

The Bible in the News: Homosexual unions

Are gay unions "marriage"? Does God approve?

The controversy continues regarding same-sex marriages, as state after state determines whether to rewrite its laws and thereby redefine marriage to include homosexual unions. Some would tell us from the outset, "Hands off!" quoting what now is said to be the two mostquoted verses of the Bible: "Judge not that you be not judged" and "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." They would have us think that we don't know what God's will is in this matter.



Steve Singleton

Yet on this topic, as on many others, we must seek the will of God from a careful study of the Scriptures. Only after looking closely at both the Old and New Testament testimony can we fairly and honestly arrive at firm conclusions.

What does Holy Scripture teach?

The Bible's condemnation of homosexual activity is unequivocal. Here are the five basic scriptural proofs.

1. The destruction of Sodom was due, at least in part, to homosexual practices (Gen. 18:16 - 19:29).

The men of Sodom's demand, "Bring them out that we may *know* them" (Gen. 19:5) is a euphemism for having sex with them (compare Gen. 4:1, 17, 25; 19:8; 24:16; 38:26; Num. 31:17, 18, 35; Judg. 19:22, 25; 21:12; 1 Sam. 1:19; 1 Kings 1:4; Matt. 1:25). Lot's offer of his virgin daughters as an alternative confirms this interpretation (Gen. 19:6-8). The New Testament's commentary (Jude 7) also indicates this. They were guilty of other sins as well, according to Ezek. 16:46-50.

2. The law of Moses clearly condemns homosexual intercourse.

According to the Law, to lie with a woman as with a man is detestable (Lev. 18:22), and those who do so must be put to death (Lev. 20:13). The LORD detests male



"Lot and His Daughters" (depicting the destruction of Sodom) by Albrecht Dürer (c. 1496/1499)

prostitutes (called 'dogs') as well as female prostitutes (Deut. 23:17-18).

The Old Testament background of homosexuality is the Canaanite fertility cults. These cults held that the fertility of crops, animals, and humans were dependent on intercourse between the gods, with the sky god as masculine and the earth goddess as feminine.

Baal was the great storm god, represented in idols as having a lightning bolt for a scepter. His consort was the goddess Astarte (the Babylonian Ishtar). Whatever the Canaanites could do to arouse Baal to send his seed (rain) to the earth was a religious act.

The Canaanites offered "sacred" prostitutes for use by worshippers, and these could be either female or male. They were not ordinary prostitutes but special ones (hence the word usually translated "holy" is applied to them, but only in the sense of special or devoted).

The Canaanites regarded union with such prostitutes as an act of worship, hoping to ensure a bumper crop, or a growing herd, or a big family (truly an asset in an agricultural society), and willing to do "whatever it takes" to please the gods. The Law, however, condemned all of this as ungodly abominations. Prostitution of any kind—heterosexual or homosexual—cannot bring a worshipper closer to the true God, for it contradicts God's nature as well as the divinely designed purpose of human existence and the closest of human relationships. "You shall be holy," the LORD says, "for I am holy" (Lev. 19:1). Later in the same chapter, He adds, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (v. 18).

Prostitution is not love of one's neighbor, but manipulation and abuse, by both parties. Both are saying, "I will use you to satisfy what I want [one wants sex, the other money], but I do not offer you any kind of loyalty or permanent relationship. Let's get physical, but let's not get personal, and certainly not permanent. I owe you nothing beyond what I deliver at this moment."

Another incident, involving the Benjaminites of Gibeah, closely parallels the sin of Sodom (Judg. 19:11-30). The same indicators are present here as in the case of Sodom, including not spending the night in the town square; the demand, "Bring them out that we may *know* them"; and the offer of a substitute sex object. In this case, the concubine was thrown out to the men, who gang-raped her to death. These Israelites were even more guilty than the men of Sodom because they had been warned in the law of Moses against homosexual practices (as already cited).

3. Idolatrous Israel had both male and female shrine prostitutes (1 Kings 14:23-24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7; Job 36:14).

Israel adapted to the fertility religion of Canaan, including its "sacred" prostitution. Of course, this was the opposite of what God wanted them to do.

4. Homosexual practice is condemned in the New Covenant along with other pagan practices (Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 1 Tim. 1:9-10).

Romans 1:26-27 cites homosexuality as an example of what happens when people turn their backs on God and God "gives them over" to suffer the results of their rebellion.

