

What Does the Bible Say about Homosexuality?

The Age of Fluidity Series, February 26 & 27, 2022 | Romans 1:18-32
Senior Pastor Rob O'Neal

WE ARE CONTINUING OUR SERIES TODAY ON THE AGE OF FLUIDITY.

Two weeks ago, we talked about God's design for human intimacy.

In Genesis 2, God created the man and then made the woman from the man.

Hence, men are to leave their families and cling to their wives. They become one flesh; they complement one another, enjoy intimacy, and become inseparable. That's the plan.

However, "The Age of Fluidity" reminds us that our culture's attitudes about intimacy are fluid.

The culture views boundaries, attractions, and even gender as changeable and fluid.

How should we Christians think and behave in The Age of Fluidity?

First, we want to get our questions right.

Asking, "What does the culture say and think?" is the wrong question.

Asking, "What do I think?" and "What do I want?" is a bad idea.

We want to ask, "What does God think?" and "What does God want?" To know what God thinks and wants, we turn to the Bible. The Bible is God's revelation of his will to us. It's true, it's reliable, and it is our guide for faith and life.

Today we're talking about what the Bible says about homosexuality.

Homosexuality has become a more prominent part of our culture.

A 2021 Gallup study found that 5.6% of the U.S. population currently identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. That number has nearly doubled in just the past decade.

Nearly 16% of Generation Z adults (currently born 1997 - 2002) identify as LGBTQ+.¹

Gay marriage became the law across the land after 2015. Since then, support for gay marriage has continued to rise. In 2019, the Pew Research Center found that 61% of Americans favor allowing gay marriage. Among those who are religiously unaffiliated, 79% favor gay marriage.²

We don't always know how to respond to these massive changes. Recently I was in a hardware store.

An older gentleman was picking up a chainsaw he had brought in for repairs.

He and his friend were talking with one of the store employees.

This older gentleman was complaining loudly about the number of gay romantic relationships he had seen portrayed on television recently.

¹ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/329708/lgbt-identification-rises-latest-estimate.aspx>

² <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/24/same-sex-marriage/>

His rant was laced with profanity, and he used graphic and unkind words for gay people.

I doubt he is a Christian. He only mentioned God when he used God's name in vain.

His rant points out that our culture has changed in ways that disorient many people, that gay people have been dehumanized and abused, and that we need a better, biblical response.

Let's search the Bible together today to find a truly biblical response to homosexual activity.

THE BIBLE IS CLEAR ABOUT HOMOSEXUAL ACTIVITY.

In Romans 1:24-25, Paul is clear that we live in a broken world:

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Paul's "therefore" in verse 24 points us back to verses 16 and 17 where Paul said that the Gospel has been revealed to the world, he is preaching it, God's righteousness is revealed to the world, and we can live by righteousness.

Paul's "therefore" also points back to verses 18-23 where he argues that while righteousness is available, many of us have chosen unrighteousness. We have suppressed the truth and chosen to worship and serve creation rather than worshipping and serving our Creator.

Therefore, Paul writes, God has allowed us to follow our hearts and do whatever we please.

Next, in Romans 1:26-27, Paul reminds us that homosexual activity breaks God's plan. It's sin.

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

Paul wrote earlier that God gave people over to their sinful thoughts and desires.

Here Paul gives us a specific example. He talks about women engaging in sexual relationships with other women and men engaging in sexual relationships with other men.

Some argue that what Paul is talking about here is lust.

What Paul is really addressing is the fact that homosexual activity violates a person's nature.

Paul is arguing that there is an inherent, optimal design to creation. God's natural design for creation was for sex between one man and one woman in a marriage for a lifetime.

Homosexual activity (both lustful thoughts and intercourse) violates God's design for creation and his plan for human intimacy.

Then Paul goes on to point out in Romans 1:28-2:1 that we are all broken, sinful people.

Homosexual activity is not the only thing that comes out when we suppress the righteousness of God, put ourselves in charge, and serve creation rather than the Creator:

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that

those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things.

We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Homosexual activity is one important example of the way that we are all guilty in thought, word, and deed. We are all in desperate need of Jesus. That's what Paul is arguing.

ARE YOU SURE THAT'S WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS?

Some people object that the Bible allows or affirms same-sex relationships. Let's look at a few of the most compelling arguments:

Objection #1: The Bible's apparent prohibitions of homosexual activity apply only to exploitation.

Exploitative same-sex activity occurred throughout the ancient world.

The first century was filled with examples. It was common for slave-owners to have intercourse with slaves and for older men to have sex with younger men.

Some people argue that the Bible was prohibiting those exploitative same-sex relationships, not consensual same-sex relationships.

They argue that consensual same-sex relationships were unknown in the ancient world and so could not be prohibited. That argument is untrue. Historians have ample evidence that consensual same-sex relationships were well known.³

The Bible was prohibiting homosexual activity, both exploitative and consensual.

