

HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE BIBLE, PART 2

Objection: It seems cruel and deeply unrealistic to expect our LGBT friends not to act on their deep sexual attractions and to find fulfillment in homosexual relationships.

The call to chastity only makes sense within larger story of gospel

- culture's story: follow your dreams, be true to yourself
- gospel's story: creation, fall, redemption, restoration
- all desires, including our sexuality, is fallen
- therefore, Christianity asks for costly obedience

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

⁹ Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Romans 8:23-25

²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Objection: If homosexuality is a sin, why would God create people to be born this way?

Romans 6:12-14

¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. ¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you.

Objection: It's unfair to ask our LGBT friends to permanently abstain from sex, with no hope of marriage. This goes beyond what we ask anyone to do.

Matthew 19:9-12

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¹¹ But Jesus said to them, "Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. ¹² For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it."

John 15:15

No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

Objection: How can love be wrong? Love is love.

"You don't choose who you love"

- #lovewins; love cannot be wrong

But love can be twisted and distorted by sin

- love must be ordered according to God's word

2 Samuel 13:1-4, 11-12

¹ Now Absalom, David's son, had a beautiful sister, whose name was Tamar. And after a time Amnon, David's son, loved her. ² And Amnon was so tormented that he made himself ill because of his sister Tamar, for she was a virgin, and it seemed impossible to Amnon to do anything to her. ³ But Amnon had a friend, whose name was Jonadab, the son of Shimeah, David's brother. And Jonadab was a very crafty man. ⁴ And he said to him, "O son of the king, why are you so haggard morning after morning? Will you not tell me?" Amnon said to him, "I love Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister."

¹¹ Amnon took hold of Tamar and said to her, "Come, lie with me, my sister."

¹² She answered him, "No, my brother, do not violate me, for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do this outrageous thing."

Objection: The Old Testament condemns homosexuality. But it also condemns eating shellfish, mixing fabrics, etc. Christians arbitrarily follow some laws and ignore others.

The NT clearly distinguishes between moral and ceremonial laws

- moral laws are abiding; ceremonial laws were provisional

Leviticus 11:10-12

¹⁰ But anything in the seas or the rivers that has not fins and scales, of the swarming creatures in the waters and of the living creatures that are in the waters, is detestable to you. ¹¹ You shall regard them as detestable; you shall not eat any of their flesh, and you shall detest their carcasses.

¹² Everything in the waters that has not fins and scales is detestable to you.

Mark 7:18-19

¹⁸ And Jesus said to them, “Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹ since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?”
(Thus Jesus declared all foods clean.)

Objection: In the past, Christians supported slavery, miscegenation laws, anti-Semitism, all based on the Bible. Just like then, Christians are on the wrong side of history.

These kinds of historical analogies grossly over-simplifies the past

- on slavery, Christians were divided; but not on homosexuality

Ephesians 6:5 – Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling.

Exodus 21:16 – Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death.

Philemon 1:15-16 – ¹⁵ For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, ¹⁶ no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother.

Christians who condoned slavery did so under cultural pressure

- unlike slavery, classic Christian view of sexuality is scorned
- who then, on issue of homosexuality, accommodates culture?

Objection: Bible condemns only exploitative same-sex relationships. Committed, long-term gay relationships are not in mind.

Ancient Greco-Roman world had full spectrum of gay relationships

- Alexander the Great and Hephaestion
- Homer’s Illiad: Achilles and Patroclus

Paul cites both Lesbianism and mutuality in gay relationships

Romans 1:26-27

²⁶ For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷ and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

This kind of revisionism is exegetically thin and could justify virtually any position

- all of the Bible’s ethical teachings could be undermined with this kind of analysis in which what is obviously condemned is not actually condemned

Homosexuality and the Bible, part II | Notes

Objection: It seems cruel and deeply unrealistic to expect our LGBT friends not to act on their deep sexual attractions and to find fulfillment in homosexual relationships

Wes Hill relates his own story in “Washed and Waiting”

- at wedding, dancing with female friend, she’s beautiful, but felt no desire
- in that moment, felt profoundly sad because realized he can never experience deep oneness and connection
- he knew at early age, he experienced strong, unchanging same-sex desires

Objection: Christianity asking for *lifetime of suppression and self-denial*

- in the face of strong, unchanging same-sex desires, how can Bible condemn every expression?
- it seems like God is just setting people up for failure

