

But what about the Bible and Same-Sex relationships? (with thanks to LGCM)

The way of Jesus is more important than ancient rules

Old Testament rules were given to preserve the distinctive characteristics of Israel's religion and culture. But, as Galatians 3:22-25 says, Christians are no longer bound by these Jewish laws. We do not, for instance, keep other injunctions found in Leviticus. By faith we live in Jesus Christ, not in Old Testament laws as such. Certainly, ethical concerns apply to all in every age. Yet these are ultimately embodied in Jesus Christ, who said nothing about homosexuality, but a great deal about faith, justice, mercy and the importance of love and commitment in relationships. Jesus condemned the Pharisees for keeping only to the letter of the law and ignoring the fact that the law served a higher purpose. Jesus is recorded as having spoken about many practices, such as divorce, that affect relationships, but absolutely nothing about homosexuality. Only in Paul's letters is same-sex sexual activity mentioned.

Genesis 19 - The story of Sodom and Gomorrah

Understanding the cultural context is helpful when we read the story of the city of Sodom. This story is not a condemnation of homosexuality, but is a story about rape and inhospitality. In other biblical texts (Ezekiel 16:49, Luke 10:11-12; 17:28-29) Sodom's 'sin' is not identified as homosexuality: rather, their sins were pride, failure to help the poor, and lack of hospitality to foreigners.

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

These verses are part of the Holiness Code, a ritual for Israel's priests, which attempted to preserve the internal harmony of Jewish male society by not allowing them to participate in anal intercourse as a form of expressing or gaining social and political dominance. These verses in no way prohibit, nor do they even speak, to loving, caring sexual relationships between people of the same gender. Much is made of the term 'abomination' but again we need to be clear about its meaning at the time it was written. For the writers of Leviticus, an 'abomination' is that which God found detestable because it was disloyal or unjust.

Romans 1: 26-27

In the ancient world, socially acceptable sexual behaviour could happen only one way: among unequals, with the dominant partner always an adult male. Significant to Paul's discussion is also the fact that these "unclean" Gentiles exchanged that which was "natural" for them, for something "unnatural". "Unnatural" does not refer to violation of so-called laws of nature, but rather implies action contradicting one's *own* nature. In view of this, we might reflect that it is "unnatural," for a person today with a lesbian or gay sexual orientation to attempt living a heterosexual lifestyle. Romans 1:26 is indeed the only biblical statement with a possible reference to lesbian behaviour. Possibly this refers to women adopting a dominant role in heterosexual relationships, reflecting ancient repressive expectations on women.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:9-11

Prostitution and pederasty (sexual relationships of men with boys) were the most commonly known same-sex acts in the Greco-Roman world. The larger context of 1 Corinthians 6 shows Paul extremely concerned with prostitution, so it is very possible he was referring to male prostitutes. What is clear is that the type of relationships Paul is condemning are based on abuse and inequality. These are not the same as the mutually loving and caring relationships between people of the same sex understood by the term 'homosexual' today.

The rarity with which Paul discusses any form of same-sex behaviour and the ambiguity in the references make it extremely unsound to conclude any sure position in the New Testament on homosexuality, especially in the context of loving, responsible relationships. Since any arguments must be made from silence, it is much more reliable to turn to the great principles of the Gospel taught by Jesus Christ and the Apostles - *'Love God with all your heart, and love your neighbour as yourself. Do not judge others, lest you be judged. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is love . . . against such there is no law.'* For when dealing with matters of biblical interpretation it is important always to keep in mind the role of the authority of the Bible in matters of faith and practice. While the Bible is an important witness to the relationship between God and humanity, it is not the ultimate revelation of God—Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, is.