

# Homosexuality In the Bible

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# INTRODUCTION

This article does not seek to answer every possible objection to the current debates on the issue of homosexuality. Instead, this article attempts to present a positive case and provide readers with tools to defend and discuss the traditional position on homosexuality. With that said, one argument worth bringing up is that which states that the term “homosexuality” wasn’t invented or used in English Bibles until the 1940s. The argument goes that because the term doesn’t appear in the original text of the Bible, it *cannot be the same concept* being addressed. Therefore, in their mind, the Christian communities have inserted this concept into English translations. While it is true that the specific term, Homosexuality, may not have been used within the English Bibles, there are several problems with this. 1) the concepts are clearly expressed in the scriptures apart from the use of the specific term “homosexuality,” and 2) we cannot use an English term to translate a Hebrew or Greek phrase until it exists in English. The term “homosexual” wasn’t a part of the English language until, at best, the late 19th century. Yet, we find that the scriptures speak to this subject with or without the specific English term.

## SECTION I: A MATTER OF AUTHORITY

**W**hen thinking through the subject of homosexuality, there is no better place to begin than the authority at play here. I presuppose that the authority on matters of theology and doctrine are the scriptures.

Hamartiology is the doctrine of sin. Because it is doctrine and because of the nature of sin, a deviation from God's morals and standards, sin *must* be defined and understood according to God's standards. Man does not get to create the standards and change what is considered a deviation from the standard of God. Man can reject that standard and ignore God's morality, but sin is first and foremost defined theologically in relation to God and his revelation. To begin with, we must define sin per the authority that gave us the concept of sin.

If one does not care about transgressing the design of God's world and morality, then it is of no consequence when another says that homosexuality is one sin in the Bible. With that said, we must recognize that it is not the only sin, and this is where we all need to do better. Sexual sins have a wide range of deviations from the design and morality of God, and homosexuality is just one of them. We must recognize and say this outright, and we must all abstain from sin according to God's commandments for us.

The foundational presupposition here is that the scriptures are the authority we are appealing to define sin, creation, and love.

Many who try to claim a faithful evangelical position on the scriptures and hold that homosexuality is not a sin have often (though not always) demonstrated that they care not for the authority of the Bible but have interjected something into the text in order to justify sin. This is not new as it has happened throughout history. Men have and will take and abuse the Bible and commit grievous sins such as justifying slavery, adultery, the prosperity gospel, general control, abortion, etc. If we are truly biblical, we must let the text speak for itself on these matters, and the Bible is abundantly clear that homosexuality is a sin. I hope to demonstrate this, and before we go further, I want to stress that the Gospel is for everyone, and there is freedom, fulfillment, and wholeness in the Gospel that surpasses our struggles and sins. While the world has told you that your identity is wrapped up in your sexuality or sexual preferences, this is not so and should be changed when the Gospel comes to bear weight on your soul. There is beauty in obedience and design. Our identities are not wrapped up in sexuality, sexuality is a gift from God, but it has a good design and purpose like all things God created. Although, as we said, sinful man can abuse all good things, we must revere God and the Lord Jesus Christ and press on with our love for God and thus for our neighbor.

## SECTION 2:

# WHAT IS LOVE?

**F**irst, we must recognize that love is often the justifier of sin in this discussion.

The argument goes that God is love; therefore, I can have a loving and intimate relationship with someone of the same sex or validate another's same-sex relationship. While it is true that there is an *affection* in love for others and a love of the neighbor, we cannot correctly understand how to love our neighbor without the context of the first greatest commandment to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind. *Our love is first directed at God*, and Jesus notes that if we love him, we will keep his commands (John 14:15). Therefore, our love of neighbor is only appropriately understood in light of our love for God, and our love for neighbor should never violate this priority, nor will it in scripture.

To the love of God, we must begin with the reality that we should love God more than our sin and love God by recognizing his words, design, and precepts as authoritative. We love Jesus by submitting to his Lordship, and we yield to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. To love, then, is first to trust in God and to obey. For some, this means: Trust in God that you do not need this identity of sexual preference and obey that truth. Trust in God that you don't necessarily need a spouse, and obey that truth. Trust in God that you have been cleaned from your sin, or better yet, trust in God that his original design for sexuality is better than homosexuality.

We know that sin is a corruption of the good and ultimately can never fulfill as God's will can, so we apply that. Not only is there trust and obedience but there is a recognition that God is serious about sin. To justify sin or say something isn't a sin is exceptionally troublesome in scripture and calls God a liar. Isaiah 5:20 notes, "woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who turn darkness to light and light to darkness, who replace bitter with sweet and sweet with bitter." Further, 1 John notes that if we say we have no sin, we make God a liar, and the truth is not in us. This should be concerning for any Christian who may justify a sin, so may we all recognize sin in our lives and repent. This is all to say, let us examine the issue truthfully in order to love God.

The second greatest commandment follows the first, love your neighbor, and Galatians 5:14 says a lot about this in terms of weight; the entire law is fulfilled in this decree. In this context, Paul is speaking of freedom in Christ, and this freedom is not to be used as "an opportunity for the flesh," that is, sin. This is crucial for today's discussion. The Bible further calls us to love our neighbors by calling them to repentance. We do not let the addict wallow in their addiction and die, but we love them enough to call them out of the addiction. We do not let the man in the burning house sit in the house but call for him to escape. It is right and loving when a Christian calls another out of sin because as pleasurable as a sin may be to the natural man, it is not what is best. It is right and caring for a Christian to call others to love God, which

encompasses everything mentioned prior. Paul in Corinth has a lot to say about sexual immorality and tells the Corinthians,

"[do] not associate with sexually immoral people – not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler -not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge. God judges those outside. Purge the evil person from among you" (5:9-13).

