

## **2 BIBLICAL STUDY OF “THE HOT BUTTON ISSUE”**

### **INTRODUCTIONI**

In 1977-78 I toured in a musical group called Up With People.

About 100 of us spent the year together, traveling on buses,  
performing our show in most of the western states and through Mexico,  
setting up and tearing down 8 tons of equipment for each show,  
and rooming together in host family homes.

Early in the year I met Jill.

We made some good friends along the way.

Two guys we became close to early on were Ron and Dennis.

One evening they came to me and told me they were gay.

I was the first person they'd come out to.

They knew I was called to be pastor,

and so asked me what the Bible said about homosexuality.

I swallowed hard.

“Well, I've not studied it closely,

but I'm pretty sure the Bible says it's a sin.

I'll try to do some studying and tell you what I find.

And I want you to know that no matter what we find,

I still want to be your friend.”

I set out to find a way to say God was OK with their sexuality.

I read and reread the relevant scriptures,

and read scholars all along the theological spectrum.

I continue that reading to this day.

I read the work of Bible scholars and theologians on both sides of the issue.

I will tell you up front that I have *not* been able to convince myself that  
the Bible doesn't mean what it says.

But I will do my best to be fair in presenting  
the progressive view of the relevant scriptures,  
as well as being honest about my own view.

### **THE HOT BUTTON VERSES**

There are six passages that are thought to directly address the issue of homosexuality.

Out of the entire Bible, that's not a lot.

Progressives suggest there is so little mention because it's not an important issue.

So it should not be important to us.

Conservatives suggest it's because it was so rare among the ancient Hebrews and  
so widely disapproved of in ancient Hebrew culture  
that more mention was not needed.

The first passage many people think of is the story of Sodom and Gomorrah.

#### **GENESIS 19:1-29**

These cities were known for their sinfulness.

And not just routine sinfulness,

but enough vile behavior that they had a *widespread reputation* for sinfulness.

God sends two angels to warn Lot and

give him an opportunity to flee the coming judgment and disaster.

Lot invites the two angels to come in stay with him.

We have an attempted homosexual gang rape of two the angels.

Lot offers to send out his daughter instead!

The ways of hospitality in the ancient world said  
 if you took in a guest,  
     you were responsible for guarding their well-being.  
 Lot displayed the *radical extreme* of this hospitality.  
*And he's given us a glimpse of the low place of women in that society.*  
 But the crowd does not want his daughters.  
 They insist on having the "two strangers."

The angels, it turns out, are quite able to defend themselves.  
 And because of the sinfulness of the ten cities, including Sodom, they were destroyed by God.  
 So why were these cities destroyed?

Often people draw a straight line to the homosexual angle.

But....

They had a *general reputation* for sinfulness,  
 not just homosexuality.

This was *not a consensual relationship*,  
 but a *gang rape*.

It's quite similar to what happens in men's prisons today.

And the men who perpetrate such acts insist they are not homosexual,  
 that what they did was not about sex,  
 but about power, violation, an act of violence.

What do you think God's judgment would have been if they had  
*accepted* the offer of Lot's daughter and gang raped her instead?  
 Would *that* have been OK with God?

NO.

So is the most serious part of this event that it was *same-sex*,  
 or that it was rape, an act of violence and violation?

On this basis it is suggested that Genesis 19 is not a good text to draw on  
 when addressing the issue of homosexuality today.

But there are *other* texts that are *more directly* related to the issue.

### **LEVITICUS 18**

The chapter begins by warning against doing things the Egyptians did,  
 and not as the Canaanites do.

Be different from

Egypt where they came from  
 and Canaan where they're going.

The key verse for our topic is v.22.

But it's important to put this in its *proper context*.

This *entire chapter* is a series of prohibitions about who you cannot have sex with,  
 and a very few other items thrown in.

It is noticeable that almost all of these prohibitions are directed at men.

But it would be a fair inference to apply them to women.

The rules about who men can have sex with address

incest, bestiality – interestingly this one is directed at men AND women (v.23),  
 and homosexual sex (v.22).