Objection #2: If an individual is born with same-sex attraction, then homosexual activity must be right.

The suggestion is that if a person is born wired for same-sex attraction, then it must be right. Further, if they are born with same-sex attraction, then they must follow that attraction through to action, or they are not being allowed to become fully actualized humans.

Science is unclear about whether same-sex attractions are genetic or environmental.

In either case, the underlying thought is flawed. We think that we are born pure and become broken as we make bad choices. Not true. We are born into a broken world.

Being born into a broken world leaves an imprint on all of us.

Consequently, we are all born sinful with sinful thoughts, urges, and tendencies from birth.

For some people that brokenness takes the form of same-sex attraction.

Being born with the imprint of the broken world does not imply that we have been designed that way by God, nor does it imply a license to act on that imprint.

Objection #3: Love wins in the Bible.

³ Preston Sprinkle, "Pastoral Paper 7: Did Adult Consensual Same-Sex Relationships Exist in Bible Times?" www.centerforfaith.com.

This argument is that the trajectory of the Bible points toward favoring committed homosexual relationships.

However, the Bible speaks in multiple places about homosexuality. There are passages in the Old Testament (Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13) as well as the New Testament (1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:9-10).

Furthermore, nowhere does Jesus relax the Old Testament's teachings on matters of intimacy. Instead, he amplifies the Bible's teachings on sexuality in the direction of holiness. The Old Testament implied pathways to divorce that Jesus closed. The Old Testament forbade adultery, but Jesus talked about lustful thoughts as sin.

The Bible is unanimous and multi-vocal in calling homosexual activity sin.

Objection #4: Christians have been on the wrong side of history before.

Christians argued forcefully for slavery in this country. Also, Christians have engaged in and defended racism. Both were mistakes.

The argument goes that we are similarly wrong now in arguing against homosexual activity.

We should pause and make sure that what we say about homosexual activity and gay people comes from God rather than from our culture or our prejudices.

However, the Church has not always or everywhere defended and affirmed slavery. Important voices have always opposed the practice.

By contrast, historically the Church has everywhere and always affirmed that God's plan for intimacy is one man and one woman in the context of marriage for a lifetime. Also, the Church has everywhere and always opposed homosexual activity.⁴

The Bible prohibits homosexual activity.

HOW CAN CHRISTIANS WITH SAME-SEX ATTRACTIONS LIVE FAITHFULLY?

There are Christians with same-sex attractions, and there is Good News if that's you!

Same-sex attraction may be something you are born with or develop. How you became same-sex attracted is not the issue. Rather, it is the starting point.

If you are attracted to people of the same gender, that means you know one of the types of temptations you deal with in life.

Jesus Christ is available to you. How then can you live faithfully?

1. Find your identity in Christ.

We live in a world of hyphenated identities. We are pushed to think about our ancestors, the region where we grew up, the type of work we do, and what kind of food we eat.

The world wants me to think of myself as a carnivorous/omnivorous, white-collar, southern-born Anglo-Saxon, white man.

When I become a follower of Jesus, all of that changed.

⁴ Preston Sprinkle, "Pastoral Paper 5: 15 Reasons for Affirming Same-Sex Relations - And 15 Responses" www.centerforfaith.com.

Without negating our origins, our experiences, or our values, our identity is now in Christ.

Galatians 3:26 says,

“For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.”

By sons, actually, Paul is calling us all children (sons and daughters) of God when we follow Jesus. Identities such as “homosexual” and “heterosexual,” “gay” and “straight” should not be our ways of thinking of ourselves. We are sons and daughters of God.

2. Choose holy sexuality as a calling.

Holy sexuality is a much better way to think of our sexuality.

We may think that God calls us to be heterosexual, but there are many sinful, broken ways to be heterosexual. God does not call us to be heterosexual but to a holy sexuality.

Theologian and scholar Christopher Yuan describes the term.

He reminds us that God calls us to holiness based on his own identity. In **Leviticus 11:44**, the Lord says:

“I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. ...”

God’s holy plan is twofold: celibacy in singleness, faithfulness in a marriage between a man and a woman. That’s God’s plan for holy sexuality. He calls us to be holy as He is holy.⁵

3. Get to know your faith family.

You are not alone; as a follower of Jesus, you are part of God’s family.

Jesus himself said that we who follow him are one big family, his family. When asked about his family Jesus said in **Matthew 12:49-50**:

And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

The church has not always been kind to people with same-sex attractions. It has not always been easy or even possible to talk about such topics with other Christians. Some of you have struggled alone and in shame. I apologize for that. You are not alone.

When we begin to follow Jesus, we become part of a much bigger family. You need this family.

Some of you who experience same-sex attraction will do so for a lifetime. Marriage may not be for you. If that is the case, holy sexuality calls you to celibacy.

Just know this: celibacy in singleness does not imply loneliness or aloneness. You have brothers and sisters in Christ, a family of faith. We are not perfect, but we are here for you.⁶

HOW SHOULD CHRISTIANS TREAT HOMOSEXUAL FAMILY AND FRIENDS?

