



Homosexuality (Part 2): What Does the Bible Say?

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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Introduction:

Perhaps the hottest topic for the religious today is homosexuality. On every front, the traditional understanding is under attack. In the midst of this, there is an interesting phenomenon. First, as we noted in our first lesson, the main battleground is not with what the Bible say, but is how we read the Bible. Consider this quote by Bishop John Shelby Spong, a retired Episcopal bishop. I apologize for the length, but it demonstrates the point:

The fact remains that these so-called laws of God, which God was supposed to have written on tablets of stone, or the excessive claims made for Holy Scripture in general, which involve the assertion that the Bible is somehow “the inerrant word of God,” are today indefensible, regardless of who utters those claims or any variation on them.

In the traditions of the past, not only were the laws thought to have been written by the very hand of God, but these laws were also assumed to be the basis upon which this same God would carry out the divine role of the ultimate judge. Those who kept these rules would be rewarded fittingly. Those who broke these rules would be punished severely. This system exercised a powerful control over human behavior.

An ethical system, however, grounded in these presuppositions has become in our day quite obviously doomed. One cannot speak cogently to the ethical concerns of this generation by quoting two-thousand- to four-thousand-year-old authorities who claim to represent God’s final word on these subjects. No longer is it deemed adequate to assert “but the Ten Commandments state” or “but the Bible teaches.” Those claims settle no debate in our time. All they do today is to proclaim that the one who uses this tactic has nothing worthwhile to say to the current ethical dilemmas. There is no creditable external deity existing today on whose perceived will, spelled out in an ancient text, we can base our ethical decision making. No heavenly parent figure sets down and enforces the rules by which life is governed. No divine and eternal law has ever been written, either in the sky or on tablets of stone. The God who once was perceived as undergirding these primitive assumptions has been taken from us and destroyed by both the march of time and the explosion of knowledge.

The death of the God of theism, therefore, has removed from our world the traditional basis of ethics. ... We no longer know how to tell right from wrong, and above all else, our confusion reflects the death of the theistic God in whom all these things were once grounded.

To build a new basis for ethics, we must learn to look in a different place. We look, I believe, not outside of life for some external and objective authenticating authority, but rather at the very center and core of our humanity. We get to that core by asking a totally different series of questions. These are not God questions but human questions...These questions will force us to search, not the empty heavens, but the depths of our own being for answers. This search will lead us, hopefully, to some new possibilities.¹

The real battleground is the nature of the Bible based on a disagreement about the nature of God. Is there a personal, theistic God and is the Bible His guide for our morality? Spong says, “No.” That is not the interesting phenomenon. The interesting phenomenon is, despite this claim, religious supporters of homosexual behavior like Spong continue to turn to the Bible as at least partial grounds for their support. While wishing we would remove the Bible from the debate, they desperately want to claim the Bible approves homosexuality. Spong suggests Paul himself was a repressed homosexual based on his impassioned discussion of sin in **Romans 7**.² Further at [religioustolerance.org](http://www.religioustolerance.org) he finds it necessary to address Bible passages he claims deal with homosexuality in order to show that they actually don’t teach about what we moderns consider homosexuality at all.³ Some try to present Jonathan and David’s friendship as a homosexual love affair (cf. **I Samuel 1:25-26**). At nolongersilent.org the 2002 Phoenix Declaration says, “We stand with the countless Christian ministers, scholars, and laity who, from prayerful study of the scriptures and Christian tradition, find no rational biblical or theological basis to condemn or deny the rights of any person based on sexual orientation.”⁴ So, while on the one hand the main cry is to discount the Bible as the guide for morality today, on the other hand they desperately long for the Bible’s support. This leads us to ask the question: What does the Bible say about homosexuality and God’s plan for sexuality?

¹ Spong, John Shelby, *Why Christianity Must Change or Die*, Harper Collins, San Francisco, 1999, pp 158-160.

² Spong, John Shelby, *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism*, Harper Collins, San Francisco, 1991, p 117.

