

Ask The Pastor



Question: What are the relevant Scriptures relating to same-sex behavior?

I knew that when I started the “Ask the Pastor” blog that this question would arise, but I was kind of hoping it would not. Not because I don’t have an opinion, I do. But so does other people. You would think that Scripture is very clear, but sometimes it is difficult when scholars are trying to determine how words should be translated. When it comes to this discussion, you can find scholars with opinions that will match what you want the opinion to be. With that being said, I will attempt to give opinions on the six Scriptures that people usually refer to when discussing same-sex behavior and marriage. These will be brief opinions, but I will also give you some references at the end in case you want to read more. I will also use the terms “affirming scholars” to designate those who wish to affirm same-sex marriage and “traditional scholars” for those who believe same-sex marriage is contradictory to Scripture while knowing that this also is generalizing. But it will help you follow the discussion. I will say that this blog may be a little longer than usual. I will give the Scriptural reference but will let you look up the Scripture. So you may want to get comfortable, grab a cup of coffee and your Bible before you begin.

I will say that there is another reason I was hesitant to address these Scriptures. For years, we have used Scripture to bash, condemn, and ostracize gay people. While we say that we are addressing the issue, in reality, we are dealing with people. People, who may be gay, but are part of our families, friends, and church. People who we love. To say it is only an issue is to dehumanize those with a same-sex orientation. They have heard these passages and it is usually in a hateful way, so be sensitive to that. I need you to do me a favor. This is part one of the blog and you will receive the second half tomorrow. I will deal with the Scripture today and how we respond tomorrow. I hope you read both days, pray, and try to reach your own conclusion. And remember what I like to say, Scripture is an equal opportunity offender. You can’t read it to pass judgment on others unless you see what it says about you also. So let’s get started.

GENESIS 19: 1-9

It seems that forever, the story of Sodom has been used to show God’s hatred of gay people. However, both affirming and traditional scholars disagree. After all, it says that “all” the people, “both young and old” were seeking to have sex with Lot’s guests. So, was Sodom a city that all gay people moved to? No, it probably had nothing to do with gay people and definitely not the consensual, loving, monogamous same-sex relationship that we see today. It was about power and rape. This is why Lot offered his daughters, which is pretty disturbing in and of itself. In addition, whenever Sodom is mentioned in the Old Testament, gay sex is never mentioned. Instead, the Scriptures speak of Sodom’s pride, oppression, wickedness, and plenty of food but not taking care of the poor.

LEVITICUS 18:22 and LEVITICUS 20:13

Some affirming scholars argue that this is not talking about the consensual loving relationship that we know today. Instead, it is talking about temple prostitution or a man forcing himself on a boy. Furthermore, the argument can be made that we don't follow all the Levitical laws today, so is it even relevant?

There are traditional scholars that would argue that there is nothing that would limit the command to a particular type of same-sex behavior. No mention of the kind of stuff that we saw in Sodom. Scholars are also not sure how much cultic prostitution actually existed during this time. It seems that there is disagreement among scholars as to what is meant in these verses as to whether they apply to all same-sex relations or just certain ones. Here again, you can probably side with the one that holds your opinion.

So do we follow these Levitical commands today? I mentioned in one blog that we do not follow certain commands anymore. We don't offer sacrifices because Christ became our sacrifice, some commands we don't follow any longer because of the New Testament as I mentioned in the blog. But some are still valid. When reading Leviticus 18-20 as a unit, many still apply to us today and all the ones regarding sex are still authoritative for Christians. For Christians, the foolproof test is to see what the New Testament says about the law, and the case can be made that these two are. So, let's take a look.

ROMANS 1: 26-27

Before we address the verses specifically, it is important to know the context. Quite frankly, Rome was very perverted. We also have to remember that terms like homosexual, gay, or lesbian were not used during this time. In fact, the terms didn't come about until the 19th century. When two men had sex with each other, the man who was the active partner was considered manly. If he was the passive partner, he would be considered womanly (effeminate). In Rome, same-sex relations were commonplace. However, having sex with the same sex didn't automatically mean someone was gay like we would think of today. While same-sex orientation may or may not have been understood during this time as it is today, there is evidence that an inborn same-sex desire did exist during this time.