The call to chastity only makes sense within the *larger story of gospel*

- we always live the story we most believe, we find most compelling
- our culture’s story – “follow your dreams, be true to yourself”
– “don’t let anyone tell you can’t do something”

In our culture’s story – to suppress or deny your homosexuality is wrong and psychologically unhealthy

But Christianity has a *different story*: creation → fall → redemption → restoration

- in the Fall, everything became corrupted and twisted – including our sexuality
- God redeems us, but still in this life, we experience profound and deep brokenness
- but we wait for the final redemption – the New Heavens and the New Earth

The *reality of homosexuality* makes sense in the gospel story

- we expect brokenness in our deepest desires | and so we distrust ourselves

Not ‘gay is *broken* but straight is *good*’

- all our sexual desires are disordered and misaligned

This is one of problems with *reparative therapy*

- flaws in reparative therapy: heterosexuality is not the goal, holiness is
- flawed use of porn and lust to evoke heterosexual desires
- deeply underestimating how deep our desires are, not result of superficial environmental causes

Virtually all men desire sex with multiple women – all men *oriented toward polygamy*

- illustration: conversation with friend committing adultery | how can I deny how I feel?
- but our feelings and desires cannot be trusted because we desire evil things

Therefore, in light of our fallenness, Christianity asks for *costly obedience*

- Jesus says, “if anyone would come after me, let him take up the cross and deny himself”
- Christian life of obedience is marked by self-denial and struggle
- life isn’t ascending to higher and higher orders of happiness and self-actualization, throwing off restraints
- Christian life is about holiness, not happiness

Objection: we’re *asking too much* of our gay friends

- *a lifetime* of sexual restraint and self-denial
- but Christianity unrelentingly asks for difficult and costly obedience
 - *unhappy marriage* with no hope of renewal – stay and continue to love spouse
 - *singles* without prospects of marriage – continue path of chastity and sexual holiness
 - *debilitating disease*, depression – don’t give in to despair or bitterness, but praise and trust God

Living with *unfulfilled desires* is *not exception* to human experience, but *the rule*

- but promise of gospel is that God will be with you in your travails

Therefore, *the gospel* is for our gay friends!

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 – ⁹ Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

“*And such were some of you*” – there were homosexuals in the Corinthian church!

- the gospel is that homosexuals, just like all sinners, are washed by the blood of Christ
- and “sanctified” – we have to leave behind our former lives and live lives of holiness and obedience

Romans 8:23-25 – ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

How come gay Christians *still* have *strong same-sex attractions*?

- because we’re still waiting for our final redemption
- “creation groans” – this life is marked by grief and sorrow | so we should expect suffering and difficulty
- we feel keenly the gap between what the world will be and the world as it is
- “groaning” isn’t a sign of *failure*; it’s a sign of *faithfulness* in a *broken world*
- pain and frustration are marks of faithfulness, not signs of failure
- and so we must wait for the final redemption of our bodies

The lie of our culture: to live a fully realized human life, you must have sex

- so cruel to deny our LGBT friends even possibility of sex
- but Jesus Christ was truest man who ever lived – sexual celibate his entire life

Objection: If homosexuality is a sin, why would God create people to be *born this way*?

If same-sex desires *cannot be changed*, they must *not be sinful*

- our culture's view of "sin" is intentional, deliberate acts of evil | if innate, then it can't really be evil
- many Christians buy into that argument – that's why insist that homosexuality is a free choice

But biblical view of Fall is that we are "*slaves to sin*" (Romans 6:17)

- very nature of sin is that it is not freely chosen
- I would argue that all sin comes from *innate predispositions* (that is no excuse)
- illustration: psychologists classify pedophilia as a sexual orientation (something you're born with)
- illustration: all men are oriented towards polygamy
- thus orientation is not a license for sin

Romans 6:12-14

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Sin is not just something you do, but something that is over you

- "reigns" over us, it has "dominion" over us
- but through power of gospel, we are not to submit to it's power

Related objection: if homosexuality is wrong, that teaches gays to *hate themselves*

- gay Christians find in themselves innate desires the Bible says is wrong
- isn't that saying that the very being and essence of being gay is repugnant to God?

