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IS HOMOSEXUALITY A SIN?

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Twenty-five years ago, the word homosexuality was spoken only in a whisper, and rarely, even at that. Then about two decades ago, homosexuality made its way to the public's attention in a very major way. This time with a new name, "the Gay Community", and with a new movement, called "Gay Rights".

Homosexuality literally came 'out of the closet' and was no longer something that was taboo in the media or in public conversation. Instead, it was being billed as something called "an alternative lifestyle."

It is interesting that for centuries now, Christian people have believed that homosexuality was an unquestioned and direct violation of God's will. But now that premise is being confronted by a far more liberal public opinion, which is right? Is homosexuality an alternative lifestyle, or is it sin? It is a blatant digression from God's law. Well, those of us who accept the Bible as God's inspired and inerrant Word, God's very breath to man, we have no other choice than to turn to this Word to find that answer. Before we look to the Bible and its specific verses in their context, I think it might be helpful to consider just a few facts about the background of this issue, worldwide.

For example, homosexuality is not really a contemporary issue at all. Anthropological investigations have indicated that homosexual behavior occurred, even among the most ancient of tribes. There is very little about it in recorded history. But it is interesting in western civilization, especially British history, you find some fascinating facts, most of them in the forms of prohibitions against homosexual behavior. For example, in the year 1290, British law commanded that a Sodomite be buried alive. In 1533, Henry VIII changed the mode of execution, but it was still a capital offense. Finally in British law, in 1861, it substituted life imprisonment for capital punishment, but it was still considered a very hideous type of offense. Would you believe that life imprisonment was still the penalty for a convicted homosexual in Britain until the year 1967? There have been similar laws in the United States, though with less severe type of penalties.

Times have changed. Not only are homosexual practices largely legal, but they are also becoming increasingly commonplace and accepted in our culture. The question arises, "just how commonplace?" Frankly, there is very little reliable data. The first major study this century about homosexual activity in United States didn't occur until 1950. It was conducted by Dr. E. G. Kinsey. He traveled all over the country, interviewing literally thousands of men--his study was on males only--and he concluded that about ten percent of the male population engaged in at least three years of homosexual experience between the ages of 16 and 65. In 1972, Dr. Paul Gebhardt was commissioned by the National Institute of Mental Health to conduct another study. His study showed even significantly higher results--up to one-fourth of male America were involved in such behavior.

There have been more conservative scholars who have rebuked and rebuffed those claims. Reliable data is still very difficult to come by. But most experts, both conservative and liberal (and anywhere in between), would agree that at least seven percent of the American male population and about five percent of the American female population are actively engaged in practicing homosexuality. While we don't know the numbers, the fact of the matter is the Gay Rights movement has picked up a world of steam. They now have their own magazines and their own communities. They run their own places of entertainment and nightspots, and they have one of the strongest legislative lobbies in the United States of America.

There is one other thing I want us to look at, though, before we turn to the Bible and see what scripture says about homosexuality. I think it is necessary for us to define the terms, though I am sure that all of us have a connotation in our minds of what homosexuality is.

A homosexual act is an act of sexual intercourse between two members of the same sex. It is an act. I want to differentiate that by definition from a homosexual orientation. Listen closely. A homosexual orientation is a tendency or a desire to prefer a homosexual relationship over a heterosexual one.

There is a difference between those two and you will see why we distinguish these in a moment. A homosexual act is an action; a homosexual orientation is the desire or the longing. Those two are as different as a heterosexual act is different from a heterosexual orientation. Now there are two technical terms that need to be defined, pervers and inverts.

There are those who would be labeled as pervers. Pervers, or perversion, are those individuals who were heterosexual in nature, but have changed to a homosexual orientation. You say, "why would anybody change their sexual longing, their sexual orientation?" Again, research is sketchy, and the reasons vary. It is interesting to note that there has been a stronger correlation between perversion and certain environments, for example, mono-sex institutions. Places where there is a single gender, for example, prison or boarding school, even the Armed Forces, have generally sighted higher incidence of perversion than the population at large.

Then there is a second category of those individuals who would be homosexuals. These individuals are called inverts. Inverts are individuals who can never remember being attracted to members of the opposite sex. From their very beginning of their cognizant adult lives, they have felt attracted to the same sex. Research is sketchy as to what causes inversion. But a correlation exists. One of the factors has been the absence of father figures within the home. In fact, in ghetto situations in America where there is a higher incidence of the absence of a father, there is a corresponding incidence of inversion - about twice that of the national population.

We are going to come back to those terms later, but remember, the difference between a homosexual act, a homosexual orientation, perversion and inversion.

Now let's get to the Bible. What does the Bible say about homosexual behavior? The Word of God doesn't have a wealth of material on the subject, but when the Bible has something to say about homosexuality, it speaks strongly against such behavior. I suppose the first place you run across it in the Bible is Genesis 19. Lot, who was kin to Abraham, received two strangers in the town of Sodom and his house was literally bombarded by the lewd, base fellows of the town, men who were obviously homosexual, both in their orientation and in their action. So, they stormed Lot's home. Eventually by the way, Sodom and its sister city, Gomorrah, were destroyed. In Judges 19, you read about a similar situation, this time in the city of Gibeah.