The most common form of same-sex relations occurred between men and boys between the age of 13 and 17, known as "pederasty". Usually, an older man would be in a relationship with someone who is younger by 10 to 20 years. It may be a type of mentoring relationship, but did include sex between them. Many times the relationship would only last until the younger one reached a certain age, but some of these relationships lasted longer due to the love between the two men. But there is also some evidence for consensual same-sex relations, though they were in the minority. Affirming scholars mention that even pederasty relationships that lasted were not the same as same-sex relationships today due to the age difference. Traditional scholars would point out that there are loving consensual relationships today, both same-sex and men-women, where there is a significant age difference, so the age difference is a non-factor.

Jewish writers in the first century, like Josephus and Philo, also mentioned same-sex relations and always in a negative context. Scholars on both sides would say they were mainly referring to pederasty, but there are places they seem to condemn all forms of same-sex relations. Jewish rabbis around this time continued to interpret Leviticus 18 and 20 as meaning that all same-sex relations were outside of God's will.

When Paul deals with same-sex relations, scholars question whether he is discussing pederasty or same-sex relations as we know. Traditional scholars point to what he says about women, who

were not pederastic. There were no power-driven differences as there were with men during this time. Paul then, similarly, writes about male same-sex relations. Many traditional scholars say that Paul is not necessarily just talking about pederasty but all male same-sex relations.

Affirming scholars make the case that when Paul talks about unnatural, or against nature, he is against same-sex relations because it can't procreate, though they acknowledge that this does not really hold with other things Paul discusses about marriage and sex. Other affirming scholars suggest that it is unnatural because it is "against culture" or the way Paul's culture expects people to act. Still others say that Paul is condemning uncontrollable passions and this does not apply to consensual, loving same-sex marriages. Traditional scholars would point out though that when Paul describes other vices in Romans 1:29-31, he does not indicate that they would be fine if committed by loving Christians. He condemns the acts.

(Side note. Paul does not write Romans 1 to condemn gay people. He is showing how we all are broken people without Jesus, which he spells out in the rest of Romans.)

1 CORINTHIANS 6:9 and 1 TIMOTHY 1:10

Most of the differing opinions in these two verses center around two Greek words, *malakoi* and *ansenokoitai* which are translated in the NIV version as "men who have sex with men". Affirming scholars point out that these words are too ambiguous, and that no one knows what they actually mean. They could refer to male prostitution or pederasty since *malakoi* refers to the passive partner and *arsenokoites* refers to the active partner.

Traditional scholars point out that though *arsenokoitai* is not found as a word in the rest of Scripture, the individual parts *arsenos* and *koiten* are, in Leviticus 18 and 20, the only two verses in the Old Testament that talk about men sleeping with men. These scholars further mention that if Paul was simply referring to pederasty, then there were Greek words that he could use to refer to that. Instead, Paul uses a general term that means "men who sleep with men".

Well, you asked for the Scripture verses. Now, aren't you glad you did? You thought it would be easy, didn't you? As I mentioned earlier, different scholars have differing opinions on what these verses mean. And they go in much more detail than you probably care to read about. So if they can't decide, you can see how difficult it is for us to decide. So, what do we do? That is what I will attempt to show tomorrow. More specifically, does Jesus say anything about same-sex marriage, and how do we respond as followers of Jesus?

In His Grace,

Pastor Jim

If you want to read more in-depth, then let me mention a few books that I have been reading:

People To Be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is Not Just An Issue by Preston Sprinkle
Torn: Rescuing The Gospel From The Gays-Vs.-Christians Debate by Justin Lee
Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis by William J. Webb (more like a textbook, so it's pretty heavy)