Let me make an *important differentiation*

- distinguish between 3 things: orientation (same-sex attractions), lust (indulging fantasy) and sexual act
- lust and sexual act are sins, but not the orientation
- orientation is part of the brokenness of the world, but not act of sin and rebellion against God

In fact, *being gay is a wonderful gift to the church*

- when Wes Hill confessed his same-sex attractions to his Christian friends, his friends thanked him
- out-of-the-closet gay Christians who practice celibate holiness is a great gift to the church
- teaches us deeper appreciation of struggle for holiness

Objection: It's unfair to ask our LGBT friends to permanently abstain from sex, with no hope of marriage. This goes beyond what we ask anyone to do.

Even in the examples of long-time singles and people unhappily married, there is still the chance for companionship and marital bliss.

- what we're asking of our LGBT friends is something beyond that – permanent, unrelenting celibacy
- objection is you can't force celibacy on gay Christians | celibacy is a gift and must be voluntary

Matthew 19:9-12 – ⁹“And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.” ¹⁰The disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.”

¹¹ But Jesus said to them, “Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given.

¹² For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.”

Jesus is speaking about the *impossibility of divorce*

- disciples, rightly, feel overwhelmed by this – “this is too much to ask”
- disciples – “it's better to stay single and celibate then” | isn't that most God-glorifying?

Jesus then describes *three classes of singleness*

- “eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs” – not literally, but people who, because of ministry, decide to voluntarily live a celibate single life. Example – Apostle Paul.
- “eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men” – through terrible injustice, like slavery and/or castration, their celibacy has *been forced on them*. They never got to choose it for themselves.
- “eunuchs who have been so from birth” – these could be people with genital deformations or something like that. And, I think, this includes people whose innate sexuality precludes marriage (homosexuality).

Jesus recognizes some will be asked to *shoulder burdens that wouldn't chosen for ourselves*

- this burden-bearing is a normal part of life in the Kingdom of God in this life (before New Creation)
- God sometimes asks of us sacrifices we don't want to make and we wouldn't have chosen. But God asks us to trust him and love him and obey him.

Matthew 19:29-30 – “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

There is a *deep consolation* waiting for us in the New Heavens and New Earth

- we wait with groaning for the final redemption, to be delivered from pain and suffering in this life
- we need a robust *'theology of brokenness'*

But also, in this life, we have *consolation in the church community*

- “we receive a hundredfold brothers and sisters in this life”

Importance of *Christian friendships in the church*

- Wes Hill – for a long time, he was afraid to hug men and show physical affection for male Christians
- but he realized, because of fear, he was robbing himself of kinship and fellowship God provides

Homosexual desires is a good longing for *connection and friendship* but distorted

- find some fulfillment in Christian community
- this applies not just to homosexual Christians, but all singles and marrieds who experience loneliness
- we've wrongly elevated "romantic love" as the ultimate thing | Christianity celebrates friendship!
- chastity is impossible without a thick web of friendships to uphold you

John 15:15

No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but *I have called you friends*, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

Objection: How can love be wrong? Love is love

"You don't choose who you love" | Jaime Lannister to his daughter

- #lovewins | "love cannot be wrong" | this resonates deeply with our culture – "love is love"

Christian response – there is such a thing as "disordered love"

- love can become distorted by sin
- otherwise, how do you distinguish any sinful desire from "love"?

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The Bible asks us to *trust God's wisdom and doubt ourselves*

Proverbs 3:5-8

⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. ⁷ Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. ⁸ It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.

The Bible forbids:

- incest | polygamy / polyamory | prostitution | adultery | premarital sex | homosexuality
- Christian view of sex is difficult and uncompromising, seems so narrow – deep wisdom of God

Objection: The Old Testament condemns homosexuality. But it also condemns eating shellfish, mixing fabrics, etc. Therefore, Christians arbitrarily follow some laws and ignore others.

This is a *popular argument* but ignores *basic principles of interpretation*

Theologians distinguish between 3 kinds of laws in the OT

- moral, civil, ceremonial
- civil laws are pertinent only to Israel as a nation-state (capital punishment for sins)
- ceremonial laws (clean laws, kosher laws) are provisional; symbolic representations of holiness | **Lev. 11**
- moral laws are abiding and reflect the character of God

It is true that in the OT, these three laws are not explicitly distinguished

- but they can be logically distinguished and Jewish religious tradition does so

But in the NT, they are explicitly distinguished – Jesus in *Mark 7:18-19*

- in debating about clean food laws, Jesus declares all foods “clean” | abrogates ceremonial laws
- this is explicit in Hebrews (law shadow of reality in Christ), Acts 10 – Peter told all foods clean

Objection: In the past, Christians supported slavery, miscegenation laws, anti-Semitism, all based on the Bible. Just like then, Christians are on the wrong side of history.