³ <http://www.religioustolerance.org/homclergy1.htm>

⁴ <http://nolongersilent.org/PhoenixDeclaration.html>

Discussion:

- I. The Bible says Jews are not allowed to participate in homosexual behavior.
 - A. **Leviticus 18:22** says, “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination” (ESV). In **Leviticus 20:13** says, “If 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).
 - B. These two verses seem pretty clear to us. There are three arguments that claim these verses do not actually prohibit homosexual intercourse. Two of them deal with translation.
 1. According to [religioustolerance.org](http://www.religioustolerance.org) the literal translation of this text is “And with a male you shall not lay lyings of a woman.”⁵ We are then told that the translation of “lay lyings of a woman” is difficult. Some folks add in words to clarify, saying, “And with a male you shall not lay [as the] lyings of a woman.” But, we are told, what if you insert a different pair of words: “And with a male you shall not lay [in the] lyings of a woman”? That gives a different meaning. Now we are talking about committing homosexual acts in a woman’s bed. That bed we are told is reserved for the woman and sex with her. Therefore all that is condemned is homosexual acts in a woman’s bed. My question, however, is what if we don’t add any words at all. What if we just go back to “you shall not lay lyings of a woman”? What does that sound like to you? That sounds to me like men shouldn’t have sexual relationships with men to me.
 2. The second explanation is also based on “lyings of a woman.” Again according to [religioustolerance.org](http://www.religioustolerance.org) in the Bible times men always took a dominant role in sex with women. Therefore, the “lyings of a woman” wasn’t a reference to simple sexuality, but to taking a domineering role with a man in sex as one would with a woman. As long as males have sex as equal partners, there is no sin. There are two problems with this. First, **Leviticus 20:13** rebuked both participants. That makes no sense at all if the only sin is being domineering. Second, consider the story of Jacob, Leah, and Rachel in **Genesis 30:14-18**. This story defies the idea that in Bible times men were sexual tyrants, using sex as a means to dominate their wives. Leah and Rachel were completely in charge of the sexuality in this passage.
 3. I’ve reserved the most common objection for the last. In reference to **Leviticus 18:22**, [religioustolerance.org](http://www.religioustolerance.org) says, “The chapters before and after chapter 18 deal extensively with idolatry. We can therefore expect that much of chapter 18 will deal with the same topic.”⁶ Just hearing that statement sounds true, doesn’t it. I mean, surely **Leviticus** is full of teaching about idolatry. But this statement only holds water for those who don’t actually read their Bibles, because it is patently false. Don’t misunderstand, **Leviticus** does, in fact, teach against idolatry. However, “extensively” is hardly the word that describes the teaching. “Idols” are only specifically mentioned in three verses in **Leviticus (19:4; 26:1, 30)**. A specific false god, Molech, is mentioned twice (**Leviticus 18:21; 20:2-5**). That’s it. Hardly extensive. However, both references to Molech are in the same chapters as the prohibitions on homosexual behavior. That is key because at this point [religioustolerance.org](http://www.religioustolerance.org) claims this is the verse that should define **Leviticus 18:22**. The entire chapter had been about forbidden sexual activity including several forms of incest, sex during the wife’s menstrual cycle, and adultery with a neighbor’s wife. “At this point, there is a break in the topic being discussed. The chapter switches to a condemnation of false forms of worship in general, and the worship of the Pagan god Molech in particular. Like many other Pagan temples, those dedicated to Molech had temple prostitutes. His followers believed that engaging in sexual activity with these prostitutes would please Molech and ‘...increase the fertility of themselves, their spouses, their livestock and their fields.’”⁷ Thus the claim is made that **Leviticus 18:22** is not about homosexuality per se but about idolatrous temple prostitution. But I ask you to read the chapter for yourself. Is there really a shift from sexual prohibitions to false worship? Or is there a mention of profane worship in the midst of a long line of sexual prohibitions. **Leviticus 18:23** goes on to speak against sex with animals. Are we to read that as only a prohibition of sex with animals if it is done in idolatrous worship?
 - C. The Bible is quite clear. It says that Jews are not allowed to participate in homosexual behavior. The arguments against this position are not in the least bit convincing. But rather simply raise smokescreens and confusion on pretty clear passages. Having said that, we need to keep something clear in our minds. These are Old Covenant prohibitions. **Leviticus 19:19** also prohibits interbreeding of cattle, sowing two kinds of seed in the same field, and wearing garments made of two kinds of cloth (a statute probably most of us are violating right now). We also need to be careful about making too much of the use of the term “abomination” in the Old Covenant. According to **Deuteronomy 14:3**, unclean foods were an abomination. Certainly,

⁵ http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_bibh4.htm

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

the Old Covenant teaches that Jewish males were not to participate in homosexual behavior. But that is not our covenant. The Old Covenant restricted things that the New Covenant permits and allowed some things that the New Covenant restricts. While I think it is important for us to recognize what the Old Covenant law was, our discussion must not end there. We are not bound by that law today. So what does the Bible say for us under the New Covenant?

