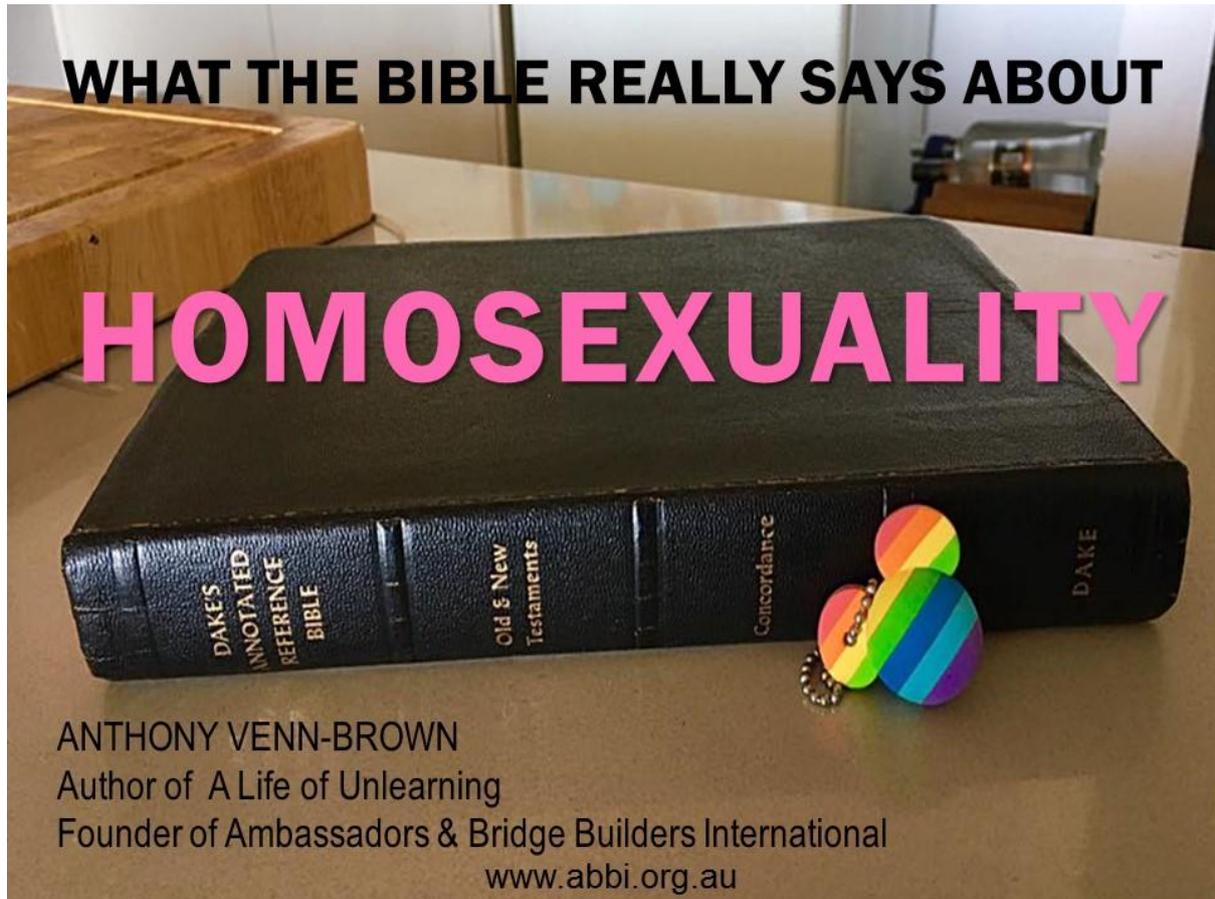


HOMOSEXUALITY, CHRISTIANITY AND THE CHURCH (Part 2)



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11 verses out of 31,173

You will find the introduction Part 1 (audio and text) on our website [HERE](#).

You read in Genesis 19 about a town of men who tried to have sex with angels and God destroyed the city. You read in Leviticus that men shouldn't lie with men as with a woman and if they do they should be put to death. Then in Romans 1 you read that men and women turned from what was natural and burned with lust for each other; therefore God gave them over to a depraved mind and all kinds of evil. You read in I Corinthians 6:9 that homosexuals are listed with a range of evil people that Paul says cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Adding of course that some you were these kinds of people.

So, it all sounds pretty cut and dried, doesn't it? Reading these in an English translation through our 21st century lens means we make assumptions as to the meaning. Really understanding the meaning intended by the writers though it would be necessary to look at the historical and cultural contexts the authors wrote in and also the nuances at times of the language used.

Matthew 5:39 is a good example of this. Jesus says "if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also."

Most readers reading an English translation through their 21st century cultural lens and no understanding of the historical/cultural context, would assume Jesus is saying be compliant, meek, forgiving, don't fight back etc. But this actually far from the truth.

Turning the other cheek had a particular meaning during the time the gospel story was written. In Jewish culture the left hand is used for unclean tasks .. so even if a person is left-handed they would

not throw a punch with that hand .. so to be struck on the right cheek, the person striking you would have to backhand you instead of punching you square on the cheek. To hit someone on the right cheek would require a blow with either the left fist or a right backhand.