First Corinthians 6:9-11 indicates that homosexual acts are among the sins that the wicked practice, thereby disqualifying themselves from inheriting God's kingdom. Paul points out that some of the Corinthians used to commit such sins (including, we presume, some who committed homosexual acts). "BUT," he says—and in the Greek, the 'but' is emphatically repeated—"you were washed, BUT you were sanctified, BUT you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." That used to characterize the Corinthians' lives before they were converted to Christ, but now they have been cleansed from all of that and empowered by the Holy Spirit to live differently.

In First Timothy 1:9-10, Paul includes "those who bed men" in a list of those he calls rebels, the ungodly and sinful. The phrase is translated "perverts" in the NIV. KJV has "abusers of themselves with men"; RSV and NRSV: "sodomites"; and NASB: "homosexuals." Paul says that all of the sins listed are "contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God."

Have these texts been misapplied?

Those we will call "gay covenanters," including some homosexual believers and some non-homosexual Bible teachers, claim that these passages have been misapplied, and they advocate an alternative understanding of Scripture. Here are their seven claims, along with a careful examination of Scriptures that refute each argument.

1. Interrogation of spies or attempted homosexual rape? - Gay

covenanters claim that the problem in Sodom and Gibeah was not homosexuality, but a concern about spies, taking "that we may know them" more literally: "that we may interrogate them." The offer of alternative sex objects makes clear the intentions of both the men of Sodom and the men of Gibeah. The context indicates that those who made the offer were attempting to divert the lust of the wicked men involved to what would be considered the lesser of two evils. Rape is horrible enough, but homosexual rape was unimaginable.

2. Same sin as that of the fallen angels? – Gay covenanters further claim that Jude's statement (verse 7) that the Sodomites' behavior is similar that of the fallen angels implies that they were not engaged in homosexual activity either. Jude, however, employs the phrases "to indulge in sexual immorality" and "to go after different flesh," both of which indicate that homosexuality was practiced in Sodom.

"Different flesh" or "strange flesh" would indicate homosexual rather than heterosexual relations were contemplated. Just as the angels refused to keep to their God-assigned roles as ministering agents of His will, the men of Sodom were similar to angels in that they refused to keep to their Godassigned heterosexual roles. It is true that those Lot protected from the men of Sodom were actually angels, but the Sodomites did not know that. Their intention was homosexual rape.

- **3.** Does Ezekiel clear Sodom of the homosexual charge? Gay covenanters claim that Ezekiel 16 does not mention homosexuality as being a problem in Sodom. But Ezekiel 16 describes the practices of the Sodomites as "detestable" and "depraved" (v. 47), adjectives readily applicable to homosexual behavior, according to the Law of Moses. Nothing in Ezekiel forces us to abandon what Genesis leads us to believe happened at Sodom.
- 4. Does the Law condemn all homosexual practice or only idolatrous homosexual prostitution? Gay covenanters claim that the Mosaic statutes and the occasional purges of cult prostitutes are not condemning homosexuality per se, but only homosexuality as a part of idolatrous worship. It is true that the Mosaic statutes are directed against idolatrous practice, but two of them (Lev. 18:22 and 20:13) condemn homosexual relationships, with no reference to idolatry at all.
- 5. Is the Law's condemnation of homosexual practice carried over to the **New Covenant?** – Gay covenanters claim that even if these statutes condemned all homosexual practice, they were merely a part of the Mosaic Covenant and not applicable to people in the Age of the Gospel. Those things, however, that are called an "abomination" (or "detestable") under the Law of Moses continue to be an abomination under the Gospel, including (in addition to homosexual practice): prostitution, idolatry, witchcraft, sorcery, crossdressing, use of unjust weights, making of idols, child sacrifice, lying lips, sacrifice of the wicked, perverting justice, no-fault divorce, etc. This is especially evident in the case of those offenses explicitly repeated in the New Covenant, as is the case with homosexual practice. The only exception to this observation seems to be the foods prohibited under the Law, which the New Covenant allows (see Mark 7:14-19; 1 Tim. 4:4-5). Yet even these were probably associated with idolatry in the Old Testament, and when they have similar associations in the New Covenant, Christians are warned to avoid them (Acts 15:19-29; 1 Cor. 8:1-13; 10:1 - 11:1; Rev. 2:20).
- 6. What about "covenant homosexual relationships"? Gay covenanters claim that likewise the New Covenant passages are condemning promiscuous homosexuality, not monogamous homosexuality, just as promiscuous heterosexuality is also condemned. The New Covenant passages, however, describe as examples of turning away from God women who "exchange natural relations for unnatural ones," and "men with men" relations (Rom. 1:26-27). These statements do not have any qualification whatsoever. In other words, the condemnation is made regardless of the permanence of the relationship involved or the commitment of those involved to one another.