In addition, there is one curious one *about when* you can have sex:  
 during a woman's period (19).

The language, "During the uncleanness of her monthly period,"  
 suggests this may not be a MORAL prohibition,  
 but a question of being *ritually clean* and, therefore,  
 eligible to enter the temple.

The blood made a woman ritually unclean.

And a man coming in contact with that blood

would make him ritually unclean.

Verse 22 *directly* addresses male homosexual sex,  
and clearly says “that is detestable.”

Two chapters later we find a *very similar* list of prohibitions.

### **LEVITICUS 20**

This chapter begins by warning them to not offer their children in sacrifice to the pagan god Molech.

Molech was portrayed by a metal idol with arms out in front of it.

A fire would be burning below the arms,  
the metal arms would be heated to glowing,  
and the baby would be offered up by laying it on those red hot arms  
to be scorched to death.

It was a horrifying thing.

There follows a prohibition against consulting mediums and spiritists, and cursing your parents.

Then follows the familiar prohibitions of who you cannot have sex with,

including adultery (not mentioned in Ch.18), incest, bestiality (15), and homosexual sex (13)

In chapter 20 there is the addition of *penalties* for those who break God’s law,  
most often a death penalty.

Verse 13 is the key one for our topic, but again it is important to read it in context.

Regarding chapter 20, progressives point out that

conservatives do not advocate for the death penalty for homosexual sex,

so conservatives are being *inconsistent* to advocate for viewing homosexual sex as *sinful*.

#### **What would you say to that point?**

I would turn to

#### **JOHN 8:1-11**

In standing between her and the crowd,  
Jesus seemed to eliminate the *penalty* for sin,  
but *did not* rewrite the law to say adultery was *not a sin*.  
In fact, he said, “Go and sin no more.”  
The sinful act is still sinful,  
but the penalty has been annulled.

Some progressives suggest the prohibitions in Leviticus 18 and 20 have to do with population growth and health.

The rules against incest are all about maintaining a healthy gene pool.

The rule against homosexuality is about promoting procreation,  
to grow the population in a time when they needed more numbers.

#### **What do you think of that?**

There’s no evidence for it in the text,  
nor even in the surrounding culture.

Other progressives suggest the same-sex intercourse was related to pagan fertility cults.

After all, the god Molech was named in Ch.20.

And there were known fertility cults that employed ritual prostitution at their altars.

#### **What do you think of that?**

There’s no evidence for that in the text.  
The cult of Molech, the one pagan deity named in the chapter,  
did not include ritual prostitution.

And, if pagan worship was the setting for prohibiting homosexual sex,  
is it also the setting for prohibiting adultery, incest and bestiality?

If it’s not the reason for those prohibitions,  
why would we say it is the reason for  
the single prohibition against homosexual sex?

These prohibitions in Leviticus are the background for what Paul wrote to the church in Rome.

### ROMANS 1:18-25

Paul's major point in chapter 1 is about sin being a rejection of the *Creator*,  
reflected in a rejection of *the created order* of things.

He is making the case that every person, Jew or Gentile,  
is sinful and in need of the cross of Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

One manifestation of sinfulness is homosexual sex.

There are *other* manifestations of sin, *just* as sinful, listed in v.29-30:

Wickedness, evil, greed, depravity, envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, gossip, slander, and so on.

The list is broad enough to catch *every one* of us in it.

And verse 32 says,

“Although they know God’s righteous decree  
that those who do such things deserve death,  
they not only *continue to do* these very things  
but also *approve* of those who practice them.”

These sins, ALL these sins, put us in the place of deserving death.

Not just homosexual sex,

but *all* these attitudes and behaviors,  
are serious and of eternal consequence.

And *all* these sins,

not just homosexual sex,  
must be confessed and repented of.

And *all* these sins,

*including* homosexual sex,  
are paid for on the cross of Christ,  
and so can be forgiven.

But Paul singles out homosexual sex as illustrative of the situation of all sinners.

*Why single out this one sin?*

Perhaps it was prominent in the region at that time.

