefully the issues around changing the fundamental nature of marriage and what the implications of such a change might be. At present, there is no consensus, either from the courts or among Canadians, on whether or how the laws require change.”*

We certainly can be thankful that the Canadian federal government has made this decision. However, this does not mean the ruling of the Ontario Court is dead in the water. The federal government has said that even though they are going to appeal, they will consider all the options to the redefinition of marriage. Moreover, the pressure to accept homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle is ever increasing and efforts are made to silence those who oppose it. Religious groups that monitor government policy continue to express the fear that if the present trend continues, those who preach, teach or speak against homosexuality (for example in a newspaper article or in a public forum) could be charged with a hate crime and be imprisoned.

The government of Canada has asked for public input as to what the citizens of our country think on the issue of same-sex marriages. Those readers who are Canadian citizens should take the opportunity (if they have not already done so) to write or phone the office of their local member of parliament, the minister of Justice and the Prime Minister of Canada and state what the Bible teaches and why we must continue to oppose this lifestyle. In the meantime let us continue to pray that the citizens of our country repent of their sins (in thinking and actions) and turn to the Lord.

This article is written to encourage us, both as adults and young people, to take a Scriptural approach to a current issue. We should not be afraid to state what the Bible teaches. At the same time, how we speak about homosexuals should demonstrate that the love of Christ and the fruit of the Spirit fills our hearts.

Where we have been heading

Homosexuality and lesbianism refer to sexual encounters between people of the same sex: males with males and females with females. A lesbian is actually a female homosexual. The word “gay,” which not all that long ago simply meant to be joyful or to have a good time, has been redefined to refer to male homosexuals.

Homosexuality is an ethical question which demands and receives more and more attention today both outside and within the church. Before the 1960s, Western Christianity was pretty well unified in their evaluation and judgment of homosexuality. Most agreed with the evaluation of Thomas Aquinas that homosexuality was a *“lifestyle contrary to human nature.”*

Today, however, new approaches in biblical studies and newly discovered data in psychology and sociology suggest that we abandon the old way of thinking. Part of the curriculum of public schools is to teach homosexuality as an acceptable alternative lifestyle. Many churches believe it is

necessary to reinterpret the Bible and change the meaning of various passages in order to approve of homosexuality. It is no longer enough for homosexuality to be legal; it must be given moral approval. Regularly, homosexual demonstrations and parades are given the wholesale endorsement of the news media. Any public figure who opposes such activities as Gay Pride Day is quickly ostracized and made the butt of scorn.

Does the Lord consider the love of two homosexuals, whether in orientation or in act, as sin? Do such relationships mirror the love of God and a love for God? Would we be discriminating if a practicing homosexual was excluded from the Lord's Supper celebration? Several texts of Scripture are crucial in discussing what the Lord says regarding homosexuality and same-sex marriages.

Genesis 1:26, 27

The Lord created two people, male and female, to be his image. He created them with a definite purpose so that they might live together in the bond of marriage. He did not design same-sex marriages. A man and a woman complement each other sexually, something two females or males do not. There is no possibility of sexual communion man to man or woman to woman because the LORD did not create them for one another as He created woman to be with man. Gay and lesbian relationships are a perversion of God's created order. We must maintain this principle. A woman is made for a man as a fitting helper, sexually too. They are one flesh (Genesis 2:18-25). In their love for one another, husband and wife mirror the love of God for his people. This is never possible in a homosexual relationship. The love and affection which pleases God gives answer to his Word. When a husband and wife love each other and give full expression to that love via the intimacy of sexual intercourse, then they do not do this in the first place for their own pleasure or self-fulfillment but in obedience to God's commandments. This too must be done to the glory of God.

Since we accept the authority of Scripture and the validity of its truths, also for today, we recognize the normative character of Genesis 1 and 2 and what it says about the relationship between the sexes. It is undeniable that certain things have changed as a result of the fall into sin. Not every man or woman is married. There are men and women who struggle daily against wrong sexual desires. Outside of marriage, God's law forbids men and women to seek an outlet for their desires in premarital or extramarital relationships.

Genesis 19

A second text which needs our attention is Genesis 19. The men of Sodom demanded that the two guests who came to Lot's house be brought out in order that the Sodomites might "*know*" them. They wanted to have perverted relations with them. The final outcome was that the men of Sodom were smitten with blindness and the city was destroyed by fire and brimstone. Some exegetes believe we should stop interpreting this passage as demonstrating God's abhorrence of homosexuality. They argue the men of Sodom could not have been exclusively homosexual in orientation in the same sense the term is used today. Quite likely, they were primarily heterosexual and merely looking for a novelty. Such people tell us not to concentrate on homosexuality when discussing this passage, but to see the sin of Sodom as violent gang rape and a lack of hospitality to strangers.

Of course, the sin of Sodom involved more than homosexuality. The texts of Isaiah 1:9, 17 and Ezekiel 16:49 give a more general picture of what was going on. But it is a contortion of the Scriptures to downplay or even dismiss homosexuality as a factor in the downfall of Sodom. It was the culminating factor that led to the overthrow of Sodom. Every attempt to make the Bible fit our contemporary situation should be rejected.