Think about this....how do you hit someone else on their right cheek? At that time a backhand was not a blow to injure, it was a blow to insult, humiliate, degrade. It was not administered to an equal, but to an inferior. Masters backhanded slaves; husbands their wives; parents their children; Romans the Jews. The whole point of the blow was to force someone who was out of line, back into place. Jesus says to his audience if anyone strikes "you". He is saying to them, "refuse to accept this kind of treatment anymore. If they backhand you, turn the other cheek. By turning the other cheek, the servant makes it impossible for the master to use the backhand again. The left cheek now offers a perfect target for a blow with the right fist; but only equals fought with fists, as we know from Jewish sources, and the last thing the master wishes to do is to establish this underlings equality. This act of defiance renders the master incapable of asserting his dominance in this relationship.

By turning the other cheek, then, the "inferior" is saying: "I am a human being, just like you. I refuse to be humiliated any longer. I am your equal. I am a child of God. I won't take it anymore". A very very different meaning from the first assumption indeed.

As Walter Wink says "This sort of defiance, instead of being a meek gesture to the attacker, is one of defiance. We are not turning our cheek so our oppressor can hit us again. Instead, we are standing up for ourselves and telling our oppressors that we refuse to take the abuse, we refuse to bow to their tyranny, that we will not cower while they vilify us."

Context is what gives meaning

Example:

Mum says to daughter: 'Do you like your new mathematics teacher? '

Daughter says to Mum: 'He rides a motorbike'

How do I know what the daughter means by that statement? Does she like, dislike or is ambivalent about the new teacher. We would have to know several things. Does she like motorbikes or not. Maybe knowing her attitudes towards mathematics might help. Does her mother think that people who ride motorbikes are ratbags and therefore the daughter has said this to antagonise her? What tone of voice did she say it in? Was it a factual statement, said with sarcasm or with a smile on her face? The more knowledge we have about these things the more likely we are to understand what the daughter means when she says 'He rides a motorbike'

So we have a verse that says 'man shall not lie with a man as with a woman'. Some have assumed this verse that God condemns all male to male sexual activity. What other information can we gain so we can get closer to the real meaning of the author? The more we understand context the more we can understand the real meaning.

The Creation Story

God created Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve. We hear that trite, annoying saying too often. Of course the question arises. **If God didn't create Adam and Steve who did?** Whenever someone makes that statement to me my usual response is 'well it's obvious you understand reproduction but seem to be ignorant about sexual orientation'.

If you believe in a literal 6-day creation and that God made man and woman only to reproduce then I guess there is not much I can do for you. As a Christian, whether you are literalist, creationist, Intelligent Design advocate, believe in Darwin's theory of evolution, or a mixture of several positions, you are not alone as all beliefs can be found in Christendom. It would be good to point out at this time that many scholars believe that there are actually two different accounts of creation in Genesis written by different authors.

Is the fundamental message of the Genesis record of creation how or who?

Who was in the beginning? On this point, I think we would all agree. GOD....existing in a realm you and I will never be able to comprehend as it exists outside the known realm of time and space and our tiny little minds. I don't think the Bible was ever meant to be a science text book and we have gotten ourselves into trouble believing it to be so. The scientific theories of Galileo and Copernicus 'are just one of the many examples of scientific discovery challenging the popular Christian worldview of the time. What was once hotly debated amongst the greatest minds of the time and rejected by the church is now taught as fact to children in the first years of primary school. We need to be more cautious about adding the words 'the bible says' to our statements lest we reveal the stupidity of our so called 'blind faith'.

So the question is 'was God's intention in making male and female for reproduction only?

Even if you believe the Genesis record of creation you'll see that God did not create a black and white world of male and female. Creation is not black and white, it is an awe inspiring, amazingly diverse, intricate creation: including sexualities and a variety of non-heterosexual expressions of behaviour, affection and partnering occurring in most species, including humans. We have animals that change gender, animals that are neuter and can become either sex, some reproduce without another partner. For example, all barramundi begin their lives as male, changing sex to female at a weight of around 5kg. If you are eating a male barramundi it is probably an illegal fish. It's interesting to study gender and sex in chickens.

Today we know that same sex behaviours are a common and widespread phenomenon in the animal world and have been observed in more than 1500 species². Not only short-lived sexual relationships, but even long-lasting partnerships; partnerships that may last a lifetime. Some include infant raising as well.

God has made an amazing creation and the ability to reproduce is only a small part of it. Before God created male and female he made an even more insightful statement; 'it is not good for mankind to be alone'. This is fundamental to all human beings whether they be heterosexual or homosexual. As the Hon. Michael Kirby wrote in the forward to my autobiography "A Life of Unlearning", "Human stories, like the one in these pages, play a part in advancing understanding and acceptance. It is the story of a quest to find not only self-acceptance but one of the most powerful forces in nature—human love." Both straight and gay lasting relationships are based on love, trust and commitment, not sex or reproduction. **Was this God's intention?**

So as the saying goes..... 'Heterosexuality is not normal, it's just more common. Normal is a cycle you choose on your washing machine'. What is natural for me as same sex orientated human being is unnatural for those of you who 'chose' to be heterosexual. (Sorry couldn't resist that one)

Old Testament

Cultural Context in the Old Testament

a) Many early religions were based on fertility, sex and reproduction. There was an endless array of fertility gods Molech (male), Asteroth (female) being two well-known in OT times. People worshiped these gods basically for survival.