And perhaps because it seemed to readily apparent to  
the common sense observer of basic mammalian biology.

Today it is singled out in our denominational arguments because  
this is the one sinful act for which some people are advocating its acceptance,  
even calling it God-given,  
and suggesting we bless it with a wedding ceremony.

Some progressives have suggested the discussion of “natural and “unnatural” behavior  
ought to be understood differently.

v.26 and 27 say “They exchange *natural* relations for *unnatural* ones.”

What is *natural* for the heterosexual person is opposite sex intercourse.

And what would be *unnatural* for them would be same-sex intercourse.

So heterosexuals should not do that.

But for the *homosexual* person, same-sex intercourse is *natural*.

So it’s not sinful.

However, nowhere in the ancient world do we find the idea of  
what is natural or unnatural being used as a *purely individual* thing.

Such radical individualism is very much a *modern* perspective.

As such it is *not appropriate* to force it on  
an ancient document such as the letter to the Romans.

In the ancient world the words and concepts of “natural” and “unnatural”

are always used in *universal* categories,  
what is natural and unnatural for *all* of humanity.

The ancient biblical worldview would say that  
 “God created human beings male and female,”  
 and he created them for one another. (Ge.1-2)  
 And *that* was what was natural.

So this attempt at a radical reinterpretation of Romans 1 fails.  
 Another attempted reinterpretation suggests Paul is writing specifically about  
 ritual prostitution of the pagan fertility cults.

*There were* pagan gods and goddesses of fertility.  
 Fertility regarding a couple trying to have a baby,  
 fertility regarding livestock, fertility regarding crops.  
 And to persuade the deities to give fertility,  
 a person would engage in sexual intercourse with a cultic prostitute.  
 Sometimes a man would engage in intercourse with a male prostitute.  
 There is no record of women engaging in intercourse with a female prostitute.  
 In fact, there is very little record of women engaging in  
 intercourse with a male prostitute.  
 It was almost always men going to the cultic prostitutes.

And Romans 1 does make mention of worshipping false gods.

But...

There is, in Romans 1, no clear or explicit connection made to cultic prostitution.  
 There is, however, very close connection to the clear prohibitions in Leviticus 18 and 20.  
 And no one associates the longer list of sinful acts and attitudes found in Romans 1  
 with the pagan cults.  
 So this attempt at reinterpretation of Romans 1 seems unconvincing to me.

### 1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-11

A list of sins that Paul says those who do them will not “inherit the kingdom of God.” (v.10)

It’s worth noticing that sexual immortality *tops* the list.

Ours is *not the first* generation that has experienced struggles in this area of life.  
 It seems that God’s gift of sexual attraction,  
 which is, according to Genesis 1-2, intended to be expressed  
 in the context of a marriage between a man and a woman,  
 is so powerful that it becomes a handy place for Satan to bring temptation into our lives.

Keep in mind the words from 1 Coirinthians:

“sexually immoral,” “male prostitutes,” and “homosexual offenders.”

We’re going to dig deep into the original Greek words and their meanings.

But first we’ll read one more text.

### 1 TIMOTHY 1:9-11

This text makes an explicit link between right *doctrine* and right *behavior*.

There is a *list* of sinful behaviors with an etcetera at the end,

“whatever else is contrary to the *sound doctrine* that conforms to the gospel.” (11)

Here’s another list of sins, to include murderers, slave traders, liars, and perjurers.

In the midst of all the other sins named are adulterers and perverts.

Adulterers:

Sexual expression that breaks the vows of marriage

Perverts:

It’s the same Greek word in 1 Corinthians 6 that was translated as “homosexual offenders.”

## THE NEW TESTAMENT GREEK WORDS IN 1 CORINTHIANS AND 1 TIMOTHY

1Cor.6:9 Sexually immoral:

Porneia: root of our word “pornography,”  
a blanket term for all forms of sexual immorality

1Cor.6:9; 1Tim.1:10 Homosexual offenders:

Arsenokoite : Gk. Literal Arsen: male, Koite: bed (root of our word “coitus”)

There is no earlier literature from the region that uses this term.