The key word in the passage is "*know*," which in the context has a sexual meaning. The NIV correctly translates, "*bring them out so that we can have sex with them.*" Lot's "*offer*" to give his daughters to these base men is rejected. They are not interested in any heterosexual relationships, but they want a homosexual relation with Lot's guests. The sin of Sodom has reached its climax. If there was any question, God shows how ripe the city was for judgment.

Judges 19

A similar event to that of Genesis 19 is found in Judges 19. The men of Gibeah, members of God's covenant people, want to have a homosexual relation with the old man's guest. They wish to involve themselves in a "vile thing." These are the sad results of what takes place when people no longer take the Word of God seriously. Natural relations are exchanged for unnatural. The ordinances of creation are mocked and ignored.

Leviticus 18:22; 20:13

The next passages we should take into consideration are two references to homosexuality in the book of Leviticus. These references are found in chapters that have been labelled as Israel's holiness code. In these texts the Lord commands that a male shall not lie with a male as with a woman. Newer exegesis attributes this prohibition by God to Israel's emphasis on procreation. Thus homosexuality was forbidden because it did not enhance the propagation of the chosen race. By implication, this principle no longer holds true because we live in an overpopulated world.

We are mistaken, however, if we should suggest that procreation was the goal of sexual life for the Israelites. Children were indeed considered a blessing, since thereby believing parents were instrumental in God's church gathering work, but this principle is valid for the New Testament believer as well. There is no indication that this was the reason why God forbade a male to lie with a male as with a woman.

Some have argued that what the Lord prescribed is irrelevant and should not be invoked against homosexuals living in the twenty-first century. It is argued that this law disappeared with all other ceremonial laws. It is true, of course, that certain Old Testament laws no longer apply to us. For instance, we wear clothes of mixed fabrics. Yet it is going way too far to suggest that everything mentioned in the ceremonial laws is irrelevant. The law in the Old Testament strictly prohibited a man to have intercourse with or to marry one's mother, sister, sister-in-law, daughter, or aunt, and for a woman to have intercourse with her father, father-in-law, brother, son, or uncle. The Lord hates those sins in the New Dispensation as much as He did in the Old Testament. Thankfully, this is still reflected in marriage licences (banns) and in the intolerance society has for sexual abuse.

The Old Testament is clear in its message: same-sex relationships and marriages are strictly forbidden as an abomination before the face of the living God. Homosexuality is so vile in God's sight that it carried the sanction of capital punishment (Leviticus 20:13). Under no circumstances was it considered to be morally acceptable. Homosexuality is "perverted (contrary to God's created order), immoral (contrary to God's commandments) and worthy of death (temporal, societal, eternal)" (G.L. Bahnsen, *Homosexuality: a Biblical View*, p. 47).

Romans 1:24-27

This passage cannot escape our notice. The apostle Paul speaks very clearly against all perverted relationships that are a consequence of the fall into sin and a result of the rebellion of humanity. The LORD punishes those who harden themselves in sin by giving them up to their own devices:

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. 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.

Paul calls lesbianism and homosexuality an exchange of "natural relations for unnatural ones" and directs our attention to God's creation ordinances. When the Lord created Adam and Eve He also

ordained the natural purpose for sexual relations. He established the normal and normative pattern of female and male. Homosexuality is a departure of God's creation ordinances.

There are other texts that address the issue of homosexuality (e.g., 1 Timothy 1:10, 1 Corinthians 6:10) but the passages discussed have already shown sufficiently that same-sex marriages is a practice that is forbidden by God's Word.

Drawing together whatever loose threads there may yet be, we come to the following conclusions:

- How we view homosexuality is largely shaped by our view of Scripture. We need not enter into a dialogue with the "spirit" of the Scriptures to form new answers to the shifting views concerning the manner in which we experience truth and reality. We must receive God's Word as normative and decisive in answering the ethical questions of our time. In the obedience of faith we accept the eternal validity of biblical truth (J. Faber, "Triumph of Relativism" *Clarion*, Volume 30, No. 1, 1981).
- Holy Scripture without question forbids homosexuality as contrary to nature and against God's created design for male and female.
- Homosexuality violates the Ten Words of God's covenant, especially the seventh and tenth commandment. Like lust, greediness, haughtiness, hypocrisy and anger, a homosexual tendency is not a sickness that has been learned due to a number of factors but it is a sinful condition that needs to be covered by the sin-forgiving grace of Christ. The same principle applies to the tendency toward homosexuality as other sins; not only is the act itself sin but also the desire leading to the act. Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount that anyone who looks upon a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matthew 5:28). All unchastity outside the marriage of husband and wife is forbidden and is cursed by God (Ephesians 5:3-5 see also Lord's Day 41).
- There are those who must struggle against homosexual desires all their life but who by the grace of God do not give in to these temptations. One who has the tendency toward homosexuality should not be condemned in the same breath as one who practices and condones it. However, we should be careful not to overemphasize the distinction in order to downplay the seriousness of homosexual tendencies.
- Those who struggle against homosexual desires and lusts must be treated by fellow Christians with compassion and love. We should not rise up in condemnation, as if we are free from all wrong sexual desires and lusts. We are all commanded to live pure and chaste lives and we all need the mercy and grace. Our bodies are not to be used as vehicles of self-gratification but for the purpose of God's glory. They are redeemed by Christ so that we, in our bodies, are no longer prisons of Satan but temples of the Holy Spirit.

PG Feenstra

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