Paul speaks to several sins and a church discipline that often makes all of us uncomfortable. Yet, here we will look to the "sexually immoral," a broad category containing specific content found elsewhere, *one of which* is homosexuality. Paul's directions here to have nothing to do with those people is twofold: 1) keep the church pure and 2) so that those people would come to repentance. It is an act of love for the church and those in sin.

So, what is love? It is first loving God, taking him seriously, living for him, and secondly, loving our neighbor by moving them to stay faithful in loving God or pleading with them to come to God. God is love, yes, but this does not negate his entire

character, which includes attributes of holiness, rebukes, wrath, and judgment. If God did not execute judgment, he would be neither good nor loving. A part of love is disciplining the wayward sinner (Proverbs 3:11-12) and rebuking the rebellious (Hebrews 12:5-6). Love is an open rebuke for the call of repentance (Proverbs 27:5-6), and God does this as well, "Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline, therefore be zealous and repent" (Rev. 3:19). We love by leading people from sin and to God.

## SECTION 3:

# GOD'S COVENANT AT CREATION

There is a reason why Christians begin in Genesis and appeal to Genesis for their understanding of marriage. This is because it is in Genesis where the concept of marriage derives. Since this is the place where the concept derives, we must recognize that this is the model and standard, but further, when we look at the account in Genesis, we find that this model is also based on a particular design and rooted in creation. This is not an obscure design placed in the middle of Leviticus, but rather how creation should operate.

It must be remembered that this is God's world, his creation, and here in Genesis 2, it is his formation of a bond between a man and a woman that forms the contents of "marriage." It is God's establishment, and it is God's rules. It is God's creation, and it is his parameters. This is so important to stress because the state can and will try to create secular institutions of marriage, but these are not the foundation or basis for the institution of marriage originally. If we ask, "what is the model of Biblical marriage?" According to God, we have the answer: it is a covenant between a man and a woman. According to his standard, which he deemed good. Corruptions of such a covenant are dealt with throughout the Bible, and yes, many individuals error and sin in the Bible, but this doesn't allow for a *prescription* to be taken from that which is *descriptive*. One sinner's actions in the Bible do not allow you to canonize that action in your book of morality.

The Bible *describes many things that it does not prescribe*; this is a critical point in hermeneutics. So, if we ask, "what is the model of secular marriage?" or "marriage according to the state?" they can answer however they please and establish whatever laws they desire, but the accurate model of marriage follows God and his creation.

The text in Genesis 2:18 begins by denoting God's grace in creating a partner for Adam, and this partner comes from Adam. In verses 22-23, we learn that the woman is made from man and complements man, which is reflected in the narrative. On this ground, *based on origin*, we find, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (v. 24). Here we have important details. At first, the man was one flesh, and out of him came the woman. They are reunited into one flesh at marriage. This cannot be for a man and a man or a woman and a woman. The text further notes this design; the man will leave *a father* and *a mother*, holding fast to his wife. The term "hold fast" denotes covenant faithfulness, and elsewhere in scripture, marriage is called a covenant (see Proverbs 2:17). Jesus and Paul utilize this text elsewhere in which we find a significant continuity (1 Cor. 6:16-17; Ephesians 5:25-32). The marriage is consummated by the man and the woman's becoming of one flesh via sexual intercourse.

Here we restate: 1) the covenant is created by God, 2) the covenant is between one man and woman, 3) the covenant is based on the creation of woman from man, 4) the covenant is consummated in man and woman's unity as one flesh via sexual intercourse, 5) the text presupposes these factors when it expresses the nature of a father

and a mother having their son become one flesh with a woman. In the New Testament use of the Old Testament, Frank Thielman puts it this way:

"The man expresses his delight: "Now, at last, this is bone from my bone and flesh from my flesh! She will be called woman because she was taken from man" (2:23). The narrator then takes this unique correspondence between woman and man, originating in the unity of their bone and flesh, as the reason ('al-kēn) why, in marriage, the man leaves his family, "clings" (dābaq) to his wife, and they "become one flesh." The organic unity of woman and man, ensured by the way in which God created the woman, corresponds to the physical unity of woman and man in marriage."<sup>1</sup>

The Jewish Study bible's notes are also helpful,

"The Lord's creation of woman from man emphasizes the close connection between them and lays the groundwork for the understanding of marriage (and its association with procreation) in v. 24. The creation of the woman after the man and from a part of his body need not imply the subordination of women to men. According to Ramban (Nahmanides, a great 13th-century Spanish rabbi), the point of v. 24 is that men are to be different from the males of the animal world,

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Thielman, "Ephesians," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 826-827.

who mate and move on to the next partner: A man “wishes [his wife] to be with him always.” Promiscuity is thus a degradation of God’s intentions in creating human beings male and female.”<sup>2</sup>

From here, we have a general consensus on the text. Jewish Interpretations at the time of Jesus agreed with what has been expressed, which we can see in Josephus and Philo, with the latter stating that this love fits two divided halves (man and woman) together.<sup>3</sup> This understanding is also consistently expressed in the early church as Ephrem the Syrian from the 4<sup>th</sup> century notes that the two, Adam and Eve, should become one again without division as they were from the beginning.<sup>4</sup> We’ll dive more into the historical aspects of such later.

