

Summer Core Class: on Homosexuality

Homosexuality in the Bible

Delivered by Pastor Jason Tarn on September 20th, 2009

Introduction

In this first of three lectures, we are going to consider what the Bible has to say on the matter of homosexuality. For Christians, this is the appropriate starting point for a thoughtful discussion on any topic. But I realize that from a secular point of view it may seem rather odd to turn, first and foremost, to the Bible to hear what it has to say on such a contemporary issue. For those who are not Christians, it would be like sitting down for a discussion on the current global financial crisis and first asking what Plato has to say about it. *Why (it is argued) are we turning to an antiquated, out-of-touch, ancient piece of literature, expecting it to have a relevant and authoritative voice in this discussion?*

The Christian reply would go like this: **We turn, first and foremost, to the Bible because we believe that God has chosen to most clearly reveal himself and his ways through the Bible.** Therefore, we believe the scriptures possess an inherent authority over us – for they carry God’s own voice. And because we believe God spoke not just once to an ancient people but is speaking through the same scriptures to people today, we believe that what the Bible has to say on all matters of life, including our private sex lives, is completely relevant and authoritative.

So in a sense, this is not just a Core Class on homosexuality – this is a class on the Bible and its contemporary relevance and authority in our lives. This is really just a continuation of our Spring Core Class on the Reliability of Scripture. Last May, we addressed the common objection that the Bible – though it be inspiring and full of good teaching – does in fact contain errors, especially when it says such “regressive” or “oppressive” things on issues like homosexuality. I’ll have to point you to our website to hear how we countered these accusations and provided a positive case for the Bible’s complete truthfulness. But let me reiterate a point of application I made: If the Bible is wholly true and without error, then everything it teaches must be carefully affirmed and obeyed – even if it is considered politically incorrect. There are a number of issues that the Bible addresses where it comes out in direct opposition to the values of contemporary culture. *So where will you stand in relation to the Word of God?*

If you’re a Christian, let this be a reminder up front: that we are in no position to sit in judgment over Scripture. No matter what you may *want* to think on this matter – no matter what you feel pressured to think – *what the Bible thinks on this matter is what really matters.* The appropriate place to be, in relation to the Bible, is under its God-given authority. **If you are not a Christian**, you probably hold to a different view of the Bible. I respect our difference in opinions, but let me encourage you this evening to try this: If you want to understand where Christians are coming from on this issue, try your best to evaluate it from within the Christian worldview. If you assume God exists and that he has spoken (and still speaks) through Holy Scripture, then it makes sense to turn to the Bible as an authority over our lives, including our sex lives. Now having said all that by way of introduction, we’re now ready to consider what the Bible has to say.

Homosexuality in Ancient Near Eastern Societies

But before we look at the Bible, we should first consider the prevailing view of homosexuality in Ancient Near East (ANE) societies (which included ancient Israel) in order to help us better understand the position the Bible takes. Now the known data that we have come from documents like ancient law codes.

One in particular, called the **Middle Assyrian Laws** (late 2nd millennium BC), provides a good insight into how ANE-ern people viewed homosexuality. In one scenario, a man starts a rumor about another man, accusing him of letting other males mount him (sexually). If he cannot defend his claim, the accuser is punished with 50 blows of a rod, a fine and castration. *What's the implication?* Apparently it is so shameful for a man to want to be mounted (sexually treated like a woman), that if you make a false accusation against someone, then according to the ancient principle of *lex talionis* (the law of retribution, “*an eye for an eye*”) you should be castrated - turning you, in a sense, into a woman. For you attempted to emasculate this man by slander. In another scenario, a man forces himself on another man in a case of homosexual rape. Because the guilty man stripped away the manhood of his victim – his equivalent punishment is to have his manhood stripped away by castration.

Both laws make it apparent that, in the ANE, it was considered shameful and degrading for a man to be mounted by another male. It makes no difference if the sex was consensual or coerced – to be the passive partner was inherently emasculating because it amounts to being treated as a woman. But in these cultures, homosexuality was never outright condemned. In fact, other texts tell us of **two forms of homosexual behaviour that were generally accepted or at least condoned.** **1)** When a socially superior male mounts a socially inferior male (ie. a slave, a foreigner, a prisoner of war). **2)** When engaged in the practice of male cult prostitution. This was the most acceptable form of homosexual behaviour back then.

