



Homosexuality: The testimony of Scripture?

The issue of homosexuality is becoming a defining issue of our time. This is the issue our fellow citizens are debating and discussing and bringing to the foreground of thinking and practice in our generation. It has been so for a number of years already. In our recent election cycle the redefinition of marriage, to include same sex couples, was placed on some state ballots as a civil rights or constitutional question. Three states — Maryland, Maine, and Washington — upheld the right of “gay marriage” in ballot initiatives. My own state, Minnesota, voted down an amendment to the state’s constitution that would have recognized the exclusive definition of marriage as a union between one man and one woman. Exit polls indicated that a majority of Minnesotans did not want to restrict the right of marriage to one man and one woman.

A growing number of denominations in North America have also come out and declared homosexual practices to be consistent with a Christian confession as long as it is done in a monogamous, committed, loving relationship.

So, what is the Church to think? Well, my intent is not to engage in political or psychological evaluations. It is simply to look with you at the Word of God about homosexuality in general. The revealed will of God will be our light in answer to the question before us. Surely, as Christians, we need to be clear on what the Bible says.

We need to be able to be prophetic on this issue. As a church and as believers who are “*salt and light*” among our neighbors and fellow citizens, my goal is that we be equipped to think through, and to understand how to speak to unbelievers and to fellow Christians about God’s will regarding homosexuality. We will need to address this issue. We must be prepared to listen, to study, to respond wisely, to speak in a God-honoring way. We especially must be prepared to address the issue of homosexuality with members of our own church, or other Christians struggling with it (and don’t think they are not).

I have two urgent pleas for you before we begin. First, I plead with you not to think the issue of homosexuality is merely “out there.” My next door neighbors for the past thirteen years are a lesbian couple who also have an adopted daughter. We have an excellent neighborly relationship. They have been, in many ways, exemplary neighbors. A number of members in the congregation I serve have siblings who are gay. In my relatively small circle of contacts, I know of two young people in Reformed congregations who are struggling, or have struggled with homosexual behavior. One is a young woman, one is a young man. I have relatives who have struggled with this behavior. This is not a theoretical issue.

Second, I plead with you to speak respectfully about and to homosexuals. There is simply no room for derogatory and demeaning statements coming from the mouths of Christians. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves. May signs such as “God hates fags” never be found among us!

What does God say about homosexuality? I would like to use Romans 1:16-32 primarily for exploring the subject of homosexuality. In order to save space in this article, I would ask the reader to open the Bible to that text for the references provided.

The beginning point of our study should be the question: What is the *motivation* for addressing the sin of homosexuality? It is this: the glory of God in the gospel of Christ.

As Christians, we need to be clear in thinking about why homosexuality is addressed and must be addressed by God. You see, we need to be clear that this is not motivated by merely political or social concern. The motivation in scripture is the glory of God. Think of Romans 1:16-17. In these verses we have a summary of the gospel, the theme of the rest of his book. Paul is saying, I'm not ashamed of the gospel. I am overwhelmed and excited by it. And it's almost like somewhere between verse 17 and 18 somebody said, "Oh, that's real nice, Paul, but so what? I don't need this gospel. I'm basically a good person." And the apostle Paul does a gigantic, "Oh no, you're not." And from 1:18 all the way to 3:20, he's explaining to us why we need the gospel. We are all sinners.

But notice that the great problem of sin and sinners is that it robs God of His glory. Verses 20-23 declare that God has revealed Himself in creation in order to be known and worshiped and glorified.

But this is what unregenerate sinners refuse to do. By the power of God, in the gospel alone, sinners will be brought to know and glorify him by way of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. This is God's motivation in addressing sinners of every kind.

Homosexuality: the Bad News

Before we can really grasp the gospel, *the good news*, we need to understand the Bad News. Here is the issue. Verses 19-23 are saying this: When you reject God as Creator — your Creator — when you refuse to worship him as God, when you suppress the inner voice of which all people are conscious deep down inside where it really counts, you are on a highway to hell. When you shut out the voice of God, you begin to listen to the voice of your own lusts. And finally, you attempt to rewrite God's laws of creation and revelation for living, you set your own standards for your own lives. Then, as Paul says, "God also gave them up ... God gave them up ... God gave them over to..."

Now, you ask, "what does that mean?" Paul you're going to have to make that clearer. So he says, okay, I'll make that clearer. Paul provides three illustrations of his point.

First, verse 24 says that, as an act of judgment, God gives people over to "*uncleanness*." As an act of judgment, God removes his restraints and people begin acting on what they desire. Lust, sexual uncleanness, and promiscuity is what he is talking about. A prevalence of sexual promiscuity emerges.

The apostle Paul is speaking to the Roman culture and to all cultures, and He is giving a diagnosis of their declining state. In response to the heart sin of idolatry, God removes His restraining hand and allows sin-hardened, unbelieving people of the world to plunge themselves into sexual practices foreign to their created purpose.

So one of the first evidences of God's judgment against sin is unclean passion. And you know we wouldn't have to look far in society today to find unclean passions. There are all sorts of things that encourage those unclean passions in our culture. You can't turn on the radio or the television without being encouraged in unclean desires. Multitudes today are struggling with internet pornography. All pornography in any form encourages unclean desires. And Paul says the pervasiveness of unclean desires in a society is an illustration of God's judgment against that society.