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<sup>2</sup> Adele Berlin, Marc Zvi Brettler, and Michael A. Fishbane, eds. *The Jewish Study Bible*. Accordance electronic ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), paragraph 362.

<sup>3</sup> Creation 151–152; cf. Alleg. Interp. 2.44–52

<sup>4</sup> Commentary on Genesis 2.13.3

## SECTION 4:

# THE GOD OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

This section will be brief but necessary. It will replace the typical use of the Gospel of Matthew as evidence that Jesus spoke on Homosexuality. The reason why I have chosen this route will hopefully become evident. Here we must recognize a simple biblical truth that ripples and has ramifications. In many circles where the authority of scripture is diminished, there is a lack of theological awareness of the person and work of Jesus Christ. This comes into play, particularly with this subject.

To paint a picture, a movement of heretics arose in early church history that put forward the notion that there was the “evil god” of the Old Testament and the “good god” of the New Testament. In such a belief, the Old Testament was effectively ignored by this group and removed. Many modern evangelicals have effectively done the same. They have neglected his wrath, justice, and might by emphasizing God's love. It is quite sad that this means they miss God's love, mercy, and compassion in the Old Testament, but I digress. In essence, many Christians have detached from the Old Testament and have made claims such as “well, that was God in the Old Testament, and now we know what God is really like in the New.” With numerous problems here, a significant disconnect is found in these evangelicals’ neglect of proper Christology - Jesus is God the Eternal Son, also known as the primary agent in the Godhead (Jude v. 5).

When God flooded the earth, destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, sent plagues on Egypt, punished unbelieving Israelites, destroyed evil nations, and ordered the conquests of Joshua, it was Jesus in complete agreement with the Father and Spirit. When God established a created order of gender and put forward standards of sexuality and holiness in the Old Testament, it was Jesus. If you believe that there is a disconnect from God the Son's will from the Father and Spirit, who all act in one will within the Old Testament, then you are mistaken. Not only this, but Jesus will return with sword, wrath, and justice (Revelation 19:15). In the Son's first advent, he came to bring peace and a means of everlasting reconciliation, but in the second advent, the Son will subdue enemies and those not reconciled to God in finality.

This is absolutely crucial because when we reach the argument that Jesus never had anything to say on homosexuality, we find this disconnect rearing its head. *Jesus established the covenant between man and woman at creation; he didn't merely reaffirm it.* Additionally, Jesus destroyed Sodom for their sin, Jesus established the laws of Leviticus, and Jesus reiterated the covenant of creation. What is often a quiet assumption in this discussion is that there also is a disconnect between Paul and Jesus. As we'll see later, what was known and established in the Old Testament was evident for Jesus, and his contemporaries, and Paul restates the design of marriage. However, this is all to say, that *Jesus is the God of the Old Testament. There is no distinction between God's stance on homosexuality and Jesus.* When we speak about what Jesus deems loving,

right, and true, he assumes the ethics of the Old Testament and agrees with what occurred within its texts because he is the divine Word of God.

## SECTION 5:

# SODOM AND GOMORRAH

**F**or decades, Sodom and Gomorrah have been pointed to as a text on this topic, and while this is for a good reason, I'm not sure many know why.

So we're going to take a look at the account and understand why "sodomite" was the original translation of "homosexual" before the English term homosexual was coined. In Genesis 13:13, we learn that the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the Lord. Straight forward enough, yet we aren't given details besides the fact that these are the *men* of Sodom and that they are wicked and exceedingly so. In Genesis 18-19, we find that the angels who visit Abram note that the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah is especially grave (18:20). Chapter 19 of Genesis is where we get more details, and if you remember, it is Lot who is in Sodom on account of Abram and Lot's splitting up prior. The angels reach Sodom, and we come to 19:1-3,

"The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed himself with his face to the earth and said, "My lords, please turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night and wash your feet. Then you may rise up early and go on your way." They said, "No; we will spend the night in the town square." But he pressed them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house. And he made them a feast and baked unleavened bread, and they ate."

(Genesis 19:1–3)

Lot recognizes the men and invites them into his home, to which such hospitality was expected, yet Lot notes that they should stay, “then you may rise up early and go on your way” rather than having an extended stay. The angels’ response is to suggest they spend the night in the town square. Their suggestion is met with Lot’s “pressing them strongly” so that the men would not stay in the square but instead stay with him. Lot, who has remained in this area for quite some time, knows the people, he knows this exceeding wickedness spoken of before chapter 19, and we see how this plays out when he recognizes exceptional guests. Verse 4 then,

“But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house. And they called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them.” Lot went out to the men at the entrance, shut the door after him” (Genesis 19:4–6).

