

What Does the Bible teach about Homosexuality?

Homosexuality is perhaps the most controversial issue of debate in American culture. Once described as *"the love that dares not speak its name,"* homosexuality is now discussed and debated throughout American society as well as the American Church. The ongoing debate in society as well as evangelicalism begs the question; what does Berean believe?

The Scriptures clearly teach that homosexuality is sinful

The affirmation of biblical authority is central to this church's consideration of this issue (or any issue). The Bible is the Word of God; that is the *Word from God*, in written form, inerrant and infallible, inspired by the Holy Spirit and *"profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness"* [2 Timothy 3:16]. The conviction that the Word of God is truly God's authoritative voice to mankind about all matters is a critical watershed. Churches that reject the authority of the Scriptures eventually succumb to cultural pressure and accommodate their understanding of homosexuality (or other contemporary issues like feminism and the ordination of female clergy) to the spirit of the age. On the other hand, churches that affirm, confess, and acknowledge the full authority of the Bible have no choice in this matter—each must speak a word of compassionate truth. The compassionate word of truth is this: ***Homosexual acts are expressly and unconditionally forbidden by God through His Word, and such acts are an abomination to the Lord by His own declaration.***

Professor Elizabeth Achtemeier of Richmond's Union Theological Seminary states the case clearly: *"The clearest teaching of Scripture is that God intended sexual intercourse to be limited to the marriage relationship of one man and one woman."*(1) That this is so should be apparent to all who look to the Bible for guidance on this issue. This assessment of the biblical record would have been completely uncontroversial throughout the last nineteen centuries of the Christian church. Only in recent years have some biblical scholars come forward to claim that the Bible presents a mixed message--or a very different message--on homosexuality.

On Developing a Pro-Homosexual Interpretation of the Scriptures

The homosexual agenda is pushed by activists who are totally committed to the cause of making homosexuality a sanctioned and recognized form of sexual activity--and the basis for legitimate family relationships. Every obstacle which stands in the way of progress toward this agenda must be removed, and Scripture stands as the most formidable obstacle to that agenda.

We should not be surprised therefore that apologists for the homosexual agenda have arisen even within the world of biblical scholarship. Biblical scholars are themselves a very mixed group, with some defending the authority of Scripture and others bent on deconstructing the biblical text. The battle lines on this issue are immediately apparent. Many who deny the truthfulness, inspiration, and authority of the Bible have come to argue that Scripture sanctions homosexuality--or at least to argue that the biblical passages forbidding homosexual acts are confused, misinterpreted, or irrelevant.

To accomplish this requires feats of exotic biblical interpretation worthy of the most agile circus contortionist. Several decades ago, the late J. Gresham Machen remarked that *"The Bible, with a complete abandonment of all scientific historical method, and of all common sense, is made to say the exact opposite of what it means; no Gnostic, no medieval monk with his fourfold sense of Scripture, ever produced more absurd Biblical interpretation than can be heard every Sunday in the pulpits of New York."*(2) Dr. Machen was referring to the misuse and misapplication of Scripture which he saw as a mark of the infusion of a pagan spirit within the church. Even greater absurdity than that observed by Machen is now evident among those determined to make the Bible sanction homosexuality.

Different approaches are taken toward this end which can only be highlighted in this position paper.

- **Some scholars outright reject biblical authority**

This quote by William M. Kent, a member of the committee assigned by United Methodists to study homosexuality is an example of a far to typical rejection of biblical authority: *"the scriptural texts in the Old and New Testaments condemning homosexual practice are neither inspired by God nor otherwise of enduring Christian value. Considered in the light of the best biblical, theological, scientific, and social knowledge, the biblical condemnation of homosexual practice is better understood as representing time and place bound cultural prejudice."*(3) This approach is the most honest taken among the revisionists. These persons do not deny that the Bible expressly forbids homosexual practices--they acknowledge that the Bible does just that. Their answer is straightforward; we must abandon the Bible in light of modern "knowledge."

- **Some scholars actively oppose biblical authority**

Gary David Comstock, Protestant chaplain at Wesleyan University said: *"Not to recognize, critique, and condemn Paul's equation of godlessness with homosexuality is dangerous. To remain within our respective Christian*

traditions and not challenge those passages that degrade and destroy us is to contribute to our own oppression."(4) Further, Comstock argues that "These passages will be brought up and used against us again and again until Christians demand their removal from the biblical canon, or, at the very least, formally discredit their authority to prescribe behavior."(5)

- **Some scholars apologize for the ignorant limitations of the Scripture writers**

These scholars suggest that the human authors of Scripture were merely limited by the scientific immaturity of their age. If they knew what we now know, these revisionists claim, the human authors of Scripture would never have been so closed-minded. Victor Paul Furnish argues: "Not only the terms, but the concepts 'homosexual' and 'homosexuality' were unknown in Paul's day. These terms like 'heterosexual,' 'heterosexuality,' 'bisexual,' and 'bisexuality' presuppose an understanding of human sexuality that was possible only with the advent of modern psychology and sociological analysis. The ancient writers were operating without the vaguest idea of what we have learned to call 'sexual orientation'."(6)

- **Some scholars redefine the plain meaning of homosexuality in the Old and New Testaments**

Revisionists, adopting this view, deny that biblical passages actually refer to homosexuality as it is defined today. They argue that the passages in question refer to specific and "oppressive" homosexual acts. For instance, some argue that Paul and other biblical writers actually speak against pederasty [the sexual abuse of young boys], homosexual rape, or to "non-committed" homosexual relationships. Yet, in order to make this case, the revisionists must deny the obvious--and argue the ridiculous. The ridiculous is epitomized in the argument of John J. McNeill who says that the sin of Sodom was actually a sin of inhospitality.

The Bible's message on homosexuality

"Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason, God gave them over to degrading passions; for the 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 makes absolutely clear that homosexual acts and homosexual desire are a rebellion against God's sovereign intention in creation and a gross perversion of God's good and perfect plan for His created order. Paul makes clear that homosexuality--among both males and females--is a dramatic sign of rebellion against God and His intention in creation. Men and women involved in homosexuality have forfeited the natural complementarity of God's intention for heterosexual marriage and have turned to members of their own sex, burning with an illicit desire which is in itself both degrading and dishonorable. The message is very strong and incredibly clear.

Paul and the other apostles seem completely ignorant of modern secular understandings of sexual identity and orientation--and this truth is fundamentally irrelevant. Modern notions of sexual orientation must be brought to answer to Scripture. Scripture must not be subjected to defend itself in light of modern notions. Paul will not apologize to Sigmund Freud or the American Psychological Association, and the faithful church must call this approach what it is; a blatant effort to subvert the authority of Scripture and replace biblical authority with the false authority of modern secular ideologies.

Endnotes

1 Elizabeth Achtemeier, quoted in "Gays and the Bible," by Mark O'Keefe, *The Virginian Pilot, Norfolk, Virginia* (February 14, 1993), p. C-1.

2 J. Gresham Machen, "The Separateness of the Church," in *God Transcendent*, edited by Ned Bernard Stonehouse (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982 [1949]), p. 113.

3 From the statement by William M. Kent published in Report of the Committee to Study Homosexuality to the General Council on Ministries of the United Methodist Church, August 24, 1991.

4 Gary David Comstock, *Gay Theology Without Apology* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1993), p. 43.

5 *Ibid.*

6 Victor Paul Furnish, *The Moral Teachings of Paul: Selected Issues* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), p. 85.

7 John J. McNeill, *The Church and the Homosexual*, 3rd edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988).

*This position paper is an edited version of an article by R. Albert Mohler clarifying the Scriptural teaching on homosexuality.