They needed:

- Children to maintain their lineage, status and for industry
- Crops both for survival and for trade
- Livestock to reproduce for trade and status

God kept reminding the Hebrews that they were not to be or do like other nations they were dispossessing in Canaan. In other words they were only to have one God Yahweh and trust Him for everything. Canaan was a place of idolatrous pagan fertility worship. When Israel played the harlot they went whoring after these fertility gods and the pagan practices. We see this happening regularly throughout the Old Testament. Fertility gods and the style of worship still existed in New Testament times as well.

- b) The society of Old Testament times was a totally patriarchal society. This was very different to what we might consider a patriarchal society. It was extreme patriarchy in that men were the only ones of importance; women were little more than baby producers and property.
- This was reflected in the belief that it was the male who inserted the seed in woman and she would incubate the child. Onan was destroyed because he let his semen fall to the ground.
 - It was totally degrading to a man's masculinity to take on any feminine characteristics like taking the passive role in sex or even to wear any women's clothing.

1. Sodom & Gomorrah

Genesis 19 is one of the most commonly cited anti-homosexual passages in the Bible. This is also probably the best example of how misconstrued meaning can become. For example, if I said the word 'sodom' to you what would be the first thing to come into your head.....Homosexuality? What is fascinating is that this has become so widespread you would find this even amongst non-believers and non-churched people. Why?

Some interesting facts:

- a) The story of Sodom and Gomorrah didn't begin to gain any sexual overtones in Hebrew writings till the mid to late first century. It wasn't till 50 AD, we find the first time that the sin of Sodom is associated with homosexual "acts" in general. In the Quaest. et Salut. in Genesis IV.31-37, Philo interpreted the Genesis word yādhā (to know) as "servile, lawless and unseemly pederasty." Around 96 AD, Josephus first used the term sodomy to mean homosexual acts. From Antiquities it says "They hated strangers, and abused themselves with Sodomitical practices."
- b) The term Sodomites actually means people who lived in Sodom but has become synonymous with homosexuals. I am a Sydneyite. A person who lives in Sydney. You may attach additional meanings to that in that I'm trendy, upbeat, cosmopolitan etc and even though they are true they would only be assumptions on your part unless you knew me personally. Some translators used the word sodomite intending it to mean homosexuals. The English word "Sodomite" is used in the 1611 KJV in the Old Testament 5 times, but not once in the 1973 NIV where it was translated male shrine, cult or temple prostitute which is the more correct translation.
- c) The term sodomy has become a part of civil law over centuries. What many people don't realise is that the crime of sodomy is not actually a same sex act but is actually any sexual act (same or opposite sex) that is non-reproductive including oral sex, anal sex and bestiality; in practice such laws have rarely been enforced against heterosexual couples. Many gay men have been put to death because of this law and currently in Uganda some parts of the Christian church have backed legislation that will ensure more gay men receive the death penalty.

The Sodom & Gomorrah Story has multiple interpretations

This story is often thought of in terms of the fate of a single town: Sodom. But according to Deuteronomy 29:22-29, God's anger caused many Canaanite cities to be destroyed. It involved: "...the overthrow of Sodom, and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, which the LORD overthrew in his anger, and in his wrath." **Were all the cities homosexual?**

They may have been concerned that the strangers were spies who were sent to the city to determine its defensive fortifications. "Sodom was a tiny fortress in the barren wasteland south of the Dead Sea. The only strangers that the people of Sodom ever saw were enemy tribes who wanted to destroy and take over their valuable fortress and the trade routes that it protected." The city had just recently survived just such an attack. **Could it have been on high alert and therefore made the people of city additionally cautious and aggressive and raping the 'spies' was a way of humiliating or conquering them?**

Classical Jewish texts do not specifically indicate that God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because the inhabitants were homosexual. Rather, they were destroyed because the inhabitants were generally proud, depraved and uncompromisingly greedy. Rabbinic writings affirm that the primary crimes of the Sodomites were terrible and repeated economic crimes, both against each other and outsiders. There is a story in Hebrew classic writing of a bed that was in Sodom and strangers were

placed on the bed. If they were too short the people stretched them or if too tall squashed them. **Did God destroy these cities because of homosexuality or because they were cruel evil places?**

Were the people outside Lots house all men? The mob that gathered outside lots house were all the townspeople and not just men. The traditional interpretation of this story largely stems from the gender biased translation of the word enoshe in Genesis 19:4. Most versions say "men", which according to some scholars is incorrect. The Hebrew word enoshe is not gender-specific; it indicates mortals or people. The word esh would have been used to mean "man" or eshal to mean "woman" if gender specific terminology was meant. This translation gives the impression that just the men of the city had surrounded Lot's house and the further impression that they were all homosexuals out to have sex with the angels.

Does the word 'know' actually mean to have sex with? Ya,da' is a Hebrew verb which is commonly translated as "know." Its meaning is ambiguous. It appears 943 times elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). Usually it means "to know a fact." In only about a dozen of these cases does it refer to sexual activity; in these instances, the sexual meaning is always obvious. The text generally talks about a man "knowing" a woman and of her conceiving a child as a result of the "knowing." All such references involve heterosexual relationships. This is pretty obvious from this context though that it is about sex otherwise Lot would not have offered his virgin daughters but it is interesting to note the different interpretations. The people would certainly have liked to know if these people were spies.