So here we have the *men of the city*, restated again, the men of Sodom, leaving no mistake of the specificity here, of all age ranges, all of them surrounding Lot’s house. The entire populous of men were surrounding the house while calling out to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them.” The term that is rendered as “know” here often denotes sexual relations and is

used in numerous texts wherein one is sexually “knowing” their wife, such as Adam and Eve “knowing” each other in Genesis 4:1. So, in some translations, such as the NIV, you’ll find, “so that we can have sex with them.” Within the LXX, the Greek Old Testament familiar to the Jews and apostles in Jesus’ day, we find the term “συγγενώμεθα” being used. The term means the same as we have stated thus far, “to have sexual intercourse.”<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere in the Old Testament, this particular word is used only in three places: in the LXX, here, Genesis 39:10, and in the non-canonical book of Judith 12:16. Since you may not have access to the latter, it reads, “Now when Judith came in and reclined, the very heart of Holofernes was ravished by her, and his deepest feelings were aroused. He was exceedingly desirous of her, and had been waiting for the moment to seduce her since the first time he saw her,” which puts the term in a sexual context, to say the least. This is the case in its entire three occurrences. Regarding the word and the passage, the NET notes,

"The expression *יְדַעַת* (yada‘) “to know” is a euphemism for sexual relations. Elsewhere NET employs the English euphemism “be intimate with” for this use of *יְדַעַת*, but uses a different euphemism here because of the perverse overtones of force in this context. Their intent is to molest them, but their rhetoric tries to minimize their wickedness. The sin of the men of Sodom is debated. The fact that the sin involved a sexual act (see note on the phrase “take carnal knowledge of”

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<sup>5</sup> A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint, (LEH) s.v. “συγγίνομαι,” 574.

in 19:5) precludes an association of the sin with inhospitality as is sometimes asserted (see W. Roth, "What of Sodom and Gomorrah? Homosexual Acts in the Old Testament," Explor 1 [1974]: 7-14). The text at a minimum condemns forced sexual intercourse, i.e., rape. Other considerations, though, point to a condemnation of homosexual acts more generally. The narrator emphasizes the fact that the men of Sodom wanted to have sex with men: They demand that Lot release the angelic messengers (seen as men) to them for sex, and when Lot offers his daughters as a substitute they refuse them and attempt to take the angelic messengers by force. In addition, the wider context of the Pentateuch condemns homosexual acts as sin (see, e.g., Lev 18:22). Thus, a reading of this text within its narrative context, both immediate and broad, condemns not only the attempted rape but also the attempted homosexual act.<sup>6</sup>

The notes from the NET get us a little ahead of ourselves here, though, and so we go back to our text. Here the men of the city surround the house and call for Lot to bring out the angels in order to have sexual relations with them. Lot goes out, and the text notes that he shuts the door after himself. Lot states in verse 7, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly." This use of wickedness is a throwback to Genesis 13:13, when Sodom is called wicked. A peculiar point comes up in the text,

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<sup>6</sup> W. Hall Harris, eds. *The NET Bible Notes*. 1st, Accordance electronic ed. (Richardson: Biblical Studies Press, 2005), paragraph 1697.

"Behold, I have two daughters who have not known any man. Let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please. Only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof." (Genesis 19:8)

This text always makes us a bit uncomfortable because *we know* what Lot is offering regarding his daughters as he offers them to the men while saying that they hadn't "known" (the same term mentioned previously) any man. In terms of why or how Lot could do this, quite interesting is the argument of White and Niell here,

"Yet we still have to ask, how could any father make such an offer? Surely we can say with confidence that the angels would never have allowed this to take place, had the men even accepted the offer. But are we forced to simply condemn Lot as an unloving man who was willing to offer his daughters to be ravished by a crowd of men? One alternative possibility does exist. Lot knew these men. He knew their lifestyle, their activities. Seemingly a sort of truce existed between him and the homosexual inhabitants of Sodom: they did not seek to involve him in their activities, and he did not speak out against them. It is possible that Lot is simply buying time, knowing that, in fact, the offer will not be accepted, for these men simply do not have any desire for women. He may feel his daughters are

perfectly safe, for those standing before him had shown a firm and unwavering desire for sexual fulfillment with men, not with women.”<sup>7</sup>

Following this, the men of Sodom, get upset at Lot’s judgment of their desires,

“But they said, “Stand back!” And they said, “This fellow came to sojourn, and he has become the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them.”

Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and drew near to break the door down” (Genesis 19:9). In the following verse the angels strike the men with blindness, yet in their rage, “they wore themselves out groping for the door” (v. 11).

The text becomes quite clear before the destruction of Sodom, and parallels of Sodom are found throughout the Old Testament. One is notably Judges 19:10-30, wherein we find a narrative similar to Lot and Sodom in verses 22-26. In this text, the men of the city surround a house to “know” a guest while the host, like Lot, states, “do not act so wickedly.” In this case, however, the host offers his daughter and concubine to the men wherein the concubine was “known” and abused by the men of the city. We find not only a parallel in language and narrative but the harsh descriptive reality of sin.

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<sup>7</sup> White, James R.; Niell, Jeffrey D.. The Same Sex Controversy (p. 35). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Jude 6-7 and 2 Peter 2:4-10 also note Sodom and Gomorrah as a type of God's punishment against immorality. Jude states that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah "indulged in *sexual immorality* and pursued *unnatural desire*" (My emphasis). Peter, being close to Jude in many ways, notes, "if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked" (v. 8) and "especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority" (v. 10). Judges, Jude, and Peter's parallels clarify what these men's sins were, but we should also point out that there is a dynamic between the men, their desires, and their lusts.

