

# Is homosexuality a sin?

by Denver Cheddie

Although gay marriage has been legal in Canada, parts of Europe and many US states for quite a while, the June 26, 2015 decision by the US Supreme Court to legalize it in the entire United States is perhaps the most profound breakthrough for the LGBT (Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) community. This has emboldened LGBT advocates and sympathizers around the world, especially in third world nations where homosexuality is still considered a criminal offense (though rarely punished). It seems inevitable that gay marriage will soon be legalized in many other countries.

Further, we can clearly see a pervasive liberal culture that facilitates these developments, as well as growing animosity toward the conservative Christian worldview. Because the word liberal may carry negative connotations, its proponents prefer to use the term progressive to suggest that they are forward thinking. Some churches of various denominations have adopted more liberal positions that openly embrace homosexuality even among their clergy. I expect more churches to follow suit in the near future as gay marriage continues to make inroads.

This 4 part series discusses homosexuality from biblical and scientific points of view, and also the church's response to gay marriage. I write mainly for Christians who will read crazy articles written by so-called Christian ministers who claim that the bible does not condemn homosexuality. The purpose of this series is to provide answers to

believers to questions that might arise. I have no interest in bashing gay people, but this site is called Controversial Bible Issues. So my interest is defending my interpretation of scripture. Because it is fairly lengthy, I will summarize my main points here:

- The bible unambiguously condemns homosexuality as a sin.
- The concept of a gay gene is not supported by science. In fact science strongly points to environmental factors more so than genetic factors.
- I am not against gay marriage and I believe that all people should have equal civil rights.
- The church should not devote its time to fighting against gay marriage since it has no jurisdiction on how free citizens choose to live their lives.
- Instead it should focus on preaching the gospel, attempting to save souls rather than reform society.
- Homosexuals can be saved and transformed.

## **What Does the Bible Say?**

### **Homosexuality in the Old Testament**

There are numerous Old Testament scriptures that outrightly condemn homosexuality as a sin. The most well known of these are Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, where a man lying with a man as with a woman is called an abomination. Jewish rabbis have always interpreted this as a condemnation of homosexuality.

LGBT advocates respond to these scriptures by pointing out that there are many other things in Leviticus that are called abominable. Leviticus 7:18 calls eating the sacrifice of the peace offering on the third day an abomination. Leviticus 11 continues by classifying as abomination various food law violations including eating seafood without fins and scales, creeping birds, and any animal that creeps or crawls on its belly. So why single out homosexuality? Considering that many Christians no longer adhere to the food laws, why do they still insist on those scriptures against homosexuality?

This is a very good question, and would constitute an irrefutable argument if the bible were originally written in English. There are actually two different Hebrew words that are used in Leviticus that are translated abomination. *Towebah* describes the abomination of homosexuality, while *seqes* describes the abomination of violating the food laws. *Seqes* is used exclusively for food law violations, and thus describes something that is forbidden. In addition to the two Leviticus scriptures, *towebah* is also used in Genesis 43:32 where it describes the utter racial hatred Egyptians had for Hebrews that they would scorn to even eat with them. It also appears in Proverbs 28:9 where it calls the prayer of a lawless man an abomination to God. *Towebah* describes something that is loathsome and repulsive. So essentially eating unclean foods was frowned upon while homosexuality made God sick. That is the difference between the two Hebrew words. Further, there are many dispensational reasons to believe that the food laws were temporary, especially considering that the New Testament lifted the sanctions (1 Timothy 4:3-5; Acts 10:15). On the contrary, condemnation of homosexuality was reiterated in the New Testament.

Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because the sin of the people had come before God (Genesis 18:20). The most characteristic of these sins was homosexuality. When the angels of the Lord visited Lot's house, the men of the city demanded that Lot send the men out that they may "know them" (Genesis 19:5). There was a similar incident described in Judges 19 where "men of Belial" demanded to have homosexual relations with a sojourner among the tribe of Benjamin. So severe was this sin that God endorsed the near annihilation of the men of Benjamin.