So we can say the prevailing view of homosexuality in the ANE was rather inconsistent. We can confidently say that no self-respecting man would want to be sexually mounted by another male. The shame and revulsion he would feel would be the same as if you were to castrate him. **BUT** the active partner in the sex act (so long as it was not forcibly coerced), would have little to no shame associated to him, in fact he might even boast about it.

Homosexuality in the Old Testament

Now in contrast to the prevailing culture, ancient Israel was bound by Levitical law codes that not only condemned homosexual rape but also the behaviour of both partners in a consensual same-sex act (both active and passive). No other nation went so far or made so definitive of a stance. To understand why, we have to consult the Hebrew Scriptures (the OT) because they were largely influential in shaping an ancient Jew's worldview, especially in regards to human sexuality. None more so than the first book, in the first two chapters.

Genesis 1-2: God Establishes Heterosexual Marriage

In the book of Genesis, we read of how God created the world and everything in it. The verses relevant to our discussion are first found in 1:27-28 when God creates humans on the sixth day.

Genesis 1:27-28 ²⁷So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth. (ESV)

Note two things: **1)** In v27 that the image of God is expressed through two distinct beings, male and female. **2)** In v28 humans are given a direct command to procreate, which can only be fulfilled by two beings with complementary sex organs. So we learn that the complementary

differences between male and female are not arbitrary but meaningful. They're meant to image God's fullness and fulfill his first command.

In chapter 2 we read that God creates Adam and charges him to cultivate the Garden of Eden, but God recognizes that Adam needs a partner, a helper fit for him. So he parades all the animals before Adam but there was not found a helper fit for him.

Genesis 2:21-24 ²¹So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²²And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." ²⁴**Therefore** a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (ESV, emphasis mine)

Granted, these verses say nothing directly about homosexuality, but they are relevant to our discussion because they provide the foundation for the Judeo-Christian view of marriage as the only bounds for legitimate sexual expression. Note three things: **First, note what vv23-24 plainly tell us.** V23 explains the particular way Eve was created. She was made from a rib from Adam's side. And in v24 God institutes marriage, explicitly calling it the union of a man and his wife into one flesh. **Second, note the connection between v23 and v24 – the word "Therefore".** Read together, it's saying that the reason why God established marriage as a union of a male and female is because Woman came from Man. They were originally one flesh. So when a man and woman are united together in marriage, she not only complements him – she restores him to his original wholeness. They become one flesh again. This is something that sexual union with another male can never provide. **Third, note in v24, that marriage involves leaving your family and cleaving to your spouse in a monogamous, lifelong commitment.** This is symbolized in the imagery of being one flesh and later reinforced in the NT.

So in light of these passages, we can rule out as illegitimate any form of sexual behaviour that falls outside the bounds of a monogamous, heterosexual marriage, including: **polygamy, adultery, fornication** (pre-marital sex), **incest**, and **homosexuality**. Now of course, there are plenty of instances of such violations in the OT, even among the people of God. But the biblical witness is clear that none of these sexual behaviours fall within God's ideal for sexual expression, namely a life-long monogamous marriage between a man and a woman.

Genesis 19: The Story of Sodom

The next OT passage to consider is Genesis 19 and the story of Sodom. This is a popular place to turn when asking what the Bible teaches about homosexuality, considering this is where we got the term "sodomy". Let me give you some background. In chapter 18, Abraham is visited by three men who turn out to be the Lord and two angels. The Lord informs Abraham of his plans to visit Sodom and Gomorrah to see its grievous sin. Now the visit takes place in 19:1.

Genesis 19:1-11 ¹The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed himself with his face to the earth ²and said, "My lords, please turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night and wash your feet. Then you may rise up early and go on your way." They said, "No; we will spend the night in the town square." ³But he pressed them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house. And he made them a feast and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. ⁴But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house.