There are several new objections to the typical understanding of Sodom's sin, such as the sin of inhospitality or wanting intercourse with angelic beings. Yet, these fall short, given what we have demonstrated thus far. The text is emphatic on the men wanting relations with the men. Were they inhospitable? Perhaps, but that certainly is not the thrust of the text. The issue with the angelic interpretation is that there is no indication that the men of Sodom knew that the men in Lot's house were actually angels. What we ultimately find with this text of Sodom, and how Sodom is understood elsewhere, is that these men were punished for, in the words of Jude and Peter, indulging in sexual immorality, pursuing unnatural desire, sensual conduct of the wicked, indulgence in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority. Notice that this isn't just "lust" but *unnatural desire*. The only point of reference for what is natural and unnatural within the scriptures are the designs of God, and any deviation from that design is sin.

Before we move on to Leviticus, where homosexuality is addressed in the Mosaic law, we should address something that is quite important. When Leviticus is brought into discussions on this subject, typically, so do other commands in the law that we don't observe today, such as mixed fabrics. While you can answer this several ways, and how you respond will depend upon how you view the law overall, there is a crucial detail we have to note: *the previous three arguments we just examined were all pre-Mosaic law.* We have first the reality of Jesus as God, second the creation account, and third the wickedness of Sodom, all occurring before Moses and the law. This is significant as Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction shows that the men were wicked in, as Peter and Jude note, *unnatural desires that they would have known about before the giving of the law.* The men in Sodom didn't need the law to know that what they were doing was unnatural or sin, nor did Lot. It was against the natural order, it was against design, and this is crucial to stress. Leviticus is not a singular point on the topic but merely *the continuity of what is assumed already leading up to the law from Adam to Moses.*

## SECTION 6:

# CONTINUITY IN LEVITICUS

In Leviticus, there are two texts that speak to our subject, 18:22 and 20:13. For the most part, these texts are not *often* questioned by critics (interestingly enough) because of how clear they are. Typically, the arguments will appeal to this law being specifically for Israel and/or *this* type of homosexuality being in relation to idol worship. Obviously, there are different positions, such as the idea that this only relates to pedophilia, but the former two are the most prominent. The two texts read as follows: "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination." (Leviticus 18:22) and "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." (Leviticus 20:13). Many homosexuality advocates recognize the clarity of these texts, with some exceptions mentioned prior. Some will say that this passage only deals with Israel, or a cultic or idolatrous form of homosexuality, not a loving, monogamous relationship. Within this first view of 18:22-30, we find an argument that this was predominately tied to Israel problematic just in the passage's immediate context. Following verses 21-23, where God condemns the offering of children to Molech, homosexuality, and bestiality, we read;

"Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean, and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. But you shall keep my statutes and my rules and do none of these abominations, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you (for the people of the land, who were before you, did all of these abominations, so that the land became unclean), lest the land vomit you out when you make it unclean, as it vomited out the nation that was before you. For everyone who does any of these abominations, the persons who do them shall be cut off from among their people. So keep my charge never to practice any of these abominable customs that were practiced before you, and never to make yourselves unclean by them: I am the LORD your God."

(Leviticus 18:24–30)

First, note that these things *in themselves* make the people unclean. The nations before Israel had become unclean by these same actions, actions that elicited judgment. Further, these actions are called abominations as in verse 22, "for the people of the land, who were before you, did all of these abominations, so that the land became unclean." So those in the past prior to Israel were punished for *these actions*, and further, "For everyone who does any of these abominations, the persons who do them shall be cut off from among their people." The emphasis is driven home again; never practice any of these customs. There are attempts to turn to other Levitical laws to deflect from the

Bible's consistency thus far and undermine it. However, we must focus on the singular ethical question at play on homosexuality, which extends so far from creation to Israel but is clearly not exclusive to Israel. To summarize such deflections, I'll cite White and Niell,

"The argument essentially is, "If you do not obey all of the book of Leviticus, then you cannot condemn me for my disregard of 18:22 and 20:13." First of all, let it be noted that a person's, or a nation's, obedience to God's Word does not make a particular commandment valid or binding. Those who are Christian strive to obey the Bible where and when and how the Bible prescribes obedience, regardless of popularity or opinion polls. Additionally, ignorance of God's commands or redefinition of His commands does not give one a "not guilty" status before God. Furthermore, those who argue from the book of Leviticus as Pattison does reveal their ignorance of God's Word and posture themselves as judges over God's own Word. In their judgment over God's Word, they are adept at declaring when it is obligatory, when it is relevant, and when it is applicable. Since they have confined the entire book of Leviticus to an irrelevant, non-binding status, it can be disregarded in the present day."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

In this citation, they are pointing to one man's attempts to point to the dietary aspects of the law to call Christians hypocritical; of course, we know that dietary restrictions are clearly repealed in the New Testament text. Additionally, such restrictions *were not present in creation*, nor were other nations judged for these restrictions. Later, we find that they acted as specific ethnic barriers to make Israel distinct. Contrary to the dietary restrictions, we have a clear line of continuity that is met minimally in Jude and Peter. Still, as we'll see later, it is also encountered in other New Testament texts. As White and Niell note, to abandon homosexuality as sinful in this text yet leave pedophilia as morally evil (and bestiality), the one who advocates for homosexuality ends up in a predicament.<sup>9</sup>

The other point of deflection is the argument that these texts do not prohibit every kind of homosexuality but only a certain kind, an idolatrous kind or one that merely lacks a loving, consensual partnership. However, one could snowball this logic and could say the same regarding pedophilia, bestiality, and sacrificing children if they are consistent (and adultery contained in verse 20 of chapter 18, unfortunately, some nowadays *do use this logic*). The chain reaction continues if we aren't careful here.