What were the sins of Sodom? Throughout the Old Testament, we are told repeatedly what Sodom sins are including pride, not looking after the poor and idolatry. Ezekiel 16:49 - 50, "Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good." Isaiah tells of us lack of justice. Jeremiah emphasizes moral and ethical laxity. The Deuterocanonical books identify the sin as pride and inhospitality; in Wisdom 19:13-14, we read "...whereas the men of Sodom received not the strangers when they came among them." In Ecclesiasticus 16:8 the sin is recognized as pride: "He did not spare the people among whom Lot was living, whom he detested for their pride." In all the Old and New Testament references to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, homosexuality is never condemned only inhospitality and idolatry. Deuteronomy 29:23, Isaiah 1:9, Jeremiah 23:14, Lamentations 4:6, Ezekiel 16:49-50, Amos 4:11, Zephaniah 2:9, Matthew 10:15 / Luke 10:12, Luke 17:29, Romans 9:29, Jude v.7, Revelation 11:8.

Why didn't Jesus mention the evil of homosexuality that is constantly highlighted by many bible believing Christians today?

Luke 10:10-13, Jesus talks about cities that are inhospitable to his disciples. He warns: "...it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city."

Matthew 11:23 he uses it in the context of unbelief

Luke 17:31-33 Jesus uses it to illustrate the point of commitment and priorities- 'remember lots wife' Jesus says.

Is this a story about same sex love as we know it today or rape? Let's imagine that the story is about sex and not all the other things we've mentioned it would have been rape not homosexuality that was the issue. Raping males was practised by conquering armies as the ultimate humiliation. From the times of antiquity to modern times rape of women and men has been practiced when enemies were defeated. The act of a heterosexual male raping another male is about dominance and humiliation. This also happens in gaols. Committed by heterosexual men, it is not about homosexuality it is about violence and power. Remember the scandal that arose about the way American troops were treating prisoners in Abu Ghraib gaol, Iraq. Amongst the atrocities was male rape. What was happening in Sodom is possibly another example of this.

Was the offering of Lot's daughters an offering culturally pleasing to Canaanites? Lot offered his virgin daughters (probably less than 14 years old). Virgin sacrifices to idols were a common practice in Canaan and therefore Lot was offering his daughters as virgin sacrifices to appease the mob in order to save the visitors.

If the men of Sodom were all gay shouldn't Lot have offered them men instead of women? Lot could have given the mob a gift of his two future sons-in-law. His daughters were both engaged to men from Sodom. In their culture, engagement was a binding arrangement, with many of the properties of marriage. It gave Lot authority over his future sons-in-law, much as he had control of his daughters. If the mob outside were homosexual Lot would have been able to sacrifice his daughters' fiancées. But he didn't.

Was it sex with angels that was being condemned? There are few obscure verses in the bible that mention angels coming to earth and having sex with human beings. It's quite a bizarre concept for us in the 21st century.

- **Genesis 6:4** The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.
- **Jude 6-7** And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.
- **2 Peter 2 4-6** For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly.

If one looks at the Apocryphal books such as Naphtali, Enoch, the Book of Jubilees then these obscure passages have more meaning. The watchers and messengers spoken about were angels who were on earth. They broke the order and had sex with women. This was unnatural in the order of things and this concept can also be linked to the passage in Romans 1. This is the strange flesh and in these Apocryphal books we are told in more detail about the punishment and consequences of not only the acts but of changing the order of things.

Of the six passages where same sex sexual behaviour is mentioned, most have a couple of possible interpretations. Not the Sodom and Gomorrah story though, as you've seen from the above examples, it has multiple possibilities.

Finally, it seems rather strange that Christians would use this story as a story about morality when a few chapters later we find Lot drunk and having sex with his two daughters. Amazing how some obsessed Christians are quick to remind us of this passage but conveniently forget the end of this 'righteous' man who firstly offers his daughters to be raped and then finally makes them pregnant himself. People out there in the LGBT world can also read and when Christians use this story as the basis of their anti-gay rhetoric it only demonstrates their stupidity and makes a mockery of the bible. Even though some Christians will quote a few verses out of context people in the LGBT world read the passages before and after.

1. Leviticus 18:22 & Leviticus 20:13

Leviticus 18:22

KJV: "Thou shalt not lie with a man as with a woman; it is an abomination."

NIV: "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable."

Living Bible: "Homosexuality is absolutely forbidden, for it is an enormous sin."

Leviticus 20:13

KJV: If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.

NIV: 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.

NLT: If a man practices homosexuality, having sex with another man as with a woman, both men have committed a detestable act. They must both be put to death, for they are guilty of a capital offense.

Is the Old Testament law relevant to us today?

- a) We are not Jewish
- b) Jesus demonstrated there was a higher law by constantly breaking them
- c) The New Testament demonstrates salvation by faith and the Gentiles were brought into the church and not required to follow the rituals of the Jewish law including fundamental things like circumcision, eating restrictions and Sabbath keeping. But some feel there is a difference between the moral code and the holiness code.

Is this about temple prostitution?

We know that the worship of the Canaanites involved worshiping fertility gods. Temple prostitution both male and female was a part of the practice. In Deuteronomy 23:17 we find the main concern of the Hebrews toward homosexual acts: *"None of the Israelite women shall become a temple-prostitute, nor shall any of the Israelite men become a temple-prostitute. You shall never bring the gains of a harlot or the earnings of a male prostitute as a votive offering to the temple of the Lord your God; for both are abominable to the Lord your God."* In verse 3 of the same chapter it says, *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.* And again at the close of the chapter 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.* So one interpretation of these passages is that they are forbidding same sex idolatrous practices.