⁵And they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them." ⁶Lot went out to the men at the entrance, shut the door after him, ⁷and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. ⁸Behold, I have two daughters who have not known any man. Let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please. Only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof." ⁹But they said, "Stand back!" And they said, "This fellow came to sojourn, and he has become the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them." Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and drew near to break the door down. ¹⁰But the men reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them and shut the door. ¹¹And they struck with blindness the men who were at the entrance of the house, both small and great, so that they wore themselves out groping for the door.

19:24-25 ²⁴Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the LORD out of heaven. ²⁵And he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. (ESV)

Now it is commonly believed that Sodom was destroyed because of the homosexuality of its inhabitants. But pro-gay theologians have challenged this view, arguing that God punished the town for a number of transgressions - but homosexual behaviour was not one of them. **One reinterpretation argues that the specific evil in view was the attempted gang rape.**

Proponents argue that the men of Sodom were not homosexuals, as we understand the term. In other words, their sexual preference was not for other men. They were just angry, violent, *heterosexual* men – who just so happened to aim their aggression at these two visitors. Had the angels come in the form of women, they still would have tried to rape them. Therefore, (it is argued) the Bible's critique of Sodom has nothing to do with homosexuality, and so this story has nothing to contribute to our modern debate concerning consensual homosexual relations.

How do we respond?

1) We agree that homosexuality was not the reason (or even the primary reason) why Sodom was destroyed but it was one of the reasons. When referenced elsewhere in Scripture, Sodom is critiqued for its inhospitality, its arrogance and its mistreatment of the marginalized (cf. Lk. 10:10-13; Isa. 1:1-10; Ezk. 16:49-50). But in Jude 7 the city is accused of indulging in sexual immorality and pursuing unnatural desire (lit. other flesh). So homosexuality still played a factor in its destruction.

2) Homosexuality is not the main point of the story, but it certainly amplifies the main point. The main point of Genesis 19 was to characterize the depth of human depravity in Sodom and Gomorrah and to justify God's destruction of the towns. The inclusion of a homosexual element was meant to further demonstrate the extent of their depravity. So while we should not overstate homosexuality's role in the story, we should not understate it either.

3) We agree that Genesis 19 does not speak directly to consensual homosexual relations, but it does say something indirectly. It reinforces what we learned from ANE societies – that it was considered shameful and degrading for a man to be mounted by another male. Mutual consent would not have made a difference. There is just no way to put a positive spin on it. But granted, we are not going to find a moral pronouncement here because that was not the author's intent.

Leviticus 18 & 20: The Holiness Codes

To find something more direct, we have to turn to Leviticus. Here we have two statements in chapters 18 & 20 that describe homosexual behaviour as immoral. They are found in a section of the Law called **The Holiness Codes**. These codes instructed the nation of Israel to stand apart from their pagan neighbors – to be distinct, separate, holy. Here in chapter 18, the focus is on unlawful sexual behaviours that, according to v3, were commonly practiced by Egyptians and Canaanites.

In vv6-18, we read a long list that catalogs all your family members you are not allowed to have sex with. In v20 there is a prohibition against adultery and against bestiality in v23. So whoever called the Bible antiquated and irrelevant to contemporary discussions on sexuality has clearly never read Leviticus 18. Just like today, people back then experimented with sex in every possible way. Now look at v22.

Leviticus 18:22 ²²You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. (ESV)

If you look at chapter 20:13, we find a similar prohibition that includes a penalty.

Leviticus 20:13 ¹³If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them. (ESV)

Note four things: **1) Note the degree of revulsion associated with homosexual behaviour.** In 18:22, it is specifically called “an abomination”. If you read on in v26, v29 and v30 – all the unlawful sexual acts are characterized as abominations, but only homosexual behaviour is singled out with the label “an abomination” – not even bestiality is addressed this way!

2) Note the degree of penalty associated with homosexual behaviour. It was *not* castration like in most ANE societies. It was death. Think about it: castration is an appropriate penalty if the extent of your offense was the shaming of a fellow man. But the death penalty suggests your offense reaches up to God, which means you’re dealing with a transgression.

3) Note the application of the law to both partners. This is clear in 20:13, “*both of them have committed an abomination*”. Unlike in other ANE societies, the active partner is shamed and condemned along with the passive.