Some, to argue this is a type of temple prostitution or that idolatry is in mind will bring 1 and 2 Kings, with its temple prostitutes into the discussion. However, while there were those in the temple who were prostitutes in 1 and 2 Kings, the qualifying

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

term for these individuals (“qadesh”) is not used in Leviticus, which is significant, as White and Niell point out,

“because the word qadesh was known and used by Moses in the Pentateuch in Deuteronomy 23:17: “None of the daughters of Israel shall be a cult prostitute (qadesh), nor shall any of the sons of Israel be a cult prostitute (qadesh).” Moses could have used the word in Leviticus; it was known by him and available, yet he did not use it.”<sup>10</sup>

Further, they point out,

“The word that is used to describe this “lying with” in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 is the very same Hebrew word that is used for a bed and for sexual intercourse. The word refers to male intercourse. The Leviticus passages are not unclear; they are very clear and stand convincingly relevant in our present day.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

In this text, their footnote states,

"The Hebrew word is mish-cov and, since it refers to both a bed (Exodus 8:3; 2 Samuel 4:7; 11:2) and to intercourse (Numbers 31:17–18, 35; Judges 21:11–12), this word is equivalent to our English slang of "going to bed with" or "sleeping with" another. This word, being used in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, clearly refers to male intercourse."

We find a consensus on these texts on what they are saying, yet how they are applied in the New Testament era is where the debate ultimately lies. We will revisit these texts of Leviticus later as we move into 1 Corinthians, as the Greek Old Testament becomes quite educational on the matters being discussed. For now, we are going to discuss homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world before moving on to the New Testament text, for it is often claimed that homosexuality was very limited in the historical setting of the New Testament and thus not a sin in the way modern Christians say.

## SECTION 7:

# HOMOSEXUALITY IN THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD

**A**t this point there is usually a discussion about whether or not homosexuality was present in the world of Jesus. There tends to be an emphasis on the relationship between adult males and young men and male prostitution. Yet, it is said by some scholars like D.F. Wright that pederasty was not as acceptable in the Roman-dominated world as it was in classical Greece. To be balanced, female homosexuality is said to be mentioned in classical Greek literature rarely, and not often in the Hellenistic period, but rather in the post-NT period.<sup>12</sup> Keener notes that "Ancient Judaism regarded homosexual activity and bestiality as subcategories of the larger issue of sexual immorality"<sup>13</sup> in citing rabbinic literature.<sup>14</sup> According to Jewish rhetoric, the Gentile immorality of homosexual love was outside the confines of marriage and family. The Jews saw homosexuality as a unique Gentile sin, and homosexual behavior merited death or punishment by God in the afterlife (Josephus *Ant.*; 2 Enoch 10:4).<sup>15</sup> It was seen as unnatural, likely concerning the inability

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<sup>12</sup> D. F. Wright, Dictionary of Paul and His Letters, s.v. "HOMOSEXUALITY," 413.

<sup>13</sup> C. S. Keener, *DNTB*, s.v. "Adultery, Divorce," 14.

<sup>14</sup> Sipra Qed. pq. 10.208.2.12

<sup>15</sup> Josephus *Ant.* 3.12.1 §275; *Ag.Ap.* 2.25. §§199, 215; 2 Enoch 10:4

for procreation (Josephus; Aristotle). The Greeks, however, found it to be common as even deities like Zeus raped a boy, Ganymede while in Greek Mythology, other deities and other creatures exhibited homosexual desires.<sup>16</sup> Male homosexuality was common in biographies and fiction, sometimes focusing on Romance.

"Various thinkers debated whether cross-gender or same-gender sexual love was superior (e.g., Plutarch *Dial. on Love* 5, *Mor.* 751E-752B; Achilles Tatius *Leuc.* 2.35.2-3; Plato *Symp.* 222C). Lesbian affection (e.g., *PGM* 32.1.-19) was also known though less widely accepted (Ovid *Met.* 9.720.-63; Martial *Epigr.* 1.90). Male prostitutes appear in the writings of Petronius (*Sat.* 8, 21, 23, 28) and Martial (*Epigr.* 3.82)."<sup>17</sup>

For Roman customs, there was a disapproval of the practice. Still, it became widespread among the upper-class Romans in particular (two examples being Emperor Nero and Tiberius) in the first century.

Essentially this is to say that homosexuality and romantic homosexuality are not novel nor limited to adult men with young boys, as many like to say. But this also shows a continuity between the Old Testament and Jews in the New Testament era. This continuity continues with Jesus and Paul, *whom both presuppose the foundation of the Old*

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<sup>16</sup> (Homer *Il.* 20.232.-35; Virgil *Aen.* 1.28; Ovid *Met.* 10.155.-61; Achilles Tatius *Leuc.* 2.36.3-4); other deities (Ovid *Met.* 10.162-219) and supernatural creatures (Euripides *Cycl.* 583-87; Athenaeus *Deipn.* 1.23d), pulled from Kenner.

<sup>17</sup> C. S. Keener, *DNTB*, s.v. "Adultery, Divorce," 14.