Is this about the preservation of the hierarchical structure of the Jewish culture of the time?

The society was based on a system of dominance and submission. Men were at the top of the pecking order with women, children and slaves down the ladder. Men were so honoured as superior that to do anything that mimicked being a female was horrific and denigrating of his position. Jewish males were not to dishonour other Jewish males by treating them like wives and being receptive partner in a sex act or even wearing women's clothing. Deuteronomy 22:5 *The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God.* The exchanging of gender clothes once again is possibly referring to temple prostitution. We have a similar though not as extreme double standard in our society today. A promiscuous woman is a slut a promiscuous man is a stud.

What is an abomination?

The word abomination about homosexuality is well established thanks to the KJV. More recent translations are much softer but the damage has been done in the minds of many Christians. Abomination to us sounds like an ultimately disgusting thing. I've heard the word 'abomination' used many times by American preachers with particular emphasis. It can refer to the breaking of either a moral or ritual law, something that is not kosher, unpleasant, and detestable. Like eating snake. Some cultures it's acceptable others it's detestable. Certain things were detestable to the Hebrew people.

There are 65 occurrences of the word abomination in the Old Testament

- 5 refer to something as being an abomination to another people
- 13 are dietary restrictions such as shellfish and prawns
- 17 refer to improper sacrifice
- 4 related verses cite dishonest trading practices as abominations.
- 12 other verses list behaviours ranging from murder to women wearing "anything that pertains to a man"

Death Penalty?

Surely the death penalty in Leviticus 20 shows how serious this act is to God.

- *Anyone arrogant enough to reject the verdict of the judge or of the priest who represents the LORD your God must be put to death. Such evil must be purged from Israel.* (Deuteronomy 17:12 NLT)
- *Whoever strikes his father or mother shall be put to death.* (Exodus 21:15 NAB)

- All who curse their father or mother must be put to death. They are guilty of a capital offense. (Leviticus 20:9 NLT)
- Whosoever doeth any work in the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Exodus 31:15
- If, however, this charge is true, that evidence of the young woman's virginity was not found, then they shall bring the young woman out to the entrance of her father's house and the men of her town shall stone her to death, Deuteronomy 22:20

When [Dr. Laura Schlessinger](#) caused so much controversy in the US by stating on her radio show in August 2000 that homosexuals were biological errors and deviates it was a catalyst for gay activism that was historical. One of the pieces that flew around the internet was an open letter to her that cleverly and humorously demonstrates how out of context verses have been taken.

Dear Dr Laura

Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God's Law. I have learned a great deal from you, and I try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind him that Leviticus 18:22 clearly states it to be an abomination. End of debate. I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some of the specific laws and how to best follow them.

a. When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odour for the Lord (Lev. 1:9). The problem is my neighbours. They claim the odour is not pleasing to them. How should I deal with this?

b. I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as it suggests in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?

c. I know that I am allowed no contact with a woman while she is in her period of menstrual uncleanness (Lev. 15:19-24). The problem is, how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offence.

d. Lev. 25:44 states that I may buy slaves from the nations that are around us. A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans, but not Canadians. Can you clarify?

e. I have a neighbour who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself?

f. A friend of mine feels that even though eating shellfish is an Abomination (Lev. 10:10), it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality. I don't agree. Can you settle this?

g. Lev. 20:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle room here?

I know you have studied these things extensively, so I am confident you can help. Thank you again for reminding us that God's word is eternal and unchanging.

Author Unknown

New Testament

1. Romans 1:21-32

21For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. **24Therefore** God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. 25They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. 26 **Because of this, God gave them over to shameful**

lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. 27In 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. 28Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. 29They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, 30slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; 31they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32Although 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.

Where did Paul write this letter and did that have an influence on what he wrote?

Many scholars believe that Paul actually wrote the letter to the Romans while he was in Corinth. Corinth was like a number of cities we have in the world today which have become known as sex capitals. Places where almost anything goes and sexual activity is way beyond what the average person would consider decent. Sex tourism is still prevalent today with people travelling to cities like Amsterdam in Holland. Patong or Pattaya in Thailand. Sex is one of the main reasons why many go to these cities, knowing all sexual fantasies are catered for at a price. Other places in South America and Eastern Europe and now China have become well known for the prevalence of prostitution. Very sad places, where, because of poverty, people are exploited.

The towns of Corinth and Ephesus, world-class cities of their day, were also the sex capitals of the world. Corinth was so famous for its sexual activities that the name of the city became a way to describe those activities: "'Corinthian girl' ...meant prostitute,... 'Corinthian businessman' ...meant whoremonger,... 'to play the Corinthian' ...meant to visit a house of prostitution.... 'Corinthian' became a Greek slang term for the sexually loose". The same-sex activity that Paul would have encountered during his missionary visits here would have been associated with idolatry, pederasty, or prostitution and sometimes all of the above. Young boys were purchased through the slave trade and castrated to preserve their youthful appearance for the pleasure of their masters" At the top of the hill in Corinth, overlooking the city was the temple of Aphrodite, which had over a thousand prostitutes, and many Greek men continued to visit them after their conversion to Christianity.

