

## **Introduction**

- Good evening. My brief tonight is to do the bible bit. On a topic like this, many of us will have firm ideas, which means that you'll either be for me or against me before I start.
- So let me build a bridge to you by telling you who I am:
  - I am a Christian, which means that I know I am a sinner, who's been forgiven by God and am only acceptable to God because of Jesus Christ, and God's grace to me through him.
  - I'm someone who became a Christian through a man who is now a practising homosexual. Before he threw in his faith, he was active in the local church, and invited me to come - first to CEBS, and then to Youth Group.
  - I'm a neighbour to two men living in a committed homosexual relationship, and they've been to my home, and I to theirs;
  - I'm a pastor - who've had to deal both with people who struggle with unwanted feelings of same-sex sexual attraction; and family members of these people;
  - but mainly I'm someone who's grateful to God and am trusting that he knows best, and so want to know what he says and why he says it.
  - That's me.

My task is to respond to the question often put in such forums - 'Isn't it just the OT that condemns homosexuality?'.

- You may have heard this. Leviticus 18 verse 22 prohibits as detestable a 'man lying with another man as he lies with a woman'. There it is. A straight verse prohibiting homosexual practice.
- But then people think, 'but that's the Old Testament. Old Testament laws are outdated and irrelevant. For example, only the next chapter in

EFAC: Isn't it just the Old Testament that condemns homosexuality?

Leviticus has laws about not wearing clothing that's been woven from two kinds of material, which no one pays any attention to now; also laws about not eating crabs and pork, which no longer apply since Jesus has come, so why do we need to prohibit homosexuality when the prohibition occurs within a section of scripture that no longer applies?

- This is the sort of line of reasoning typically taken by the ABC, when one of their current affairs presenters interviews a conservative theologian on this.
- And they have a point! You search the gospels, and it seems that Jesus doesn't say anything about homosexuality at all. And then we think, 'Maybe Jesus' silence means that we can be relaxed on the issue. That Jesus is supportive of gays and heterosexuals?. That Jesus would want our marriage act to be changed to support gay marriage?'
- Our task tonight is to engage with what God has said to us in the scriptures, and we'll be looking at what Jesus says, but not just what he says. Because all the scriptures are God-breathed, and - whilst Jesus is the key to our understanding of them - God's mind is revealed throughout them. Most Christians would agree on this. But what about Leviticus? Straight away, we're beginning by asking questions about scriptures: Which parts apply today? Which parts are the more important?
- We need to begin by recognising that the Bible has a theological shape:
  - from creation (where everything begins),
  - to the fall,
  - to the story of redemption (focussing on Jesus),
  - and finally to the new creation.
- That's the theological shape of the bible. So that will be our route that we'll follow tonight, for three reasons:
  1. that's the shape of the bible

EFAC: Isn't it just the Old Testament that condemns homosexuality?

2. often this discussion is limited to discussing the relevance of the small group of verses which prohibit homosexuality. But that's too narrow. Because those verses fit within a wider context, and wider plan for human sexuality which God unfolds. To find God's mind on this, we need not only to look at what God prohibits, but also to what he affirms as good;
  3. the larger shape tells us that - in the end - even the best of human relationships and sexuality now will be replaced by something far far greater within God's plans.
- One last introductory comment. Our aim - in looking at the bible - is **clarity**. We examine the scriptures not so that we can think superior thoughts to others, but so that we can think clear thoughts, and understand the mind of God as he's revealed it. We need to be clear about what God has said, if we're not clear, then we'll be fuzzy. And, as we'll see, there's great need for us to be clear, because much is at stake.

## Creation

- Genesis presents us with two accounts of creation, slightly different, but complimentary. The first describes God's creation of us in his image. Genesis chapter 1.26-28,

26            Then God said, "Let us make man in our image ...."
- This tells us that who we are - is defined by reference to God. We are his image bearers. This is true for every person created by God. This is very important. Because it tells us that we are not defined by our sexuality first and foremost, because who we are - first and foremost - has to do with our relationship to God our Maker. God is primary. Only then do we come to sexuality. So in verse 27 we read:

27        So God created man in his own image,  
              in the image of God he created him;  
              male and female he created them.

and here we see the complimentary nature of human sexuality. God didn't create two men, or two women, but a man and a woman. So - from Creation - we see that the nature of human sexuality in God's plan is complimentary. And then -

28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number .."