Homosexual people are people. They are created by God with the image of God inside.

They have hopes and dreams and fears. We need to remember that.

⁵ Christopher Yuan, *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel: Sex, Desire, and Relationships Shaped by God’s Grand Story* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2018).

⁶ Ibid.

Before a gay friend or family member ever says anything about their orientation, they have likely had experiences other people do not know about or understand.

They have wrestled with their attractions and identity.

Frequently, they have experienced rejection and verbal or physical abuse.

Then we add our experiences. When someone tells us that they are gay, we may be shocked at first.

We may grieve. We may feel guilt or shame. Our feelings complicate the matter.

What should we do? How should we treat homosexual family and friends?

1. Decide to care.

Getting angry and judging is not going to help.⁷

When a friend says, "I am gay," our first response needs to be care. It took great courage for them to tell us knowing that we might reject and judge them.

When a family member tells us that they are gay, their first question is, "Will you still love me?"

When we get angry, judge them, and reject them, we are closing off an important connection they have to God and the Church.

When we decide to care about our friends and love our family members, we keep the relationship alive and create possibilities. That's what we want.

2. Don't change your convictions to match your circumstances.

When we discover that they have gay friends and family members, we face a dilemma a second dilemma. We know that homosexual activity is sinful, but we care for our friend or family member. Our convictions and love battle with one another.

Holding grace and truth, love for God, and love for neighbors in tension is not easy. It is difficult to tell someone that we love them and disagree with their behavior.

Don't allow your care for someone to lead you to compromise what the Bible plainly says.

Grace and truth are difficult to hold in tension, but that is what the Bible calls us to do.

3. Focus on Jesus.

When we care for gay friends and family members, it is easy to focus on the behavior; we know that their behavior is wrong, destructive, and God-dishonoring. We want them to change their behavior. Their behavior isn't the real issue, however.

If they are not Christians, we want them to meet Jesus and become followers of Jesus. Jesus died to pay the price for our sin. All of it. We want our gay friends and family members to meet Jesus, accept Jesus, follow Jesus for a lifetime, and spend eternity in heaven.

Keep the focus on Jesus.

HOW MIGHT CHRISTIANS RESPOND TO HOMOSEXUALITY GRACEFULLY?

I learned how much I need to learn when my local Chamber of Commerce hired a gay employee.

⁷ There may be times when Christians choose homosexual activity after they have met Christ and while they are members of a church. That is a unique circumstance that places special demands on us all to navigate compassionately and clearly.

I was involved in the Chamber.

When the Chamber hired that gay employee, a friend pulled me aside and said, "I hope that's not going to be a problem for you." I was dumbfounded. Something about me and my faith said that I could not even encounter a gay person in public and work together on projects for common good. Frankly, I was offended.

Then I had my first meeting with the gay Chamber employee. I found myself asking, "How am I supposed to treat him?" Why was I asking that? How do I treat him? I treat him the same way I would any other staff member. It's not that complicated. But it isn't easy either.

How might we Christians respond to homosexuality gracefully?

1. Avoid homophobia.

Homophobia can be reduced to disagreeing with a social agenda. That's not what I mean.

Homophobia is a prejudice against gay people that manifests itself in ugly thoughts, unkind words, and discriminating actions.

We Christians should never engage in homophobia.

We should honor Christ in our language and draw people to Christ by our actions.

2. Keep sin in perspective.

In Romans 1, Paul was telling us that we all sin. I sin. You sin.

Homosexual activity is just one kind of sin Paul mentions. He also mentions gossip, envy, foolishness, heartlessness, and ruthlessness. His point was that we are all guilty.

Paul does not excuse or minimize any sin, not even gossip. Nor should we.

Neither should we over-emphasize any one sin or category of sin.

Instead, Paul calls us to know our sin and recognize in it our need for Jesus.

3. Embrace holy sexuality as well.

God calls us all to be holy as He is holy. If the New Testament is the benchmark for holy sexuality (and it is), then we all fall short. We are all broken and sinful. That's the bad news. It's important that we remember the bad news.

However, the Good News is that Jesus died to pay the price for our sin.

May God the Father call us all to holiness and to holy sexuality.

May God the Son forgive us when we fail.

And may God the Holy Spirit sanctify us all.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some pros and cons to a dialogue about homosexuality among believers?
2. Do you agree that the Bible is very clear about homosexual activity? What Scriptures are most compelling to you?
3. Of the critical arguments against a biblical view of homosexual behavior, which one(s) challenges you the most?
4. Why might it be important to consider a distinction between same-sex attraction and behavior?
5. How is the concept of finding our identity in Christ important to our discussion today?
6. What comes to your mind when you hear the word homophobia? How can we intentionally avoid unnecessarily offending people in the LGBTQ community?
7. In what practical ways can the church minister faithfully to those who experience same-sex attraction?