Is Paul singling out homosexuals or using idolatry as an example of the decline of humanity if they ignore God?

If you read the entire chapter you can see that Paul is not singling out homosexuals as such but talking about the Gentile state without God. The whole point of the first chapter of Romans is that God's power and reality are obvious to anyone who looks around and that people must consciously choose to turn from God. He is speaking in past tense giving a chronological history lesson. And look at the end result he says. God's anger is directed against those who deliberately choose to turn away from worshipping God to worshipping or giving magical power to objects, animals, other people, or even to "self"...it can end up in all sorts of debauched orgies. Something the average gay or lesbian person is not involved in let alone a worshipper of idols. Once Paul has made his case for the Gentiles not acknowledging the true God he turns on the self-righteous Jews.

Romans 2: ¹You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. ²Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. ³So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? ⁴Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? ⁵But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶God "will give to each person according to what he has done."^[a] ⁷To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life. ⁸But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. ⁹There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; ¹⁰but glory, honour and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹¹For God does not show favouritism. ¹²All who

sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law

Were these heterosexuals doing unnatural things?

It is quite possible that Paul is speaking about heterosexuals doing unnatural things. Their pagan practices involved same sex acts. This is abnormal or heterosexuals but gay men and lesbians in a relationship make love to each other which is completely normal and natural to them and certainly does not involve worshipping pagan gods. This passage is irrelevant to gay and lesbian believers today.

Was Paul describing a pagan ceremony, possibly to Aphrodite?

Probably the best insight into what Paul is describing here is to look at what a pagan ceremony may have looked like.

Both male prostitution and lesbianism were associated with the Temple of Aphrodite above Corinth. The Story of Sex in Religion, speaks of Aphrodite: "She is both male and female - a bearded face with full maiden breasts. ...They who come to worship her must hide their sex. Males come in female attire and females in the clothes of males. The greatest glory they can bring to Aphrodite is to physically efface their sex." "When the human being reaches the stage in which he is neither man nor woman, then he is closest in tune with the spirit of the great goddess of love..." Worshippers of Aphrodite and other gods such Cybele, Astarte, or Ishtar, practiced erotic flagellations, same-sex orgies, and climaxing castration rites in their temples all along the sea coasts of Paul's missionary journeys.

Historian B.Z. Goldberg in his classic [The Sacred Fire](#), gives a colourful description of the rites of Aphrodite when he describes the rituals of Galli or young priests. At the beginning of the "erotic blood-letting" rites, one of the young priests resembling Attis or Adonis would be found stabbed to death. "The sight of the dead priest ... aroused others to give of their own life fluid for the sake of the son of their goddess. The high priest drew blood from his arms and presented it as an offering. And the inferior priests wrought to the height of passion by the wild barbaric music of symbol, drum and flute and by the profusion of blood around them, whirled about in furious dance. Finally, overcome by excitement, frenzied and insensible to pain, they savagely thrust the knives into their bodies, gashing themselves in violence to bespatter the altar with their spurting blood. The frenzy and hysteria of the priests spread to the worshippers, and many a would-be priest fell into the wave of religious excitement. He sacrificed his virility to the goddess, dashing the severed portions of himself against her blood-besmeared statue. [Onlookers joined in.] With throbbing veins and burning eyes, they flung their garments from them and with wild shouts seized the knives of the priests to castrate themselves upon the very spot. They ran through the streets of the Sacred Ring, waving the bloody pieces and finally throwing them into a house they passed. It became the duty of the households thus honoured to furnish these men with female clothes, and they, made eunuchs in the heat of religious passion, were to serve their goddess for the rest of their lives. The priest who castrated himself in religious frenzy assumed feminine dress and continued in the service of the temple and like the priestesses served man for the required fee. They were," says Goldberg, "male priests serving males in the temples of all the gods."

It's not difficult after reading this description to place this in the context of what Paul was describing in Romans 1 *Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. 27In 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.*

2. I Corinthians 6:9

"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God." (RSV)

What is the correct translation of the words? There are and have been so many interpretations

Year	Version	malakos	arsenkoitai
		Soft, weak	Bed a male
1611	KJV	Effeminate	Abusers of themselves with mankind
1952	RSV	Homosexuals	
1965	Amplified	Homosexuality	
1966	Jerusalem	Catamites	Sodomites
1966	TEV	Homosexual pervers	
1970	New American	Boy prostitutes	Practicing homosexuals
1971	Living	Homosexuals	
1977	RSV	Sexual pervers	
1978	NIV	Male prostitutes	Homosexual offenders
1982	NKJ	Homosexuals	Sodomites
1989	RSV	Male prostitutes	Sodomites
1996	TNT	Effeminate	Pederasts

Arsenkoitai poses a problem to the translator because this is its earliest known occurrence in Greek literature. This has also happened in I Timothy 1:8-10 where it is also linked to slave traders or kidnappers. Where these men who traded in young boys? All possibilities some scholars tell us are: -.

- **Homosexual offenders like heterosexual offenders**
- **Male prostitutes in Pagan temple**
- **Pimps**
- **Abusive paedophiles**
- **Male prostitutes**
- **Boy sex slaves**
- **Masturbators (Roman Catholic Encyclopaedia 1967)**

Why didn't Paul use any homoerotic words that were popular in his day

If Paul wanted to refer to homosexual behaviour, he would have used the word "*paiderasste*." That was the standard Greek term at the time for sexual behaviour between males.