Gay advocates point to Ezekiel 16:49 which says that the people of Sodom failed to help the poor and needy. So according to them, their sin had nothing to do with homosexuality. This scripture only suggests that the sin of Sodom was manifold. It does not in any way invalidate all of the other scriptures that clearly point to the sexual nature of their sin. In fact the very next verse (Ezekiel 16:50) points out that they also committed "abomination" (*towebah*), and this is why God destroyed them.

## **Homosexuality in the New Testament**

The New Testament echoes the Old Testament's condemnation of homosexuality as a sin. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 outlines examples of unrighteous people that would not inherit the kingdom of God. These include the sexually immoral, idolators, adulterers and homosexuals. 1 Timothy 1:10 also lists homosexuality as unrighteous behavior. Romans 1:26-28 calls homosexuality the product of a debased or reprobate mind. Romans widens the condemnation to lesbianism and not just homosexual acts, but homosexual lusts as well. Jude 7 describes the homosexual practices of Sodom and Gomorrah as unnatural.

Gay advocates typically attempt to narrow the scope of these condemnations to temple prostitution or to pederasty – men economically exploiting younger boys by use of homosexuality. According to them, the bible condemns homosexual abuse and homosexual idolatry, but not a faithful committed relationship between homosexuals. They remind us that the word homosexual does not appear in any English translation of the bible until 1946. If you listened to them without studying scripture for yourself, you would think that Paul actually approved of committed homosexual relationships. Let us investigate their claims.

Their strategy for the 1 Corinthians and the 1 Timothy passages is to retranslate two Greek words – *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*. *Malakoi* is translated “effeminate” in the KJV (1 Corinthians 6:9). It is also used in Matthew 11:8 and Luke 7:25 to refer to soft clothing. So the word clearly has a sexual and a non-sexual connotation. Gay advocates suggest that this word was never understood to mean homosexuality until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Instead if it is used in a sexual sense, it refers to male prostitution or to pederasty – sexual oppression of the poor.

There are a number of problems with their view. If Paul wanted to describe pederasty, there was another Greek word that he could have used instead – *paiderastes*. The fact that he did not use that word says a lot. He also describes this behavior as sinful. Why would he condemn someone who is being sexually abused? Even the Old Testament does not condemn victims of rape and abuse. Further, the sinful behaviors listed in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:9-10 are so general, it is academically dishonest to limit the scope of any of them. For example, one of them is thieves (1 Corinthians 6:10). Should we limit this to only

those who steal from the Temple? There is nothing in the context of these passages to imply that the scope should be limited. Paul was deliberately being general.

Although *malakoi* is rarely used in the New Testament, it does appear in classical Greek writings. One example is Roman Antiquities (written in 7BC), where it refers to those who allow themselves to be used homosexually. So even effeminate in the KJV is a poor translation. Effeminate can simply mean unmanly or girly. But *malakoi* is clearly being used in a sexual context. Most reliable lexicons translate it as the passive partner in a homosexual relationship.

*Arsenokoitai* is only used once in the bible (1 Corinthians 6:9) where it is translated “homosexual” in new translations, and “abusers of themselves with mankind” in the KJV. It appears that Paul invented this word, and gay advocates readily pounce on that fact to suggest that the word is difficult to translate and most translators do not know what the word really means. Again they would like to restrict the meaning to homosexual abusers rather than consenting homosexuals.

But this word is really not that difficult to understand. Scholars believe that Paul derived the word from the Septuagint– a Greek translation of the Old Testament that was available to Jesus and the apostles. Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 (discussed above) speak of a male (*arseno*) lying (*koitai*) with a male as with a female. Paul simply put those two words together to get *arsenokoitai*. It really is not that hard to figure out. So instead of discarding those Leviticus scriptures as liberal Christians do, Paul reaffirmed the rabbinic condemnation of homosexuality. *Arsenokoitai* refers to the active partner in a homosexual relationship. Put together, *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* condemn both partners in a homosexuality relationship. It does not matter when the

word homosexual first appears in English translations, the concept of homosexuality was condemned in Hebrew, Greek and King James English (1611).