II. The Bible tells us God's plan for proper sexuality.

- A. A great deal of the discussion regarding homosexual behavior surrounds prohibitive passages. We will get to those. However, we miss the fundamental issue when we jump there first. Before looking at what is prohibited, let's look at what is sanctioned. What does the New Testament establish as God's plan for sexuality?
- B. **Hebrews 13:4** provides the plan: "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous" (ESV). Sexuality is for marriage and for marriage alone. Everything else is immoral.
- C. Further, the New Testament defines God's plan for marriage. Jesus taught about the nature of marriage in **Matthew 19:4-6**. He goes back to the beginning to explain what God's desire had been for marriage and family all along. He claims it is between male and female, leaving parents, cleaving to one another, and not separating. In **I Corinthians 7:1-5**, Paul explained that "in view of the present distress" (**vs. 26**) it would be good for a man not to touch a woman. However, because of sexual temptation each man should have his own wife and each wife her own husband. Further, this single union was to be for life (**I Corinthians 7:10**).
- D. Jesus and Paul could both have very easily explained that God's only requirement was a loving, committed relationship between two individuals no matter their gender. But they didn't. They specifically said one man and one woman. Interestingly, [religioustolerance.org](http://www.religioustolerance.org/hommarrbibl.htm) admits the Bible never once condones a homosexual marriage or even mentions it. They explain it this way: "The last biblical books to be written appear in Christian Scriptures. they (sic) were all written before 100 CE (according to most conservative Christians) or 150 CE (according to most liberal Christians). The concept of homosexuality as a sexual orientation that could lead to a committed, long term relationship was not developed until the late 19th century. Thus, one can not expect to find biblical references to same-sex marriage. There are no references to planes, trains, or automobiles, either."⁸ The reason legitimate homosexual relationships are omitted from the Bible, we are told, is because its writers had no concept of a homosexual self-identification or orientation. They only recognized homosexuality as an activity or a behavior. Therefore, we can't expect them to comment on the orientation we discovered in the late 1900s. However, many historians recognize that homosexual relationships have been happening for centuries, including back in Bible times. According to the Wikipedia article on same-sex marriage, "Emperor Nero is reported to have engaged in a marriage ceremony with one of his male slaves" and "there is a consensus among modern historians that same-sex relationships existed in ancient Rome, but the exact frequency and nature of 'same-sex unions' during that period is obscure."⁹ In fact, another article asserts, "...there is a long history of recorded same-sex unions around the world. Various types of same-sex unions have existed, ranging from informal, unsanctioned relationships to highly ritualized unions. A same-sex union was socially recognized institution at times in Ancient Greece and Rome, some regions of China, such as Fujian province, and at certain times in ancient European history. These gay unions continued until Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire."¹⁰ Further, another article proclaims, "The first recorded mention of the performance of same-sex marriages occurred during the early Roman Empire. These same-sex marriages were solemnized with the same ceremonies and customs which were used for heterosexual marriages. Cicero mentions the marriage...of the son of Curio the Elder in a casual manner as if it was commonplace. Cicero states that the younger Curio was 'united in a stable and permanent marriage' to Antonius."¹¹ Interestingly, when those who support homosexual behavior want to talk about government sanction, they want us to believe it was commonplace as early as the Roman Empire. When they talk about the Bible, they want us to believe it was unheard of. We can't have it both ways. According to these historical studies, homosexual unions were well known in the days of Jesus and Paul, but they did not endorse them. Rather, they very specifically pointed out God's plan was between one man and one woman for life. And that's it.
- E. By the way, there is a point in this we need to remember when we get to the discussions about translations of the New Testament passages. These articles assert that homosexual unions and even marriages were

⁸ <http://www.religioustolerance.org/hommarrbibl.htm>

⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Same-sex_marriage

¹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_same-sex_unions

¹¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_same-sex_marriage#Same-sex_marriage_in_ancient_times

commonplace until Christianity became the official religion of the empire. Please understand what that means is for all the bickering about what those Greek words meant in that culture, the Christians who lived in that culture thought the Greek words condemned the practice of homosexuality and same-gender unions and marriages.

F. If we believe the Bible is God's book and we believe the New Covenant is our agreement with Him, then here is the plan He has outlined. Any other pursuit is immorality and violates the covenant with God.