D. S. Bailey in his book, Homosexuality and the Christian Tradition, has tried to argue that the transgressors (particularly in the episode involving Lot and the strangers in his home) were really violating rules of hospitality and that's why they were being reprimanded, not for their homosexual activity. Mr. Bailey's theory doesn't stand the test of scrutiny, because we are given an interpretation of what occurred in Sodom and Gomorrah. It is found in the little book of Jude, verse 7. "*In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.*" That makes it pretty clear, doesn't it? The letter that we call Jude is written to let us know—at least that part of it—that those individuals were condemned because of their homosexual behavior. Frankly, that corresponds to some Old Testament prohibitions, like Leviticus 18:22 and Leviticus 20:13 where male homosexuality is described as an abomination for which the death penalty is prescribed.

The strength of these statements is found both in their context and also with the severity of the penalty that is attached. Then when you go from the Old Testament into the New Testament, you find that Paul continues to deplore homosexual activity. "*Even the women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way, the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another.*" (Romans 1:24-25) All of that is within the

context of those individuals who have turned away from God--they are Godless--and God will not tolerate that type of behavior. Strong words, but really the same thing Paul also said in 1 Corinthians 6:9 when he listed those who were unrighteous, and he included homosexuals. In 1 Timothy 1:10, Sodomites were listed among the lawless and disobedient.

Now I want to point something out here that, if you haven't heard before, you will probably hear in the future. There has been a movement afoot, among liberal theologians, to stress that Paul in those three admonitions against homosexuality, was condemning perversion, not inversion. You remember the difference? That Paul was saying to those individuals who were "born with a natural attraction for the opposite sex", but who have changed, that for those individuals to do so is wrong. The implication there is, "if anyone is an invert who chooses to practice homosexual behavior, that person would not be prohibited."

That is not right. There are at least two reasons from scripture that this is true:

- 1) The primary reason is the word that Paul used to condemn homosexual behavior in Romans 1, in 1 Corinthians 6, and in 1 Timothy 1. He uses a Greek word that is really an umbrella term that refers to all homosexual behavior. By contrast, he could have used one of three different Greek terms that would have referred specifically to sexual perversion, but he chose not to do that. So, the implication is clear, whether inversion or perversion, homosexual activity is condemned.
- 2) Notice that the context in Romans 1 is that of creation. The prohibition against homosexuality isn't just aimed at individuals, whether inverts or perverts. It states that that's in violation of God's order of things. *"Since what may be known about God is plain to them because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world, God's invisible quality, his eternal power and his divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made so that men are without excuse."*
(Romans 1:19-20)

You see, the context of Romans 1 is that God's made it clear what his design was. It is for a man to choose a woman, and for the two to be together within the context of marriage, in a life-long relationship. That is the natural way God made things, the way He has chosen to run this world. It is very clear from the language.

Conclusion:

A. In General

- 1) Homosexuality is likely more common in our culture than any of us would like to admit.
- 2) Homosexuality is an issue that is making its way to the forefront today.
- 3) The consistency and the fervor with which the Bible speaks against homosexual acts mean that a Christian cannot accept such a practice, as a God-ordained or a God-accepted lifestyle. That would be true regardless of an individual's sexual orientation or motivation.

B. To Christians

- 1) The Bible teaches that we abhor sin, but we love the sinner. When we call a man or a woman a homosexual, are we referring to what they are, or to what they do? Now think about that for a moment. When would you call a person a murderer? When they have committed murder, right? When would you call a person a thief? When he or she has stolen something. On a more positive note, when would you call a person a plumber? Only if they have demonstrated skill in that task. For many of us, who are Christians, the nature of the sin homosexuality is of such distaste for us, then perhaps we have had a harder time of segregating the sin from the sinner.

There are those in our world who may have a homosexual orientation, but who are fighting the sin. God can rescue them from that, just like he can rescue you and me from our tendencies to whatever our "Achille's heel" of sin is--and ours may be totally different. But I implore Christians, as we face the homosexuality issue, don't run from the problem, face it. Love

the sinner while abhorring the sin. That's what Jesus did, that's what he would expect us to do regarding the sin of homosexuality as well as the sins of prostitution, chemical dependency, anger and all other sins.

Years ago, the Interpreter's Bible (a commentary) wrote this about Romans 1:27 "The subject is one, in which, in honesty must be faced, but one on which no man of fine feeling should linger."

I suppose that's described our outlook on homosexuality and homosexual behavior for decades. I'm afraid we live in a time where our minds must linger on it longer, because of the place it has taken in our society.

Amazing Grace Lesson #1013

Questions:

1. Since creation homosexuality has been accepted or tolerated by society?
 - True
 - False

2. A homosexual act is sexual intercourse between two members of the same sex?
 - True
 - False

3. Homosexual orientation is a tendency or desire toward homosexual relation over a heterosexual one?
 - True
 - False

4. Men of Sodom and Gomorrah gave themselves over to sexual perversion.
 - True
 - False

5. All sexual activity outside marriage both homosexuality and fornication, is sin?
 - True
 - False

6. The apostle Paul condemned homosexuality and is quoted as saying "Even the women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way, the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another."
 - True
 - False

Answers to Questions

1. False
2. True 3. True 4. True 5. True
6. True