A more fundamental reason for rejecting the legitimacy of so-called "covenant homosexual unions" as the equivalent of marriage is a semantic reality in the original languages of both the Old Testament and the New Testament. A significant and often ignored factor in our interpretation of the biblical passages regarding marriage and homosexuality is that in both Hebrew and Greek, the original languages of the Old Testament and the New Testament, respectively, the word for 'husband' is also the word for 'male,' and the word for 'wife' is also the word for female. This means that the passages in both



'David and Jonathan" by Giovanni Battista Gaulli (c. 1505-1510).

testament that provide us with a definitive description of marriage necessarily define it as heterosexual.

Take, for example, the description of the original institution of marriage (Gen. 2:24). Not only are the two participants definitely of the opposite sex, but the lesson drawn from their union is heterosexual: "Therefore shall a man ['*iš*, read 'male'] leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife ['*išah*, read 'female'], and the two shall be one flesh." Jesus quotes this same passage in Mark 10, providing us with the Greek equivalents of '*iš* and '*išah* in *aner* and *gyne*, the Greek terms for man/husband and woman/wife, respectively.

We can apply the same principle to First

Corinthians 7:2: "Let each man have his own wife/woman, and each woman her own husband/man. [again, using *gyne* and *aner*]" Neither Genesis 2:24 nor First Corinthians 7:2 can be applied to homosexual relations without contradicting the basic meaning of the terms that occur in these verses.

Marriage, therefore, as biblically defined and described in numerous passages, is always heterosexual.

Did David and Jonathan have an approved gay relationship? – Gay covenanters claim that David probably had a homosexual relationship with Jonathan which is nowhere condemned in Scripture (see 1 Sam. 18:3-4; 20:1-42, esp. vv. 17, 41; 23:16-18; 2 Sam. 1:26). David's relationship with Jonathan was not homosexual; it was a close friendship between two obviously heterosexual males (see 2 Sam. 3:2-5; 9:1-13).

What should be the Christian's position regarding homosexual practice?

We must recognize the need for repentance, not only for the practicing homosexual, but in our own lives if an honest self-examination reveals that we are homophobic and pharisaical. As Richard Lovelace (125) states:

It is my hope, however, that we will not be forced to resolve our conflicts by emptying ... churches of homosexual believers. There is another approach to homosexuality which would be healthier both for the church and for gay believers, and which could be a very significant witness to the world. This approach requires a double repentance, a repentance both for the church and for its gay membership.

First, it would require professing Christians who are gay to have the courage both to avow their orientation openly and to obey the Bible's dear injunction to turn away from the active homosexual life-style, seeking a heterosexual reorientation when this is possible and adopting a celibate life-style when it is not. Second, it would require the church to accept, honor, and nurture non-practicing gay believers in its membership.

Lovelace goes on to propose that repentant homosexuals be appointed to ministry positions as those best qualified to reach the gay subculture. I have grave doubts concerning the wisdom of this proposal, because non-practicing homosexuals would then face temptations to which they might be particularly vulnerable, and because ministry often puts people in the limelight, where they are subjected to intense scrutiny, undeserved criticism, and misguided assumptions. This seems too heavy a burden for repentant homosexuals to have to bear.

Those who are committed to *Sola Scriptura* (the Bible is our only authority) must, therefore, recognize the Bible's consistent condemnation of homosexual acts, no matter what the social context. A better approach to offering help to Christians with the challenge of grappling with a homosexual inclination is to offer them the friendship, fellowship, and encouragement that are available to all Christian singles committed to a pure lifestyle.

Want to dive deeper?

Here are some resources where you can study these matters in more detail:

1997 H.-P. Müller. "*qdš holy.*" 3:1103-1118 in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament.* Eds. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann. Trans. Mark E. Biddle. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

1993 F. LaGard Smith. *Sodom's Second Coming.* Eugene, OR: Harvest House.

1984 Richard F. Lovelace. *Homosexuality: What Should Christians Do About It?* Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell.

1983 Debate: "Homosexual practice is consistent with a Christian lifestyle" (Dan Billingsly denied) (video tape). The debate took place on the campus of the University of North Texas in Denton, Texas, and was sponsored by the university's philosophy department. Billingsly presented much of the biblical truth about homosexual practice but failed to discuss the biblical definition of marriage based on the semantic correspondence between husband and male, and between wife and female. Also, in his efforts to indicate the seriousness of the subject, in the face of a mocking college crowd, often came across as harsh and angry, which undercut the effectiveness of his presentation.