Some scholars suggest Paul may have invented this term.

Whether he did or not, its use is *very deliberate*,

to express what is said in Leviticus 18 and 20,

“a man who lies with a man as one lies with a woman.”

Arsenokoite is the man who penetrates the other man.

1Cor.6:9 Male prostitutes:

Malakoi: Gk literal soft

Some progressives suggest it means “effeminate.”

Most scholars say it means the male who is penetrated.

Some progressives suggest the terms arsenokoites and malakoi are referring to the practice of pederasty.

Pederasty was a fairly common practice among the upper classes.

It is a sexual relationship between a man and an adolescent male.

The adolescent male would be a servant or slave,

used for sex among other things,

by someone of financial means.

But if that was the case, why would the adolescent male, the malakoi,

be condemned in the same terms as the “homosexual offender”?

They were in that position not by their own choice or desire.

They were enslaved, and *without* choice in the matter.

So this attempt at explanation does not seem to make good sense of the text.

### WHAT DID JESUS SAY ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY?

Progressives often say:

Jesus never said a *word* about homosexuality.

So it can't be all that important.

And, in fact, if you read the four Gospels carefully,

you do not find *one mention* of homosexual sex.

But a conservative would respond:

1) You *do* find Jesus always talking about *marriage* as  
a covenant relationship between one man and one woman.

He roots that firmly in the creation story.

2) And if you believe Jesus is *truly divine*,  
and if you believe the scriptures are *divinely inspired*

in the way the historic church has affirmed,

then, well, yes Jesus DID have something to say about homosexual sex.

He just said it in other places besides the four Gospels.

But in a later information session,

I will show you how many progressives *do NOT* believe Jesus is truly divine,  
at least not in the way the church has historically understood that term.

And many progressives *do NOT* believe the scriptures are divinely inspired,

at least not in the way the church has historically understood inspiration.

But, back to what Jesus DID say.

He did talk about the institution of marriage,

always grounding his teaching in the creation story.

## THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

### GENESIS 1:26-28

27 Male and female  
 One of the God-given reasons for sexuality is procreation.  
 Only sex between male and female can fulfill that

28 Be fruitful and multiply

### GENESIS 2:18-25

18 Not good to be alone

23 Bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh      built in intimacy

24 become one flesh      sexual intimacy between a man and a woman  
 Specifically between a husband and wife

25 both naked  
 Physical nakedness and emotional vulnerability

A God-given reason for sexuality is the deepest sort of relational intimacy  
 And it is explicitly male and female in God's design.

### MATTHEW 19:1-9

The question asked him was about *divorce*.  
 His answer drives back to the creation story,  
 to lift up God's good and perfect intention from the beginning.  
 God's intention is that marriage be a lifelong covenant,  
 never broken, "till death do us part."

Though Jesus was not addressing the issue of homosexuality or same-sex marriage,  
 it also seems God's intention from creation is that marriage be between *a man and a woman*.  
 And, from creation, it was for ONE man and ONE woman.  
 Jesus quotes Genesis as saying, "The TWO will become one flesh."  
 Which raises the question of polygamy.  
 Sometimes progressives will point out that it seems  
 God veered from the creation model to permit polygamy in the Old Testament.  
 So, why not also allow homosexual relationships?  
 And it is true.  
 God did, on occasion, seem to *explicitly permit* polygamy.  
 He didn't command it, but he did permit it.  
 And nowhere in the Bible does God explicitly *prohibit* polygamy.  
 But, conservatives point out that every time  
 the Bible gives us a close look into a polygamous family,  
 such as Abraham or Jacob or King David,  
 we see jealousy, envy, and rivalry.  
 Does God have to explicitly say "Thou shalt not" for us to get the point?

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### IF GOD CREATED HUMANS ONLY FOR HETEROSEXUAL RELATIONS, WHY IS SEXUAL ATTRACTION NOW SO VARIED?

So, if God designed sexuality to be expressed only between male and female (husband and wife),  
 why is the human sexual drive apparently aiming in *all sorts* of other directions?