III. The Bible says homosexual behavior is on par with other sins (or perhaps I should say it says other sins are on par with homosexual behavior).

A. I know most of you are waiting for me to bring up **Romans 1:18-27**. And I will discuss this in a moment. But first I think it is important to notice that the text goes on in **Romans 1:29-32** to talk about all manner of unrighteousness that goes along with the homosexual behavior mentioned in the earlier verses. In fact, the text almost suggests that because of their homosexual behavior God gave them up to be filled with all of this other wickedness.

B. What did it include? Covetousness, malice, envy, strife, deceit, gossip, disobedience to parents. Have you ever coveted? Have you ever been mean to someone? Have you ever been engaged in strife with someone or argued with someone? Have you ever lied? Even a little white one? Have you ever gossiped? Have you ever disobeyed your parents? Then you have been filled with all manner of unrighteousness and evil.

C. God didn't rank these sins. You are not better if you have never committed homosexuality. You are not worse if you have. You are especially not better if you have never been tempted to commit homosexuality. Because you have committed the sins you have been tempted to commit. You have not fared any better in the war against your sins than those who have committed homosexuality and that is the heart of the **Titus 3:1-7** that we keep mentioning in this context.

IV. The Bible says homosexual behavior is unlawful for Christians.

A. As we have just seen, not only does the Bible endorse heterosexual union between one man and one woman, it claims homosexual behavior is unlawful.

B. **I Timothy 1:8-11** includes "men who practice homosexuality" in its list of practices that are committed by the lawless and disobedient, the ungodly and sinners, the unholy and profane. The word translated by this phrase in the ESV is "arsenokoites," which literally means either "male bed" or "male sex."

C. According to Bishop Spong this verse is "limited to condemnation of male sex slaves."¹² This argument seems to be based on the fact that the next sin condemned in the list is enslaving or kidnapping, which referred to kidnapping people for the purpose of selling them into slavery. Are these two terms connected? What about the possibility that the term for homosexuality is connected with the previous term, "the sexually immoral"? Or what about the possibility that the only connection these terms have is they are all sins in and of themselves? After all, are we to believe that striking parents, lying, murdering are only sinful when connected with sex slavery?

V. The Bible says homosexual behavior is contrary to nature.

A. In **Romans 1:18-27**, Paul described homosexual behavior as dishonorable passion. It claims that women gave up the natural relations with men for relations contrary to nature. Men also gave up the natural relationship with women and exchanged that for unnatural relationships with men. This text is important, because while claiming we shouldn't be so strict with our interpretations of the Bible, most who approve homosexual behavior claim the Bible only ever talks about male homosexuality and not female homosexuality. But here it is. Both are claimed to be contrary to nature.

B. Paul claims this sexual exchange took place because first there was an exchange made regarding the nature of God. Because they exchanged the "glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things" (ESV), they came to exchange natural relationships for unnatural ones. Because they "exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (ESV), they continued on into a debased mind governed by the passions of their flesh.

C. Please do not miss how important these words are in the midst of the modern debate. As pointed out in the last lesson, the dividing line between those who approve homosexual behavior and those who do not is not really what the verses says about homosexual behavior. Rather, it is what we believe about the Bible and what we believe about God. This is nowhere more evident than in Bishop Spong's book [Why Christianity Must Change or Die](#). Spong has been one of the most outspoken supporters of homosexual behavior for

¹² <http://www.religioustolerance.org/homclergy1.htm>

those in mainstream “Christian” religions. In his chapter, “Beyond Theism to New God Images,” Spong explains that to truly deal with these moral issues we have to exchange the traditional theistic view of God with a newer postmodern view of God. He details a history of this thinking saying:

Alfred North Whitehead...laid out the theological framework for perceiving of God not just as an external being, but as a divine process coming into being within the life of this world. He conceived of God as existing with all of reality, not prior to it, and as growing by absorbing and transforming what is done in the temporal world. This God was, for Whitehead, the abiding source of all new possibilities.

...

Paul Tillich...suggested that we must abandon the external height images in which the theistic God has historically been perceived and replace them with internal depth images of a deity who is not apart from us but who is the very core and ground of all that is. This God would not be a theistic power, a being among beings, whose existence we could debate. This God would not be the traditional divine worker of miracles and magic, the dispenser of rewards and punishments, blessings and curses.

...