1981 John Bright. "The Culture and Religion on Canaan," 117-119 in *The History of Israel.* 3rd ed. Philadelphia: Westminster.

Those arguing in favor of the acceptability of "covenantal homosexuality" (which I oppose) include:

1983 Debate: "Homosexual practice is consistent with a Christian lifestyle" (Dr. Ralph Blair affirmed) (video tape). Blair's urbane and calm demeanor and his apparently compassionate attitude were far more persuasive to the audience than any biblical arguments he tried to make. Blair has gone on to establish "Evangelicals

Concerned," an organization that continues to promote the idea that covenanted homosexual relationships have God's approval and that none of the biblical passages are relevant to that kind of relationship.

1972 Troy Perry. The Lord is My Shepherd, and He Knows I'm Gay. Los Angeles: Nash.

1971 W. Dwight Oberholtzer, ed. Is Gay Good? Ethics, Theology and Homosexuality. Philadelphia: Westminster.

Non-homosexuals who make many of the same arguments include:

1978 Letha Scanzoni & Virginia R. Mollenkott. Is the Homosexual My Neighbor? New York: Harper & Row.

1955 Sherwin Bailey. *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* New York: Longmans, Green & Co.

It's All Greek to Me: Second-Class Conditions

In the issue #4, I gave a brief introduction to the four classes of conditional sentences that occur in Koiné Greek. That same article also covered the first class conditions, which assume that the condition actually corresponds to reality.

In this issue, we move on to the second class, which assumes the opposite: that the condition does not correspond to reality. In English, we express this by use of the past tense, such as "If I were a woman, I would like that color." Since I am not a woman, the condition is contrary to reality and I indicate this by using the past tense. That's why the second class condition is called "Contrary to fact." About 50 second-class conditions occur in the New Testament.

Simon's false assumption – Simon the Pharisee invited Jesus to his house for a meal following the synagogue meeting (Luke 7:36-50). This is the occasion when a sinful woman came up behind Jesus as he reclined at Simon's table. Her tears washed his feet, and she wiped them with her hair. When Simon saw that Jesus permitted her to do this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is&#@151that she is a sinner" (v. 39). Simon employs a second-class condition, assuming that Jesus and the Sinful Woman at Simon's House the idea of Jesus as a prophet of God is contrary to reality.



The insight Luke gives us into the mind of Simon is, in fact, a series of deductions, what logicians call syllogisms. Here, apparently, is the thread of Simon's reasoning: First syllogism:

- Assumption: Ritually pure Jews do not allow anyone that they know is sinful to touch them.
- Observation: Jesus is allowing the woman to touch her.
- Conclusion: Therefore, Jesus must not know that the woman is sinful.

Second syllogism:

- Assumption: Prophets have supernatural knowledge of the people they meet.
- Assumption (from #1): Jesus does not know that the woman is sinful.
- Conclusion: Therefore, Jesus must not be a prophet.

Let's examine Simon's thinking more closely. Simon probably considered his reasoning flawless, but his opening assumption is flawed. Jesus touched people freely, ignoring the strict rabbinic rules of ritual purity that governed most Jews of his day. We see him touching lepers, blind people, Gentiles, women, and even a dead man. Jesus' touch expressed His compassion and concern for people that went beyond the ordinary.

The likely background to the woman's extraordinary action at Simon's house is that she is responding to the sermon Jesus just preached at synagogue.

Jesus had compared the contradictory way the Jewish leaders reacted to John the Baptizer and His ministries to the way children play "Wedding" and "Funeral."

"Let's play 'Wedding,'" a little girl suggests. "Let's dance and laugh and have a happy time!"

"No," the bored little boy replies. "I don't want to play 'Wedding.'" "OK, then," the girl says.

"Then let's play 'Funeral,'" says the disappointed girl.

"Naw," yawns the boy. "I don't want to play 'Funeral,' either."

Jesus portrays John's ministry as a funeral: he came neither eating nor drinking. The Jewish leaders rejected John the Nazarite-like ascetic. Jesus' ministry was the opposite: like a wedding, He came both eating and drinking. They rejected him, too, asserting, "Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and 'sinners'" (v. 34).