- So in Genesis 1 we see that the nature of human sexuality is complimentary, and the purpose of this is procreation.
  - This has great application to our Federal politicians, who are proposing a change the marriage act to redefine marriage so as to include same-sex relationships.
  - To my mind, redefining marriage to include gay marriage would ignore the foundational importance of the marriage unit in Genesis 1. That is, the unit upon which human society is based is a man and a woman in relationship, with the ability to self-propagate. If you redefine marriage by broadening it to include other things, you go against God's good plan for the world, and you still have the extra problem of needing a way of recognising this foundational building brick of society.
- Finally from Genesis 1, the verdict on God's creation of humanity as both man and woman (made in his image, complimentary to one another, able to reproduce and companions to one another) is that it is very good. Clearly what's set out in the opening chapter of the bible is a template for human life - the Creator's intent - which is very good, and under which humanity thrives.
- That's Genesis 1. When we go to Genesis 2, we see God creating man from the dust and putting him to work in the garden, and (whereas things

EFAC: Isn't it just the Old Testament that condemns homosexuality?

in Genesis 1 were 'good' or 'very good'), in Genesis 2 we see something that is 'not good' - and that is that the man is alone, without a suitable helper, and so God forms the woman from the man. Here, the purpose of marriage is not procreation, but companionship.

- And we have our first definition of marriage: 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.'

### **SUM: Creation**

- So we see from creation that who we are has to be first defined by reference to God our maker, and then that the nature of human sexuality from creation was complementary; and that his purpose was both procreation and companionship.

### **QUESTIONS - Creation**

- At this stage, Genesis doesn't address all our questions: Is this pattern meant to be normative for all people, or is it just a pre-fall ideal? Must the purpose of procreation still apply in all sexual relationships?

Next, we come to the **Fall**

- What does this have to say about human sexuality and homosexuality?  
Five quick points:
- 2. The temptation is for the woman and the man to doubt the word of God about judgment for disobedience - 'Did God really say 'You shall not die''? (This seems to me to be relevant when we come to the biblical prohibitions).
- 3. The appeal of temptation is to human pride - to reject God's rule over us, and to 'become like God, knowing good and evil'. We should be cautious from departing from what God has said, and taking matters into our own hands.
- 4. The sin represents an overthrow of the created order: the snake tempts the woman who leads the man who hides from God. The point is that it

EFAC: Isn't it just the Old Testament that condemns homosexuality?

is a bad idea to do something which overthrows the order of things God establishes in chapters 1 and 2.

5. There are implications for human sexual expression. God's word to the woman was that her desire would be for her husband, and he would rule over her. Those words ('desire' and 'rule') aren't in themselves bad, but the context is that of judgment. And in the next chapter, the same words crop up again with Cain - 'sin desires to have you, but you must master (rule) it'. We know the result. Violence and murder. It seems then, that the meaning of the curse on the woman (in Genesis 3) is that violence and domination will now enter into human sexuality.
6. Not everything we read in the bible after this is good, or right, or good for us, or approved of by God.

Where do we go from here?

As we know, sin spreads.

And it's in that context, that homosexuality first emerges, in Genesis 19, and then - later - in Judges 19. Both stories are violent. Both are shocking. Both are horrific.

- In the first, the story of the angels and Lot at Sodom, you'll remember that the men of that town banging on Lot's door, demanding that Lot send out the angels so that they could rape them.
- In the second story, the Israelite men of Gibeah make the same demands to an old man about a visitor staying with him. Horrifically, he sends out his concubine instead, who ends up dying from her injuries.

What can be said?

Many have used these passages to say, 'The Bible condemns homosexuality' - which after all, gets its name 'sodomy' from this passage.

EFAC: Isn't it just the Old Testament that condemns homosexuality?

BUT.

It's equally true that many practising homosexuals are appalled at what's en view here: non-consensual, violent, gang-rape - which is a long way from a consensual homosexual intercourse (especially in a committed relationship). I think that - in that respect - their point is fair.

When you read these accounts, the main offense here is not homosexual intercourse per se, but 'knowing' someone sexually without their consent. Brutal gang rape.

- Barry Webb - Moore College lecturer in Sydney says that the violence of the action suggests that the demand for homosexual sex was probably made by heterosexual men with a view to shame and humiliate the visitors, whom they regarded as enemies. (Apparently this is what men did to shame others).

What else can we say?