Progressives suggest that these varieties of sexual attraction are actually *God-given*.

They say the Bible only presents the *norm*, the *usual*.

Some even suggest the Bible provides us with *purely human* understandings of things,  
 including of human sexuality,  
 an understanding which is as limited, flawed, even sinful  
 as the human authors of scripture.

(I'll have more to say about that view of scripture next week.)

But, they say, in contrast to the flawed biblical picture,  
 all forms of sexual attraction are actually God-given, and built into us.  
 That's why many people say they cannot recall a time in their lives  
 when they were not heterosexual or homosexual.  
 Their memory is that they were always heterosexual or homosexual or bisexual.  
 And, these days, the varieties of sexual attraction and gender identity  
 are exploding in number.  
 And the claim is it's all built into us, all God-given.

And, along with this argument,  
 they often include the claim that it is all genetically determined.

A conservative response would remind us that  
 studies *have not proven* genetic causation of sexual orientation or gender identity.

And conservatives suggest that  
 just because we have no memory of being different,  
 and possibly even being a certain way because of genetic predisposition,  
 that does not mean it is *God-given*.

The Bible teaches that, *all* of creation, including the nonhuman creation, is affected *by sin*,  
 and every dimension is now broken.

#### **GENESIS 3:17-19**

“Cursed is the ground.” “thorns and thistles”

#### **ROMANS 8:18-23**

Sin affects humanity,  
 but it *also* has ripple effects into the *nonhuman* creation.  
 Now *every dimension* of creation is broken,  
 distorted out of the shape of God's intention.  
 Not only are there human acts of sinfulness.  
 There are also heat waves and droughts, floods and famine, coronavirus and cancer.  
 There are genetic mutations that deform and disable.  
 There are disordered impulses and urges,  
 to include sexual orientation and gender identity.

So just because someone *always knew* there was something different in them,  
 that does not mean it is *God-given*.

And it does not mean the outward expression of that “something different”  
 should be *accepted, approved or even blessed*.

Some people claim *alcoholism* has a genetic component.

That's unproven, but not impossible.

But that does not mean it should be *accepted and blessed*.

Pedophiles say they have *always* felt sexually attracted to children.

That does not mean pedophilia is

*God-given* and ought to be *blessed*.

The progressive argument in favor of accepting homosexual sex  
 because a person has known nothing else or  
 because it might be *genetic*...

the argument is not logically persuasive.

It might appeal to our *feelings*,

and our desire to not hurt *someone else's* feelings.

But it is not logically persuasive.

The next question that arises is:

If *everyone and everything* is marked by sin,

why are we giving such special attention to *this one thing*, homosexual sex?

The short answer is this:



This one manifestation of sin has a number of people advocating,  
 not only to be *accepted*,  
 but even for it to be *blessed* in wedding ceremonies.  
 And not just in society at large,  
 but in our *denomination*.

That cannot be said about *any other* manifestation of sin.

Oh, the seriousness of *divorce* has been *ignored* to some extent.

Jesus had a *lot* to say about divorce,  
 and the last couple of generations of the church  
 have not been *very attentive* to his words.

And I think the church probably ought *to revisit* the reality of divorce,  
 and provide a ministry of repentance, recovery and rehabilitation  
 for people who have experienced divorce.

But the church's lax treatment of divorce  
*does not go nearly* as far as things have gone with homosexual sex.  
 No one is proposing or demanding that  
 we proclaim divorce to be *God-given* or  
 be given a ritual of *blessing* by God.

From the perspective of the history of biblical interpretation,

it is worth noting that these variant interpretations of verses about sexual morality  
 did not come into being until after the sexual revolution of the 1960s.

Which suggests to me these interpretations *did not* arise from *scripture itself*,  
 but from our *contemporary cultural drift*.

A *conclusion* was reached,  
 the acceptance of homosexual sex,  
 and then we set out to find a way to justify it with biblical interpretation.

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## Q&A

### HOMEWORK

Write down what you believe the Bible to be.

What do you mean when you say it is divinely inspired?

What is the Bible's dependability? Authority?