*Testament as authoritative and continue in their Jewish heritage with the understanding of homosexuality as unnatural and outside design.*

## SECTION 8:

# CONTINUITY IN PAUL

**A**s mentioned already, the continuity with Jesus is assumed on three grounds 1) The theological reality that Jesus is the Eternal Son of God who was the means by which all things were created and who instituted the Laws we discussed already 2) his upholding of the Old Testament's authority, and 3) his Jewishness. Some will quote Jesus' quotation of Genesis one in Matthew on this subject. Still, I'm not convinced it is necessary for two reasons: the three points previously mentioned, and that wasn't Jesus' precise point of using that quotation even though he affirmed what was presupposed. Continuity in Jesus is simply assumed theologically and culturally. I think the deity of Christ is the end-all appeal on the subject, though it will be admitted that many progressives will deny the deity of Christ, yet, such a denial foregoes and forfeits any claim of being a Christian.

So, enter in Paul and his continuity. Such a continuity is not only presupposed based on Paul's role as a zealous law-abiding Jew but also explicitly in his writings. Romans 1 reads;

"For this reason, God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error." (Romans 1:26–27)

In this passage, Paul lays out that homosexuality is an unnatural perversion of God's created order, as we have seen elsewhere so far. There is a lot that could be said here, as the passage is a whopper, but we're going to hone in on this issue. The context of Romans is an epistle expounding on the good news, and Paul begins the first three chapters pointing out the sinfulness of man. The passage begins with the proclamation of the wrath of God upon humanity v. 18, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." God is holy, and his wrath comes upon that which is not holy, what is ungodly and unrighteousness. The chapter tells us that man is not ignorant but rather actively suppresses the truth; it is an active rebellion against the creator. Paul tells the Romans that God is evident for humanity (v. 19) and that God has been revealed through creation specifically what is revealed is God's power and divine nature. This is called general revelation, which is all that is necessary to hold humanity accountable for denying God and making man without excuse, as Paul outlines.

Paul continues knowing that humanity suppresses and twists the truth *that is obvious in creation*. He first does this in regards to religion. He speaks of men worshiping created things and not the creator himself, idolatry. In verse 24, Paul notes that God lets the sinful creature wallow in their sin and punishes them by the consumption of their own lusts. Here we reach verse 26, where "for this reason" because of their idolatry, God gives men over to shameful lusts or degrading passions. The text mentions lesbianism

first, women who burned in their desire toward one another, followed by men with men “in the same way.” Both are described as being “against nature” and against the obvious revelation of God. The text is quite straightforward and consistent with what we have discussed thus far. What is against nature is exchanging relationships between men and women for relationships between the same sex.

Objections to this clear passage abound. Some will say this is a text against general infidelity or that this passage speaks out against homosexual acts committed by heterosexuals. Basically, for these arguments, this is a calling out of going against one’s orientation. This, however, is eisegesis that is untenable with what is clearly stated in the text, especially in light of the continuity thus far. Another objection is that this isn’t addressing those oriented towards same-sex attraction (similar to the first point). It typically claims that Paul wasn’t aware of such an orientation. Though, this is ahistorical, which was demonstrated prior. White and Niell point out that Plat’s Symposium, written long before Paul,

“showed that the ancients were well aware of all the elements of modern homosexual behavior, even if they did not use the same exact words. Plato’s writings make reference to male homosexuality, lesbianism, the claims of some to be born as a willing mate of a man, the concept of mutuality, permanency, gay pride, pederasty, ‘homophobia,’ motive, desire, passion, etc. One would have to assume Paul a very

poor student and a very poor observer of the culture around him to be unaware of these things.”<sup>18</sup>

Moving further into Paul, we can look at 1 Corinthians. The church in Corinth was, what we could call, a hot mess, especially regarding sexual ethics. Paul is reminding the people in Corinth of the holiness of God to which they are called to uphold, and Paul also stresses that Christians should not be looking to the counsel of unbelievers when it comes to the judgment of ethics (6:1-7). Our target text reads as follows;

“Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

Paul begins by asking, “do you not know,” which indicates that the people in Corinth *should already know* this information, yet he feels the need to restate it anyway. Much like the whole of the New Testament, issues entering the church were theological and ethical, and these two were intrinsically linked. He notes that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is a kingdom of the righteous and holy king.

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<sup>18</sup> White, James R.; Niell, Jeffrey D.. The Same Sex Controversy (p. 129).

The list then reaches the discussion on homosexuality, with the same term used in 1 Timothy 1:10. The term is *Arsenokoites*. This term is the point of controversy as objectors will narrow the term to mean something more specific that allows for other forms of homosexuality to be permissible. However, looking back to the LXX, the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures, we find an intentionality in Paul that should be noted. Given that the New Testament authors utilized the Greek text of the Old Testament, this becomes particularly noteworthy. Within the text of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, already discussed, we find the text against homosexuality utilizing two terms, “arsenos” (male) and “koiten” (to lie with sexually, have intercourse). In 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy, we find these two words *compounded into a single word – arsenokites*.

<i>Arsenokoites</i>	Arsenos & koiten
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BDAG, the leading Greek Lexicon, simply notes, “a male who engages in sexual activity with a person of his own sex,” though BDAG includes “pederast.” Paul’s point ultimately cannot be explained by alleged temple prostitution or contract with boys. Not only is this the case, but scholars predominately agree that this particular term did not appear before the New Testament, which points to the high probability that the term arose from Rabbis or was coined by Paul (which isn’t unusual for Paul).

As stated previously, the same term appears in 1 Timothy,

"But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching." (1 Timothy 1:8-10).