These *historical analogy arguments* misrepresent and distort history of Christian thought

- idea is that all or nearly all Christians supported slavery or miscegenation laws, etc
- opposite is true – majority of evangelical, devout Christians have held slavery as sinful
- let’s not forget it was evangelical Christians who led the abolition movement in Britain and US
- and not in spite of the Bible, but because of the Bible – by taking the Bible seriously

Certainly, there were Christians who used the Bible to justify slavery

- cite passages like Ephesians 6:5-6, “slaves obey your masters”
- but there were numerous other passages that mitigated and in fact forbid chattel slavery

In fact, for Christians who supported slavery, they *twisted the Bible to accommodate broader culture*

- the church, especially in South, fell into “cultural captivity” – extremely hard go against cultural pressures
- but issue of homosexuality is exactly opposite | to maintain orthodox view goes against popular culture
- in fact, is it not *gay-affirming side* that capitulates to cultural pressures and distorts Scripture?
- so the historical analogy more apt is Fundamentalist-Liberalism debate of 1920s
- then, revisionists were saying modify views of miracles and divinity of Christ to stay relevant
- liberals were saying “we now know” the Bible’s literalism is impossible – join the “right side of history”
- this led to the split between Mainline denominations and evangelicals
- contrary to predictions, Mainline denominations rapidly declined and evangelicals continue grow
- culture shifted and now “supernaturalism” is not that big an issue | “sexual ethics” is now the big issue
- this is a parable for our times – we must stay true to orthodox teaching, no matter scorn and derision
- 50 years from now, we’ll look back at this cultural moment and

On the slavery issue, the Bible articulates complex view, both pro and con positions (depending)

- this is true of every other historical issue – miscegenation, anti-Semitism, feminism, etc
- but Bible is uniformly negative on homosexuality – no passage even hints homosexuality is good

[The issue of slavery and the Bible is complicated]

- not all slavery is equal | chattel slavery in South – race-based, extremely brutal, kidnapped victims
- in ancient world, there were a variety of slaveries – debt-slavery, indentured servitude, captives of war
- slavery was not race-based and most slavery was temporary (manumission was frequent) and for set time

[So when Paul in Ephesians 6 calls on slaves to obey their masters]

- Paul is working within the social fabric of the Roman empire, not advocating social, economic upheaval
- but within the slave economy, he is advocating for just relationships – for masters to treat slaves equitably

[And then in Philemon, Paul lays foundation for the end of slavery]

- “do not denigrate slaves, but give dignity and honor” | this undermines very foundations of slavery

**Objection: Bible condemns only exploitative same-sex relationships.
Committed, long-term gay relationships are not in mind.**

Revisionist argument that Paul and Bible is really only condemning “exploitative sex”

- pederasty, raping of slaves, prostitution, etc | of course, this immorality was rampant in ancient world
- but it is not true that ancient world didn't have *full spectrum* of homosexual relationships
- there are many examples of committed, long-term gay relationships
- two of most famous: Alexander the Great and Hephaestion, Achilles and Patrocles
- homosexuality was celebrated in ancient world | greatest heroes in Greek world were gay or bisexual

So when Paul condemns homosexuality, not just exploitative versions but *broadly all variations*

- in Romans 1, Paul gives us two major clues for this
- first – he talks about Lesbianism – “women exchanged natural relations”
- Lesbianism does not fit into paradigm of exploitative sex | consensual
- second – he speaks of men “consumed with passion for one another”
- there is mutuality here – we cannot say this of male children or slaves, who are being coerced

Finally, this kind of revisionism is *extremely exegetically thin*

- if you read the revisionist literature, you come away saying, “that’s it?”
- especially Romans 1 is just sort of waved away as inconvenient Scripture without deeper explanation

Also, this logic of revisionism could be applied to all ethical teachings in the Bible

- one could say, “Paul or Jesus was only talking about a certain kind of exploitative situation”
- “he wasn't addressing what we have now in the modern world, so it doesn't apply”
- this eviscerates and undermines the abiding applicability of the Bible
- long-term, this kind of hermeneutic will lead to extreme skepticism and cynicism about Bible