Are there other words Paul could have used if he intended to discuss temple prostitution? The answer is yes. The Hebrew word *qadesh* means cult prostitute. It is used twice in Deuteronomy 23:17 – there shall be no whore (*qadesh*) of the daughters of Israel and no cult prostitute (*qadesh*) of the sons of Israel. The context clearly shows the meaning to be cult prostitute. When speaking of women it is translated whore, so when speaking of men it must carry a similar meaning. Unfortunately the KJV translates this word as “sodomite” almost every time it is used in reference to a male. There is no doubt that these male prostitutes practiced homosexuality since in those days women did not hire prostitutes. But the word *qadesh* should not be translated generally as sodomite. Cult prostitute or temple prostitute are better translations. This is perhaps why gay advocates latch on to the idea that every time the bible mentions homosexual or sodomite, it must be referring to cult prostitutes and not committed homosexuality.

Now when the Old Testament was translated from Hebrew into Greek (the Septuagint), how did the translators handle the word *qadesh*? In Deuteronomy 23:17, they used the Greek word *porne*. This Greek also word appears in various New Testament scriptures and is always translated harlot or prostitute. A notable example is Revelation 2:20 where the church at Thyatira was condemned for allowing a “prophetess” called Jezebel to practice harlotry. If ever there was a definite reference to a cult prostitute, this was it.

If Paul wanted to communicate the idea of cult prostitute, he would have used the Greek word *porne*. *Qadesh* was never translated

using *malakoior arsenokoitai*. This is a damning indictment against the gay advocate's argument. The fact that Paul used those two Greek words strongly suggests that he was not referring to temple prostitution, but to all homosexuality.

Neither of these words appears in Romans 1, yet that scripture graphically condemns homosexuality, lesbianism and homosexual lusts. By now, the response of the gay advocate is predictable. They insist that this scripture is speaking of temple prostitutes who idolize sex, and not committed homosexual couples. Anything that appears to speak negatively about their lifestyle, they deflect the condemnation elsewhere. Again there is no reason to limit the scope of those condemnations described in Romans 1. Any student of scripture knows that Romans 1 speaks of the sinfulness of man who has rejected God, and this thought crescendos and culminates in Romans 3 where all men are deemed guilty. Paul is building up to the idea that all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. It makes no sense for him to limit his condemnation to temple prostitutes. The context only allows for a wide application of the condemnations detailed. Romans 1 condemns all homosexual acts and lusts.

## **Biblical Marriage is Heterosexual**

In addition to these outright condemnations, the bible consistently speaks of marriage as a heterosexual union. God created man and woman. For this reason shall a man leave his parents and cleave to his wife (Matthew 19:4,5). To avoid fornication let each man have his own wife and each woman have her own husband (1 Corinthians 7:2). Bishops and deacons should be the husband of one wife (1 Timothy 3:2,12).



Heterosexual marriage is the clear ideal set out in scripture as the counter to sexual promiscuity.

Gay advocates often allude to the fact that Jesus himself never condemned homosexuality. The simple response to this is that it does not matter. The bible does not just consist of Jesus' statements. He authorized his apostles to speak on his behalf things he could not teach during his limited time on earth. Also Jesus' purpose was not to teach everything that there is to be taught. This he delegated to his apostles. His real purpose was to die for the sins of men. Even so, he did teach about marriage in general, and clearly spoke in terms of heterosexual marriage.

If Jesus had met a homosexual, I believe he would have handled it the same way as he did the woman at the well. He would not have scorned the person or crossed the street. He would have been moved with compassion, but would still firmly point out the person's sin and need for repentance.

As far as the bible is concerned, homosexuality is not a controversial issue. There is simply no controversy. It is a sin. So why does God condemn homosexuality if gay people were born that way and had no choice in the matter?

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