- The Sodom incident from Genesis 19 is picked up in two places in the New Testament - in Jude 7 and 2 Peter 2.6-7.
- In Jude, Jude has been speaking about angel sins - angels who didn't keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home.
- Then he says, 'In a **similar way**, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.'
- Clearly the reference to 'eternal fire' raises the stakes. But what was their sin? The terms 'sexual immorality' and 'perversion' both refer to utterly repugnant immorality which is a radical departure from God's good design - but are unclear. Is it homosexual intercourse en view? Or gang rape? Or both? Or something else?
- The clue comes in the words, 'In a similar way' - tying what happened at Sodom back to this sin of angels abandoning their own home. Now, it's a bit of guess as to what that means. But one good suggestion is that it

EFAC: Isn't it just the Old Testament that condemns homosexuality?

refers to what happens in Genesis 6, when some angels appeared to have had sexual intercourse with human beings. If so, then the particular abhorrence of Sodom was the demand for sex with someone who was an angel - a violation of the created order - of the way God's made the universe.

- Now - if that's the case - then we need to look elsewhere to be more clear about homosexuality.
- But - if also - if it's the case - then we also need to see the importance of not going against the order of things that God has established in creation. Because the point of both passages is that the punishment on Sodom is a warning and example to us of what God will do when the sexual order of his creation perverted.

And it's these sort of perversions which the book of **Leviticus** speaks against explicitly.

- In Leviticus 18.22, and 20.13 we get the clear prohibitions against homosexual intercourse:
  - Lev. 18.22      " 'Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.
  - Lev. 20.13      " 'If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.
- These commandments are part of the holiness codes given by God to his people, to set them apart as different to the other nations. That's the context - 'I am the LORD your God. 3 You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. 4 You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the LORD your God.'
- That's the context for the prohibitions against homosexuality, and other laws about sex. Ultimately, the reason for these prohibitions is because

EFAC: Isn't it just the Old Testament that condemns homosexuality?

these actions are abhorrent to Yahweh. He despises them. And the rule he upholds in the laws is that of the pattern of Genesis - that sexual activity to be limited exclusively to the marriage relationship.

- Was this just for Israel?
- It's telling that God says that the reason why the nations before Israel were ejected from the land was because they violated these creational laws. verse 24 - 'Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. 25 Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants.'
  - [Some people have responded to this by saying that the form of homosexuality being condemned here is cult prostitution (and not homosexual intercourse within a consensual, committed relationship).
  - I don't think that argument works. Chapter 18 covers a whole range of sexual sins, some of which would apply of course to cult prostitution, but most wouldn't. These laws are meant to apply across all contexts, across all relationships.]
- Does this mean that God condemns people who struggle with feelings of same-sex sexual attraction? ... condemn those with a homosexual orientation? No. This passage says nothing about orientation. Only homosexual intercourse.

You might say - but surely these laws don't apply - because God prescribes the death penalty!. The death penalty doesn't apply now, so clearly these laws don't apply now.

- Good point!

EFAC: Isn't it just the Old Testament that condemns homosexuality?

- We have to look carefully at what Jesus' attitude to the law was, but while we're still under the heading of 'the fall', first I want to go forward to **Romans chapter 1**, to see what Paul says on this.
- Here, he doesn't speak of the death penalty brought down through law, but he does speak of God's displeasure, and of the wrath of God being revealed from heaven against human godlessness and wickedness. The form of this wrath - I take it - is in human suffering; and the reason for it comes in two steps:
  1. The step by humanity into idolatry. Turning our back on what God has revealed of himself through the creation, and exchanging the glory of the immortal god for images, and the worship of them. And then closely followed is the second step, of ...
  2. God handing people over to "shameful lusts (verse 26). Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones (here lesbianism is mentioned explicitly for the first time. v27 ..) In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.'
- We should note that this is all part of Paul's wider argument, leading to the conclusion in 3.23 - that we are all alike, all under sin - both Jew and Gentile - 'all have sinned, and have fallen short of the glory of God'

But Romans gives us some insights:

1. Homosexuality is not the only sin mentioned here. It's mentioned alongside gossiping, arrogance, pride, and even disobeying ones parents.
2. Having said that, there seems to be a very quick connection between giving up on God (through idolatry), and God handing someone over to homosexuality. This shouldn't surprise us. As we saw in Genesis 1, our sexuality is basic to our identity, but more basic still is our relationship to

EFAC: Isn't it just the Old Testament that condemns homosexuality?

God. Give up on the vertical, and it's got to affect who we are. And the language Paul uses is very close to the language of addiction.