Second, verses 26-27 give another illustration/evidence of God's judgment on an unbelieving society. This is a description of male and female homosexuality, sexual acts between a man and man, and a woman and a woman. There is no other way to read it or say it. It means the same thing in English and Greek. God is clearly condemning this activity. There is nothing that restricts this passage to the Roman society. There is no merit whatsoever to the claim that this is only speaking against promiscuous homosexual activity outside of a committed relationship. Paul is talking about homosexual activity in general.

Contrary to creation

He says this activity is against nature, or, it could be translated “contrary” to nature (ESV). One of the effects of cutting the Creator out of the creation is to (then) go on to do what is contrary to the design or intent of the Creator for the creatures He made.

So, how is homosexual activity against nature? God created male and female after his image. He created us with sexual desires and functions. He intended sex to take place exclusively within marriage, and only between a male husband and female wife. When sexual affection and desire is used in any other way it misses the mark for which God intended it to be expressed. It is sinful, against God’s righteous and creational standard for sexual expression. When sexual activity takes place between a man and man, or woman and woman, it is fundamentally against the actual created and natural purpose for human sexuality. This does not mean such people are to be considered “freaks” or sub-human. To practice homosexual sex is to miss God’s best purpose for you as a human being.

Doesn’t this teaching raise questions for us? Against nature? But, pastor, ever since I was a young boy/girl, I have known an attraction to members of my own gender. Isn’t that natural then, for me? We have to agree that this is the experience of some people. There are mysteries here we don’t fully understand. Let’s be humble about that. But let’s think about this in light of sound biblical theology.

Homosexuality is natural in the same way that anger and lust are natural to the fallen human state. Some people have great inclinations to abuse alcohol; others struggle with a gluttonous use of food. Because of the effects of the Fall on all human beings, the totality of our human nature is affected. However, not everyone has the same manifestations of the effects of the Fall. Every emotion, every affection is distorted by the Fall. Homosexuality is “natural” in the sense that it is an expression of the sinful nature.

Therefore, homosexuality is not a morally neutral, God-created part of our humanness. In this fallen world, we will always have the effects of the Fall to deal with; we will feel and see the tendency to sin in every form. But Paul’s point in Romans 1 (see v. 32) is that the acceptance of it, the open calls to approve of homosexuality (Gay Pride Weekend!), the explosion, proliferation, and expansion of homosexuality in a society — all are signs of mankind defying God, and God giving that society over to their own passions as part of His judgment upon them for their willful rejection of Him. That is the Bad News.

Homosexuality: the Good News

I want to stop right now and say there may be folks in your congregation that are struggling with homosexuality in various ways. You may have loved ones who are wrestling with this desire. I don’t want to be misunderstood here. It is not unloving to say God condemns homosexuality. God does not accept any of us “just us as we are.” He does something better than that. He accepts us in spite of who we are. And then by His grace, He makes us into what we are not. And every single believer knows that experience. The apostle Paul who wrote this book was a murderer, and God by His grace saved him. Paul did not have the experience of Jesus coming to him saying, ‘Paul I embrace you in your murderous lifestyle, I love you just as you are, just go right ahead murdering people.’ Jesus loved Paul too much to do that. And believers will love those practicing this particular sin too much to say “just go ahead and do that.”

But Paul’s point, and this is his ultimate point, is that the gospel’s divine power is so great that it can transform those engaged in this particular sexual sin. You don’t believe me? Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and see what Paul says there. It’s interesting isn’t it? Paul is writing to the Romans, from Corinth, with the Corinthian behavior patterns in the background. When he writes to the Corinthians, he’s writing to a congregation, many of which have come right out of the atmosphere of the Corinthian behavior patterns. And he says this in 1 Corinthians 6, beginning in verse 9: *“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexual, nor sodomites, nor*

thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, will inherit the kingdom of God."

But he doesn't stop there: "*Such **were** some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God.*" The apostle Paul is saying to the Corinthian Christians, 'Some of you were living that way. But Christ's gospel is so wonderful that there is no one that is beyond the pale of its power to transform. The good news of the Lord Jesus Christ is that the gospel can transform you no matter what.' What is the apostle saying? That this sin is unforgivable? Or that it's beyond the grace of God? No!! He's saying, 'Oh, this is an example of the kind of sin that my gospel can utterly eradicate and transform.' That is the Good News about the sin of homosexuality.

Practical applications

I want to close with two applications. If you are struggling with same-sex attractions, and you are afraid to talk about this because you are afraid we will freak out and treat you like a leper, I want to urge you to go and talk to your pastor, talk to your parents, and talk to your elders about this. We want to lovingly, thoughtfully, patiently, and biblically help you in dealing with this temptation in your life. Just as we want to help anyone and everyone struggling with temptations. We want you to know we will be a communion ministering Christ's grace to you for that purpose.

To each one of you as God's people, most Reformed Christians are not following the trajectory of liberals in denying biblical truth and accommodating to the culture with respect to homosexuality. But would we honestly say that our churches are the kind of communions in which young men or women among us struggling with same-sex attraction can come and say, "I am a devoted follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. I want to live in faithfulness to Christ. What do I do with this? How do I handle this?"

I read somewhere recently this challenge: "We are not a *gospel* people unless we understand that only the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ gives a homosexual any hope of release from homosexuality." I ask you, Will we be a gospel people on the issue of homosexuality? Will we uncompromisingly and humbly set forth the bad news about homosexuality? Will we lovingly declare the good news to those struggling with homosexuality? Will you seek God's glory in the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Jim Sawtelle

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