Is Paul drawing on a list of people in a form that most of his readers were familiar with

Some historians have told us that a popular Roman board game was one in which virtues and vices were listed along the side of the board. The "naughty" vices were listed in the vulgarest street language and included: fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortionists.

Paul was using a list of commonly known "vices" as an example for his mostly Greek audience. Corinth, though a Greek city, was enormously influenced by Roman culture. And Paul always knew and directed his comments at his specific audience.

How could we summarize these verses?

I think it is fair to say that these verses are speaking about male to male sexual activity and always in a negative light. If anything they are speaking about male prostitution, pederasty, exploitive relationships. If you spoke to your average gay man and tried to explain these to him he would have a hard time understanding the relevance to him. Whilst prostitution and exploitive relationships exist in our society they occur in both the heterosexual and homosexual worlds. This has nothing to do with one's orientation. Gay and lesbian couples that are in relationship, some for up to 50 years have built their relationships on the same principles that straight couples do; love, trust, respect, commitment. To condemn them for their orientation is not only unchristian it is unbiblical.

Three last things

Did Jesus heal a Centurion's male lover?

In Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10. In Matthew, we are told that the centurion came to Jesus to plead for the healing of his servant. Jesus said he was willing to come to the centurion's house, but the centurion said there was no need for Jesus to do so — he believed that if Jesus simply spoke the word, his servant would be healed. Marvelling at the man's faith, Jesus pronounced the servant healed. Luke tells a similar story.

The Greek word used in Matthew's account to refer to the servant of the centurion is pais. In the language of the time, pais had three possible meanings depending upon the context in which it was used. It could mean "son or boy;" it could mean "servant," or it could mean a particular type of servant — one who was "his master's male lover."

Is it possible the pais referred to in Matthew 8 and Luke 7 was the Roman centurion's male lover?

The Bible provides three key pieces of textual and circumstantial evidence. First, in the Luke passage, several additional Greek words are used to describe the one who is sick. Luke says this pais was the centurion's entimos doulos. The word doulos is a generic term for slave, and was never used in ancient Greek to describe a son/boy. Thus, Luke's account rules out the possibility the sick person was the centurion's son; his use of doulos makes clear this was a slave. However, Luke also takes care to indicate this was no ordinary slave. The word entimos means "honored." This was an "honored slave" (entimos doulos) who was his master's pais. Taken together, the three Greek words preclude the possibility the sick person was either the centurion's son or an ordinary slave, leaving only one viable option — he was his master's male lover.

A second piece of evidence is found in verse 9 of Matthew's account. In the course of expressing his faith in Jesus' power to heal by simply speaking, the centurion says, "When I tell my slave to do something, he does it." By extension, the centurion concludes that Jesus is also able to issue a remote verbal command that must be carried out. When speaking here of his slaves, the centurion uses the word doulos. But when speaking of the one he is asking Jesus to heal, he uses only pais. In other words, when he is quoted in Matthew, the centurion uses pais only when referring to the sick person. He uses a different word, doulos, when speaking of his other slaves, as if to draw a distinction. (In Luke, it is others, not the centurion, who call the sick one an entimos doulos.) Again, the clear implication is that the sick man was no ordinary slave. And when pais was used to describe a servant who was not an ordinary slave, it meant only one thing — a slave who was the master's male lover.

The third piece of evidence is circumstantial. In the Gospels, we have many examples of people seeking healing for themselves or for family members. But this story is the only example of someone seeking healing for a slave. The actions described are made even more remarkable by the fact that this was a proud Roman centurion (the conqueror/oppressor) who was humbling himself and pleading with a Jewish rabbi (the conquered/oppressed) to heal his slave. The extraordinary lengths to which this man went to seek healing for his slave is much more understandable, from a psychological perspective, if the slave was his beloved companion.

Were the eunuchs gay men as we know them?

People will often say Jesus said nothing about homosexuality. I disagree with that.

In Matthew 19:12, *For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it*

Looking at the place of eunuchs in biblical times is a fascinating study. To the people of this time it was simply assumed that all people would marry and have children. If one did not do so, it would be assumed that there was something wrong with him, i.e. he may be classified as a eunuch. Thus, it is possible that many people who were gay would have been seen as eunuchs. We do not know this for

fact, but we do know that many men were made to be eunuchs by men in order to guard their harems. Was the first category mentioned by Jesus gay men who had no inclination for women?

Also, Paul speaks of one eunuch in Acts 8: 26-39. The eunuch was a high ranking official of the queen of Ethiopia and he had come to Jerusalem to worship. He was on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza, returning home and reading the book of Isaiah. Philip had been commanded by an angel of the Lord to be on that road that day. Philip caught up with the man and preached the Word of God (despite the prohibition of allowing a eunuch to worship). As they neared the water Philip baptizes the eunuch (again quite a taboo) and is then whisked away by the Spirit of the Lord. Tradition has it that this eunuch introduced Christianity to Ethiopia.

We don't know if this eunuch was homosexual. However, we do know that some of the eunuchs mentioned in scripture were undoubtedly those whose sexuality precluded a heterosexual relationship ("those born incapable of marriage") and Philip a messenger of God would have known this. He was not at all hesitant about sharing God's Word despite the church's rules against such behavior and he did not attempt to convert him from being a eunuch (i.e. ex-eunuch ministry like the ex-gay ministry). He simply shared the Word of God like he would equally with any human being.