The term itself should be translated, as it has been here, as homosexual behavior in a more broad sense rather than some ambiguous subcategory not found in the text. Note that this is included in the category of sound teaching, and the morals presented here closely align with the ten commandments. Why, though? I would postulate because it was an assumed ethic of creation. Looking back to 1 Corinthians and arsenokoites, White and Niell point out importantly,

"We miss the truly redemptive force of 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, however, if we allow ourselves to be caught up solely in the discussion of the meaning of arsenokoites. Once its definition has been established, we must surely hear the clear teaching of this portion of God's Word: 11Such 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 in the Spirit of our God. The past tense "such were some of you" cannot be ignored. Paul does not address "homosexual Christians." He addresses former

homosexuals who were now Christians. A transition had taken place, a supernatural movement from the practice of homosexuality to the Christian faith."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

## SECTION 9:

# CONTINUITY IN THE EARLY CHURCH

The last consideration on the subject of homosexuality is the continuity in the early church. To account for all citations would be quite a task, but we find that the early Christian interpretation of the Bible found continuity with the Old Testament. The early church recognized homosexuality as contrary to God's law and that Sodom was condemned in part to homosexuality. Here we will just sample some quotes pulled from Kevin DeYoung, White, and Niell,

Athenagoras (2nd Century),

"But though such is our character (Oh! why should I speak of things unfit to be uttered?), the things said of us are an example of the proverb, "The harlot reproves the chaste." For those who have set up a market for fornication and established infamous resorts for the young for every kind of vile pleasure—who do not abstain even from males, males with males committing shocking abominations, outraging all the noblest and comeliest bodies in all sorts of ways, so dishonoring the fair workmanship of God (for beauty on earth is not self-made, but sent hither by the hand and will of God)—these men, I say, revile us for the very things which they are

conscious of themselves, and ascribe to their own gods, boasting of them as noble deeds, and worthy of the gods. These adulterers and pederasts defame the eunuchs and the once-married (while they themselves live like fishes; for these gulp down whatever falls in their way, and the stronger chases the weaker: and, in fact, this is to feed upon human flesh, to do violence in contravention of the very laws which you and your ancestors, with due care for all that is fair and right, have enacted), so that not even the governors of the provinces sent by you suffice for the hearing of the complaints against those, to whom it even is not lawful, when they are struck, not to offer themselves for more blows, nor when defamed not to bless: for it is not enough to be just (and justice is to return like for like), but it is incumbent on us to be good and patient of evil."

Tertullian (2-3 centuries),

"Demanding then a law of God, you have that common one prevailing all over the world, engraven on the natural tables to which the apostle too is wont to appeal, as when in respect of the woman's veil he says, "Does not even Nature teach you?"—as when to the Romans, affirming that the heathen do by nature those things which the law requires, he suggests both natural law and a law-revealing nature. Yes, and also in the first chapter of the epistle he authenticates nature, when he asserts that males

and females changed among themselves the natural use of the creature into that which is unnatural, by way of penal retribution for their error."

Cyprian (3rd century),

"For, their own proper character being overcome, it sends the entire man under its yoke of lust, alluring at first, that it may do the more mischief by its attraction,—the foe of continency, exhausting both means and modesty; the perilous madness of lust frequently attaining to the blood, the destruction of a good conscience, the mother of impenitence, the ruin of a more virtuous age, the disgrace of one's race, driving away all confidence in blood and family, intruding one's own children upon the affections of strangers, interpolating the offspring of an unknown and corrupted stock into the testaments of others. And this also, very frequently burning without reference to sex, and not restraining itself within the permitted limits, thinks it little satisfaction to itself, unless even in the bodies of men it seeks, not a new pleasure, but goes in quest of extraordinary and revolting extravagances, contrary to nature itself, of men with men."

## SECTION 10:

# CONCLUSION

**W**hether or not this article will prove helpful remains to be seen. My concluding thoughts are that Christians can do better about how we engage in this topic overall. We recognize that according to the Bible, homosexuality is a sin. But, we must also keep in perspective and concede rightly that heterosexual lust is also a sin along with divorce, which has been a plague within evangelical circles. We must not be unbalanced in how we treat these issues. When we examine these sin lists, such as 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, we find that homosexuality is listed with other sins such as idolatry, adultery, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, etc. There are many sins that many individuals can struggle with, and so we need to be careful not to elevate some sins too much. We are all born into sin, with particular inclinations to particular sins. Thanks be to God, who is a savior. With that said, we should never identify with our sin if we are in Christ. We ought not to be “homosexual Christians,” just as we would not say we are “lustful Christians” or “alcoholic Christians.” It is an antithetical blending of identities. Further, while we can struggle with our sins, we don’t wrap our identity in those sins.

From my observation, the Christian community that *struggles* with homosexuality, and does not necessarily engage in homosexual acts, has been treated poorly. While I believe it is a problem for them to call themselves “homosexual Christians,” I have observed that many tend to mean, “this is the sin I struggle with.”

This caution is to say; that we ought to clarify what they mean if we engage in this conversation. If they say that they are a practicing homosexual, they need to be called to repentance like the drunkards and adulterers, with the truth that Christ came to save us. However, if they are saying that they struggle with same-sex attraction or lust, we ought to walk with them and confess our struggles rather than isolate them. 1 Corinthians 6:9 through 11 offers us a beautiful reminder that once we were all enemies of Christ and left identifying with our sins, but we have been washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.