Of course, the first two charges were false. Self-control, listed by Paul in Galatians 5:22-23 as among the fruit of the Spirit, was characteristic of Jesus' life. Jesus was not a glutton, and he was not a drunkard. But He proudly confessed the truth of the third charge: He was, and is, the friend of tax collectors and sinners.

Put yourself in the sinful woman's place as she stood there in the synagogue, hidden behind the screen that separated the men from the women. "Friend of sinners? Jesus, the famous healer and man of God? Could it be possible?"

You see, the Pharisees tended to sort everyone they met into fixed categories. That one is a righteous man. Here is the synagogue ruler, the rich benefactor of our

community. Here is the tax-collector, apostate from the true faith and a traitorous collaborator with the Romans. Sort him as a sinner, along with that woman of the night. Some are saints and always will be saints; the rest are permanent sinners. All of the entrances to Pharisee sorting rooms were one-way doors.

Yet here was a Man who earned the respect of the whole of Galilee. He was wellknown for His miracle-working and for the authority of His teaching. Here, in our own little synagogue, He is announcing that He is a friend of sinners, that a way out of the "sinful" category exists, and that He would escort people out. Perhaps for the first time in her life, the sinful woman's future began to glow with a rosy warmth. She had to follow the Teacher to Simon's house to see if this astounding new possibility for her were really true.

Simon observed accurately that Jesus was permitting the woman to touch Him. She had washed his feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. Jesus later tells her, "Since the time I entered, you have not stopped kissing my feet."

Simon was wrong, however, in his assumption that if Jesus knew what the woman was, He would not let her touch him. What would Jesus be communicating if He had refused to let the woman touch Him?

Other examples of the second-class condition

John 5:46 – If you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about me. (This is repeated in John 5:46).

Jesus' Jewish opponents had performed a lifelong study of the Law of Moses. This should have led them to Christ (Gal. 3:24), but they failed to recognize Jesus as the subject of Mosaic prophecies such as Deut. 18:18-19. See also the prophecies in Genesis, which Moses apparently recorded (e.g., Gen. 3:15; 12:2-3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 49:10-12).

Matt. 11:21 – If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. (This is repeated in Luke 10:13.)

The Galilean towns of Korazin and Bethsaida had been particularly blessed because Jesus performed a number of miracles there. Yet their citizens were unwilling to believe in Jesus. Jesus says that the Gentile cities, condemned in Scripture for their ungodliness, would have been more responsive to God's demonstrated power than these Jewish towns.

Matt. 23:30 – If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.

The teachers of the law and Pharisees thought themselves more righteous than their forefathers. Yet in acknowledging the blood ties they have with them, they are also opening up the possibility of a spiritual kinship--a family heritage of murdering the righteous, which they were soon to confirm in the mock trial and murder of Jesus. Matt. 24:43 – *If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would stay awake and not permit his household to be broken into.* (This is repeated in Luke 12:39.)

The religious leaders--whether the teachers of the Law or their replacements the apostles--are urged to watch for the return of Christ.

The list is long

Here are some more examples:

- Mark 13:20 If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom He has chosen, he has shortened them.
- Luke 19:42 If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace--but now it is hidden from your eyes.
- John 4:10 Jesus said to her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks your for a drink, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."
- John 8:19 If you knew me, you would have known my Father also.
- John 9:33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing. (Assuming the untruth only for the sake of argument)
- John 11:21 "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died." (Mary says the same thing in v. 32.)
- John 15:19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own.
- Acts 18:14 If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you.
- Acts 26:32 This man could have been set free, if he had not appealed to Caesar.
- Rom. 9:29 If the Lord of Hosts had not left us some descendants, we would have become as Sodom and like Gomorrah.
- 1 Cor. 2:8 If they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.
- 1 Cor. 11:31 But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.
- Gal. 1:10 If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.
- Gal. 3:21 For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law.
- Gal. 4:15 I can testify that if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.
- Heb. 4:8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day.
- Heb. 8:4 If he were on the earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer gifts prescribed by the law.
- Heb. 8:7 For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another.
- 1 John 2:19 For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us.

Keep studying!

By now, you should be able to identify second-class conditions when you encounter them in the New Testament. They often play an important role in the meaning of a passage. As I noted at the end of the discussion of the first-class conditions, the

same is true about those of the second class: I am only providing you with a simplified explanation. Language is not an exact science, and the rules of grammarians are only describing usage, not prescribing it. Context is the main tool we have in our struggle to understand a passage.

In future issues, we will examine the third- and fourth-class conditions. To "dive deeper," consult the **<u>Greek grammars</u>** listed in Issue #4.

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