Are LGBT people lepers or gentiles?

Sometimes people liken gay and lesbian people to the lepers of Jesus day. There are of course similarities. Lepers were considered outcasts, unclean and were rejected by everyone including their families. I think there is possibly a better analogy.

In Acts 10 we read the familiar story of Cornelius the Roman centurion (a gentile) who had a vision that he was to send his servants to Joppa and bring back Peter. This is not unlike the many 10,000's of gay Christians who are having an experience of God even though they may have left the church and been told that God will never accept them as they are. It's called the rainbow revival and it is strong healthy and growing.

Meanwhile God is trying to get through the years of Jewish of a tradition of separatism and exclusivity to speak to Peter. Let's pick up the story in verse 9.

Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

Why three times? Because not only are some of Gods people stubborn..... some are thick.

You know the rest of the story. Peter goes to Cornelius's house and preaches.

Verse 28 He said to them: *"You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.*

Peter had his personal experience that God was extending the boundaries. So it is happening today. As gay (LGBT) Christians come out, as people get to know LGBT family members, friends, work colleagues the preconceived ideas, misconceptions are broken down and people realise they are no more different to them except they are attracted to the same sex not the opposite sex.

From what I have discovered in churches more and more individuals are having a personal experience like Peter and God has shown them that they should not call any man impure or unclean. I've found them in Hillsong, other Pentecostal churches and evangelical denominations. I've found them in Bible colleges. Hopefully you've already had your Cornelius experience.

Now the next step.

Acts 15

1 Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." 2 This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. 3 The church sent them on their way, and as they travelled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles (people in the LGBT community) had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad. 4 When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

5 Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees (religious right) stood up and said, "The Gentiles (gays and lesbians) must be circumcised (go into an 'ex-gay' program) and required to obey the law of Moses (turn from their homosexuality and become like God intended, heterosexual)."

6 The apostles and elders met to consider this question. 7 After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. 8 God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. 9 He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. 10 Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? 11 No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

12 The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.

James spoke up: 19 "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles (gays and lesbians) who are turning to God. 20 Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. (to live good Christian lives and be faithful to their partners) **Parentheses mine of course.**

So we see Peter's individual experience now becomes the corporate experience of the church. Am I stretching the scriptures too far. I don't think so. How many years between Acts 10 and Acts 15? This is the period we are in now. It takes time to transform a corporate belief system. The struggle we are experiencing today is no different to the struggle to embrace the Gentiles in the early church or the struggle for the abolition of slavery, acceptance of Afro-Americans as equal or for women to take positions of leadership in the church.

This journey has been going on since the 1950's when the first book exposing the misinterpretations was written. Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition was published in 1955. Written by Derrick Sherwin Bailey, it was a pioneering study that almost all modern historical research on gay people in the Christian west has depended upon. Now there have literally been 1,000's of books on the subject.

Summary

I'd like a \$1 for every email I've received or comment made on my Facebook pages from Christians who tell me 'THE BIBLE CLEARLY CONDEMNS HOMOSEXUALITY' and then proceed to quote either one or all of the passages above as if I've never heard them before. I chuckle. Obviously these people haven't done their homework on me or the passages they freely and stridently quote.

The bible is clear on lots of things; homosexuality is not one of them.

Yes, the Bible does refer a few times to same sex sexual activity. Same sex sexual activity and same sex orientation are two very different things however. The only times same sex sexual activity is mentioned it is always in the context of either rape (Genesis 19), idolatrous/pagan practices (Leviticus 18:22 & Leviticus 20:13, Romans 1:26-27,) exploitive relationships such as prostitution or pederasty (I Corinthians 6:9, 1 Timothy 1:10) or sex with angels (Genesis 19, Jude 1:7).

The gay and lesbian people I know and mix with are definitely not into the above categories. Many are actually living in monogamous, long term relationships and to condemn them to hell on the basis of 11 doubtfully interpreted verses out of 31,173 is a disgraceful use of scripture. It is bad enough to condemn and judge others but to do it out of ignorance and in the name of God is abhorrent.

*“The enemy is not individuals, churches, 'ex-gay' organisations or political parties; **the enemy is ignorance.** Change is created by focusing our energies on overcoming the latter instead of attacking the former.”* Anthony Venn-Brown

This resource is made available by Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International (ABBI).

ABBI's mission is to create understanding and acceptance for LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex) people, empower community members and build bridges with churches, religious organisations and leaders.

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Anthony Venn-Brown is one of Australia's foremost commentators on faith and sexuality. His bestselling autobiography '[A Life of Unlearning](#)', detailing his journey from married, high profile preacher in Australia's growing mega-churches, such as Hillsong, to living as an openly gay man, has impacted thousands globally. He is also an [educator and consultant](#) on LGBT/faith issues and leader in [deconstructing the 'ex-gay' myth](#). Anthony is the founder and CEO of [Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International](#). In recognition of his work he has received numerous awards including being twice voted 'One of the 25 Most Influential Gay and Lesbian Australians'

¹ <http://www.fsmitha.com/h3/copernicus.htm>

² <http://www.news-medical.net/news/2006/10/23/1500-animal-species-practice-homosexuality.aspx>