4) Note that these sexual prohibitions were not arbitrary. They are very much rooted in a worldview where a Creator God exists and created humans to be male and female and to enjoy sexual relations within the good bounds of marriage. Any violation of this boundary is an abomination, homosexuality in particular.

So in sharp contrast to their pagan neighbors, Israel issued a categorical ban on all forms of homosexual behaviour. Remember, most ANE societies at least accepted homosexual cult prostitution, but the Bible rejects even this. There were no qualifiers in the Bible whatsoever.

But pro-gay theologians have challenged this interpretation. **A common objection is to claim that the Holiness Codes were written primarily out of a concern for ceremonial cleanliness.** They will point to a tendency in the Law to keep like things together and unlike things separate, so we find purity laws that prohibit the cross-planting of seeds, the cross-breeding of animals,

and the wearing of clothes with mixed fabrics. The laws against homosexuality (it is argued) fall under this category of ceremonial law, not moral law. But under the new covenant of Christ, we are no longer required to keep the ceremonial aspects of the law. Just as we are free to wear mixed fabrics and eat pork, we are free to engage in homosexual behaviour. **Proponents will also accuse traditionalists of hypocrisy.** They will point to 18:19, which prohibits sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman – a law that most conservative scholars would agree no longer applies today. *So aren't we just picking and choosing which laws are still applicable, if in the same chapter we enforce one law but ignore another?*

How should we respond? We agree that just because a law is in the Holiness Codes doesn't mean it still applies today (see dietary laws) BUT neither does it mean we can just sweep all the laws aside because we're living under the New Covenant. ***Would any Christian argue that the prohibitions against adultery, incest or bestiality are no longer applicable?*** They are in the same chapter as well! So the criterion for determining whether an OT law is still applicable is not based on a comparison with surrounding verses. It is not that simple.

To determine whether a law is no longer applicable today (b/c grounded in ceremonial concerns) or still applicable today (b/c grounded in moral concerns), we have to put it through the following tests: ***1) Is the practice or behaviour being prohibited in conflict with God's holy character or his created order? 2) Is the prohibition reinforced anywhere else in Scripture, particularly in the NT?*** In the case of wearing mixed fabrics or menstrual intercourse, you would be hard pressed to identify a conflict or find reinforcement in the NT. So they are likely ceremonial in nature and no longer relevant. But in the case of homosexual behaviour, the conflict is clear, as we saw in Genesis, and as we will now see, the prohibition is consistently reinforced in the NT.

Homosexuality in the New Testament

Romans 1: The Sinful Suppression of Truth

In fact, the clearest statements in the Bible against homosexual behaviour are actually in the NT. We find them in Paul's letters, starting with Romans 1. Now to understand Paul's statements regarding homosexuality, we have to understand the bigger argument he is making in chapters 1-3. Paul is trying to show his readers that divine judgment is coming for both Jews and gentiles because of their shared sinfulness.

Now in 1:18, he starts first with the gentiles – the uncircumcised pagans who have never seen or heard the OT Law. **In vv18-32 Paul is explaining why God is justified to bring judgment on them, even though they are without the Law.**

¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

So God is just when he judges gentiles because they indeed know what they are doing is wrong, yet they consciously suppress the truth. *Now where did they get this truth if not from the Law?*

¹⁹For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

So truth about God has been plainly revealed through creation. That is why they are without excuse when they sin. **Paul goes on to give two clear examples of how they suppressed the knowledge of the truth. He points to the practice of idolatry and same-sex intercourse.** Now notice how three times Paul will say the gentiles “exchanged” the truth for a lie (for the unnatural) and each time God responded by “giving them up” to indulge in their sinful desires.

²¹For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³and **exchanged** the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

So here is the first exchange: the gentiles suppress truth by exchanging the glory of God for idols made in the image of created things. They can look to the heavens and see that it declares the glory of a Creator God YET they suppress what is obvious to them and worship created things. *So what will God do in response?*

²⁴Therefore God **gave them up** in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,

So God’s “*giving them up*” results in sexual immorality. Think about it: if your god is in the image of an animal, then where do you get your sexual ethics? The animal kingdom! Now in v25 a second exchange is mentioned, but it is basically a restatement of the first.