3. Notice how the word 'natural' is used. Paul says that same-sex lusts are 'unnatural'. This bears directly on the thorny question of whether people are born with a 'natural' homosexual orientation, and if so - what's wrong with them pursuing what's 'natural'?

  - Some people have said from this that Paul is NOT speaking of people with a natural same-sex orientation. They've said he's only talking about the perversion of those who are naturally heterosexual, but whose orientation then gets perverted and distorted through sin towards (what is an 'unnatural' orientation for them) - namely, the homosexual orientation. They say it's this that is unnatural - a heterosexual becoming a homosexual, but someone who's born with a homosexual orientation isn't being addressed here.

What shall we say?

- If we go back to verse 20, we see that Paul takes us back to the creation of the world, and the patterns God established there. ('Since the creation of the world ...' Paul says).
- That's the context for using the word 'natural'. In the way Paul uses the word, he is saying that the heterosexual pattern God establishes at Creation is what's truly natural.
- What if that's not someone's experience?
- We need to remember that Romans 1 is part of a wider argument to show that all of us have turned our backs on God, and in fact, been corrupted by that decision - which goes right back to Adam (Romans 5).
- So two things are going on here in this argument.

  1. The first is what we see in Romans 1 - that the corruption of our natures is something that we have willingly played a part in. We turn our backs on God, and God gives us what we want.

EFAC: Isn't it just the Old Testament that condemns homosexuality?

2. But the other aspect is that we have inherited a corrupted nature from Adam. We are fallen. We are damaged. But part of our fallenness means that there's an aspect of this that we relish in. We take delight in rejecting what is good (ie., natural), and we move further from God, and God hands us over, and corrupts both our minds (what we think of as 'good'), and our hearts (our willingness to pursue God).

Look at verse 32:

- 'Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.'
- So there's two things being said:
  1. We actively decide to sin and cultivate this desire, and God hands us over to our depravity.
  2. We are also born with a corrupted and fallen nature, that desires to continue to reject God and what He says is good. One implication for homosexuality is that - even though a so-called 'gay gene' hasn't been found - we shouldn't be surprised if one day it was. We recall from Genesis 3 that, the very fabric of creation is now under a curse. Weeds have appeared. Death and decay plagues us. Sin has altered us physically. It's not just our minds, and our hearts, but also our bodies which are fallen and affected by sin. That tells me that it shouldn't surprise us to find that some people are born with a sexual orientation that is distorted from the 'good' or the 'natural' heterosexual orientation of Genesis 1 and 2.

So we've looked at Creation. Fall. And now Redemption.

Enter Jesus.

Jesus said nothing about homosexuality per se. Does that mean that he sanctions it through silence? We need to look at his attitude to laws such as

EFAC: Isn't it just the Old Testament that condemns homosexuality?

the ones we looked at in Leviticus, and also to his attitude towards sinners, and to human sexuality.

- In regards to the law, Jesus said he had not come to abolish the law, but to **fulfill** it. And he does it in **three ways**:
  1. He fulfills it in his teaching. All the moral dimension of the law, Jesus takes an intensifies. He speaks of being pure not only in action, but also in thought, because you only have to lust after a woman in your heart to commit adultery. And so in view with Jesus is a total alignment of our whole selves with God - hence his call for us to love the Lord our God with all our hearts and minds and soul and strength.
- What of his silence on homosexuality?
- Given that his moral teaching intensified the laws of the Old Testament, we'd expect his views on homosexuality to be in line with the Levitical laws (that is, against homosexual sex), rather than supportive of it.
- And in his teaching on marriage and divorce from Matthew 19, Jesus takes us back to the pattern of creation in Genesis 2:

“Haven't you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' 5 and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? 6 So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”

- This is very significant. Here is Jesus, addressing a post-fall audience in a post-fall context, and taking us back to a pre-fall pattern, and speaking of it as the normative standard for us in a post-fall world. So Jesus sees the marriage pattern of Genesis 2 as normative, and speaks against those interpretations of the law which violate those patterns.

EFAC: Isn't it just the Old Testament that condemns homosexuality?

- What if sexual expression through marriage is not an option for people?
  - In the same passage (chapter 19 verse 12), Jesus upholds being single and chaste - as he was - as a valid alternative to marriage. He does not say, 'Because you're tempted sexually outside of marriage, feel free to explore the options'. What he says applies just as much to the person with same -sex attraction, as it does to a person with heterosexual desires.
2. Jesus fulfills the law in his living. In his life, we saw him loving his neighbour by mixing with sinners, and prostitutes and tax-collectors. There were no untouchables for him. In fact, his most strident criticisms were of the self-righteous people who would withhold love from sinners. And yet at the same time, he didn't love people to leave them in their sin, he loved them to free them from their sin. He called them to repentance - to 'go and sin no more'. Jesus' own example of mixing with sinners speaks to Christians who shun all contact with homosexuals; at the same time his call for repentance speaks to Christians who feel it's wrong to encourage repentance;
  3. Jesus fulfills the law by his death. As the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, he is the final and perfect sacrifice which makes other atonement unnecessary - including the death penalty for intentional sins. By his death he makes universal forgiveness possible. The only sin which now places someone beyond the reach of forgiveness is the refusal to accept what's offered. (This is GREAT news for all those people suffering with shame because of homosexual acts they may have committed, or who have lusted in their hearts sexually after someone - of either sex!).

And so Jesus brings real hope and forgiveness to those who have struggled with homosexuality. Yes, he fulfills the law, but that doesn't mean anything goes (that's one area where Christians get unstuck), and we mustn't forget

EFAC: Isn't it just the Old Testament that condemns homosexuality?

that part of Jesus' freeing us from our sin was his call for people to end their sin and to turn back to God (this is another area Christians can forget).

So not surprisingly, by the time we get to the New Testament letters, Paul has to write to clarify confusion on the issue of homosexuality.

1 Corinthians 6.9-10: Paul is clear:

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And that is what some of you were. 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.

- i. Note here - Paul does not speak of people who have unwanted feelings of same-sex sexual attraction. He speaks of homosexual actions.
  - ii. Note also - that homosexuality is a sin, but it's not worse than all others - it's listed alongside idolatry, and greed - which are pertinent to all of us.
  - iii. Verse 11 gives hope to people struggling. 'That is what some of you were'.
  - iv. But also note that this is not a secondary issue. It's a salvation issue. (cf also 1 Thessalonians 4.2-8; Galatians 5.19-21, 6.7-8).
- Jesus makes the difference. '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'
  - Is it possible for someone be a Christian, justified, sanctified by Jesus, and still experience unwanted feelings of same-sex attraction? Yes.
  - The sanctification isn't a 'final and complete' sanctification (where we're completely changed and made perfect. We all still wait for that!). The sanctification here refers to God washing us from our sins and setting us

EFAC: Isn't it just the Old Testament that condemns homosexuality?

apart for his service. That, even more than our sexual orientation, defines us. Because now we're connected back with him.

Creation. Fall. Redemption.

Finally - **New Creation.**

- At the end of the Bible, there is no reference to homosexuality. There is, however, a reference to the sexually immoral person, who - in Revelation 21.8 and 22.15 will find themselves on the outside, and experiencing a second death in the fiery lake.
- Further, if we take a leaf out of Jesus' teachings, neither will there be heterosexual marriage. In Matthew 22.30, Jesus says that "At the resurrection people will **neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.**"

What will there be?

There will be the wedding between the Bridegroom (Jesus) and the Bride (his church). Heterosexual marriage, therefore is a pointer - to a far far greater reality.

This tells us two things:

1. To be either male or female is not the true essence of what it means to be human. That's why our identity can never be found - ultimately - in our sexuality. Our identity is found in relationship with God, and the quality of relationships that we experience there, with God and with one another, will transcend even the best of companionship that heterosexual marriage can offer.

EFAC: Isn't it just the Old Testament that condemns homosexuality?

2. This should provide some comfort and hope to those who will never marry, who struggle with same-sex attraction, but strive to live a chaste life serving Christ.

#### Conclusions:

1. The consistent position in scripture is that homosexual acts are wrong because they are a rejection of God himself, and a rejection of what God regards as 'good' for us. Homosexual sex runs counter to both the nature of human sexuality (complimentary), and counter to the purpose of human sexuality (procreation). Casual sex of any kind runs counter to the companionship purpose of human sexuality.
2. We need to be careful when we discuss what's natural, and what's unnatural. Homosexuality is a product of our fallenness, rather than our createdness. It may be part of the way I am, and even the way I was born, but it is not how God intends me to be. It is something to be resisted with God's help.
3. Finally, we need to remember that we are all sinners, and our true identity is not 'homosexual' or 'heterosexual', but human beings, made in the image of God, fallen, but still loved by God, and (if we will have it so), his sons and daughters through faith in Christ Jesus.