²⁵because they **exchanged** the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. ²⁶For this reason God **gave them up** to dishonorable passions.

So because they gave up the truth about God for a lie, God gave them up to their sin. Now we come to a third and final exchange.

For their women **exchanged** natural relations for those that are *contrary to nature*; ²⁷and 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.

It is interesting to note that this is the only direct prohibition of lesbianism in Scripture, but what is more interesting is that **male and female homosexual behaviour are affirmed to be “*contrary to nature*”**. Now pro-gay theologians have tried to redefine this term in a number of ways. Some argue that Paul was talking about heterosexuals who act contrary to nature (their sexual orientation) by engaging in same-sex acts. But that is reading too much into the text. In fact, the text suggests otherwise. Paul may not have use the term “orientation”, but he understood that such individuals actually desired one other – note their “*dishonorable passions*” (v26) and being “*consumed with passion for one another*” (v27).

So when Paul calls homosexual behaviour “*contrary to nature*”, he is referring to the fact that the male anatomy was designed to complement the female anatomy. **In other words, it is obvious which parts fit together.** You do not need special revelation to figure that out. Natural revelation is enough. But still they denied natural revelation and exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. *So what did God do?*

²⁸And 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. ²⁹They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³²Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them. (ESV, emphasis mine)

So idolatry and homosexuality are not the only sins that resulted from a conscious suppression of the knowledge of God, but they are two of the clearest examples. Remember Paul is justifying God's judgment of the gentiles. **He highlights idolatry and homosexuality because both are conscious rejections of visible, observable truth in nature.** Even though they never read Exodus 20:3 "*You shall have no other gods before me*", the gentiles knew that to worship a statue made in the image of a creature is a lie because the truth of a Creator is visibly obvious in nature. In the same way, even though they never read Leviticus, the gentiles knew homosexual intercourse is a lie because the truth of male-female sexuality is visibly obvious in human anatomy. Therefore, those who practice such things are without excuse. **They are guilty of violating the Law even though they have never read it, because their actions reveal a conscious suppression of what they know to be true – of what they know to be right.**

Now by the end of chapter one, all law-abiding Jews in Paul's day would be applauding in agreement, but in chapter 2, Paul turns the table on them, arguing that God would be equally just to judge the Jew who sins in like manner, and in chapter 3 he argues that sin is universal among both Jews and Gentiles so that all mouths are stopped and everyone stands accountable before God (3:19). Therefore, (and this is the big point) everyone is equally dependent on the atoning death of Christ for the forgiveness of sin. That is what Romans 1-3 is all about.

So like in the Sodom story, homosexuality is not the main point, but it definitely amplifies the main point. It provides a clear example of how bad humanity has gotten since Genesis 3, and how God is just to judge all of humanity, even cultures that do not have access to his Law. To summarize, according to Romans 1, homosexual behaviour is **1) A conscious rejection of God's verdict that what was made and arranged in Genesis 1 was "very good" (Gen 1:31). 2) A sign of God's judgment upon a culture for suppressing the truth of him and his ways. 3) A sin worthy of death for those who practice it with an unrepentant heart, ALONG with those who envy, gossip, disobey their parents, etc. with unrepentant hearts.**

1 Corinthians 6 & 1 Timothy 1: Two Key Terms

Now there are two more references to homosexuality in the NT. There are found in 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1 in what are commonly called "vice lists". We will focus on 1 Corinthians 6. Now Paul wrote to the Corinthian church to address a number of problems. In chapter 5 he admonishes them for tolerating among their membership, a man who professes to be Christian but lives contrary to that profession. He is in an ongoing sexual relationship with his stepmother. Paul says such a man needs to be confronted.

His point is this: those who profess to be saints - but practice sin like the devil - should not be tolerated but rather warned that they will not inherit the kingdom of God. So when we read his vice list in chapter 6, keep in mind that Paul is listing sinful behaviours (like incest) that, if practiced without repentance, would disqualify you from the kingdom of God.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 ⁹Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality [nor *malakoi*, nor *arsenokoitai*], ¹⁰nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹And such were some of you. 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.

Now the term “*men who practice homosexuality*” is a gloss used to translate two particular Greek words that Paul used. The first is the word “*malakoi*”. Literally, it means “soft/effeminate ones”, but it is not just referring to a man who exhibits feminine mannerisms. When paired with the following term, it clearly refers to the passive partner in homosexual intercourse because that male is taking on the feminine role. The second term is “*arsenokoitai*”. It is a combination of the Greek word for “male” (*arsen*) and the word for “bed” (*koite*), so quite literally it means “a male bedder”. It is referring to the active partner. In 1 Timothy 1:10, this same word is found and translated as “*men who practice homosexuality*”.

1 Timothy 1:8-11 ⁸Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, ⁹understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, ¹⁰the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality [*arsenokoitais*], enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, ¹¹in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

Now pro-gay theologians will explain these verses away by arguing that Paul had a very specific form of homosexual behaviour in mind in these vice lists. He was not condemning all forms of homosexuality, only exploitative and abusive forms. They will point to the prevalence of a practice in ancient Greece called pederasty – where an older male will pursue a sexual relationship with a young boy/teen. They claim that this was the kind of homosexual practice Paul had in mind in his vice lists – not the loving, monogamous homosexual relationships we witness today.

This arguments falls flat at a number of points. **1)** The term “*arsenokoitai*” was most likely derived from the LXX version of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 because there we find those exact same root words for “*male*” and “*bed*”. So Paul had in mind the general sense of “homosexual behaviour” as used in Leviticus, not some narrow, deviant form. **2)** If Paul specifically had pederasty in mind in these vice lists, then he would have used the well-known, well-used Greek word, *paiderastes*. **3)** Paul condemns both partners in a homosexual sex act, implying there was consent from both parties. But a mutual desire between partners was not characteristic of pederasty.

So when you read 1 Corinthians 6 in its context, it is clear Paul was referring to those who practice homosexuality in an ongoing, unremorseful, unrepentant manner. Such individuals will not inherit the kingdom of God – they will not enter heaven. **BUT LET IT BE CLEAR:** this also applies to adulterers, greedy people, drunkards and the like (vv9-10). As 1 John 3:9 says, no one who makes a practice of sinning is born of God. You cannot continue in your sin (with no repentance) if you wish to inherit the kingdom. All who make a practice of sinning are worthy of death (Rom. 1:32) and disqualified from the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 1:9).

But the good news of the Gospel (which always accompanied a vice list) is that God sent his Son Jesus to take the place of sinners on the cross to die the death they deserved. So now those who trust in Jesus and what he has accomplished on their behalf will be justified by God and qualified to enter his kingdom. Look at 1 Corinthians 6:11 with me.

¹¹And such were some of you. 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.

“*Such were some of you.*” BUT the Gospel entered and changed their lives. They *were* sinners who practiced such things as idolatry, adultery, homosexuality, etc. But after trusting in the Gospel, they were *transformed*. They were no longer enslaved to their former practices. They were no longer identified by these things, but now by their status in Christ – as sinners *justified, washed and sanctified*. So we can sum up what the Bible has to say about homosexuality like this: **In the Gospel, there is hope for all sinners – even those who sin by making a practice of homosexual behaviour.**

Conclusion

This concludes what the Bible has to say on the subject, but this is *not* the end of the discussion. What the Bible has to say is important because truth is important, but we recognize that, at the end of the day, this is not just about interpretations and abstract principles. **This is about real people and the real issues they face.**

So let me get personal. If you struggle with homosexual desires, the Bible clearly teaches that it would be a sin against your Creator to act on those desires, just as it would be a sin for me (a heterosexual married man) to act on a desire to commit adultery. **“What feels right” simply cannot be the measure of our sexual ethics, especially if it goes against what God calls “very good”.** But know that you can find in the Gospel: forgiveness for sin’s penalty, freedom from sin’s power, strength to live a life of holiness amid sin’s presence, and most of all a new identity – no longer rooted in your sexual preference – but in your status as a child of God. And for all of us, may we remember that whether a person’s sin is of a more obvious sexual nature OR if it’s an unobservable, inner craving or attitude (like covetousness, pride, bitterness, etc.), everyone should be treated with the same respect and offered the same hope in Jesus.