The God to whom Tillich pointed was the infinite center of life. This God was not a person, but, rather like the insights of the mystics, this God was the mystical presence in which all personhood could flourish. This God was not a being but rather the power that called being forth in all creatures. This God was not an external, personal force that could be invoked but rather an internal reality that, when confronted, opened us to the meaning of life itself.

...

So I start here. There is no God external to life. God, rather, is the inescapable depth and center of all that is. God is not a being superior to all other beings. God is the Ground of Being itself. And much flows from this starting place.¹³

The quote is lengthy, but notice the exchange made in this passage. The Eternal Power is exchanged for a divine process that came into existence as the world did. The Creator is exchanged for a mystical presence that is forever recreated by what it absorbs from the what is done in the temporal world (that is, it's recreated by us). The Life-Giver who brought us and everything into existence is exchanged for a mystical life-force that is made up of us and everything that exists. Paul himself recognized what happens when the truth of God is exchanged for a lie; it comes out in how we live. If we exchange the truth of the personal, theistic, all-powerful Creator for an amorphous, divine, life-force process that is growing as the temporal world grows, then our ethics and morality will change, even accepting things that have been known for generations to be contrary to nature. Despite Spong's claims that we are facing something new with all of our modern enlightenment and explosion of knowledge, he has only repeated what Paul himself saw happening 2000 years ago. People refused to accept God for what He is, and, therefore, refused to accept God's plan for sexuality for what it is.

- VI. The Bible says impenitent practice of homosexual behavior will keep one from God's kingdom.
- A. **I Corinthians 6:9-10** says we must not be deceived. When Paul says this, it is because he knows Satan will try very hard to deceive us. Further, he knows how easily we might be deceived. So he offers a warning. Don't be deceived; those who practice homosexuality will not inherit the kingdom of God.
 - B. The ESV uses the simple phrase “men who practice homosexuality.” The KJV says mentions effeminate and abusers of themselves with mankind. The NKJV says “nor homosexuals, nor sodomites.” The NASB says “nor effeminate, nor homosexuals.” The footnote in the ESV explains what the terms mean. “The two Greek terms translated by this phrase refer to the passive and active partners in consensual homosexual acts.”
 - C. Those who approve homosexual behavior do some interesting things with this verse.
 - 1. Some translate it in ways that are horrific to all of us. For instance, on one page at religioustolerance.org the statement is made that most religious progressives and secularists interpret this passage to mean “male child molesters and the children they molest will go to Hell, not Heaven, at death.”¹⁴ That is, they do not see this as active and passive partners of a homosexual relationship but rather an adult male molesting a male child. They explain this further by saying,

The Jerusalem Bible, New American Bible, and James Moffatt translation use the word ‘*catamites*,’ or the phrase ‘*boy prostitutes*’ to describe one group of individuals that Paul believed will go to Hell because of their behavior on Earth. Catamites and boy prostitutes were often boys or male youth who was (sic) kept as a sexual partner/slave by an adult male.

¹³ Spong, John Shelby, *Why Christianity Must Change or Die*, Harper Collins, San Francisco, 1999, pp 63-64, 70.

¹⁴ <http://www.religioustolerance.org/homglance.htm>

The verse is profoundly immoral by today's secular and most religious moral standards because it transfers punishment from the guilty perpetrator to the innocent victim...Many religious liberals believe that these passages are immoral and should be ignored because they are clearly opposed to the will of God.¹⁵

Certainly all of us would be aghast at a passage that claimed a molested child was somehow guilty of sin in this molestation and condemned to hell because he was molested. So if we can be convinced this verse proclaims something absolutely horrific even to our sensibilities based on everything else we know of God from the Bible, maybe we will just ignore what this verse says. I think I have a better suggestion. Perhaps we should recognize that this extreme translation must not be the right one. But please note that whether liberal or conservative, everyone recognizes if we are going to take this verse at face value then whatever actions these two terms describe will keep the perpetrators from God's kingdom.

2. Spong, as recorded on a different page at religioustolerance.org, says something a little different about this verse. And it is truly powerful in this discussion.

In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Paul gave a list of those who would not inherit the Kingdom of God. That list included the immoral, idolaters, adulterers, sexual perverts, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, and robbers. Sexual perverts [this is the term used in the RSV-*elc*] is a translation of two words; it is possible that the juxtaposition of *malakos*, the soft, effeminate word, with *arsenokoitus*, or male prostitute, was meant to refer to the passive and active males in a homosexual liaison.

Thus, it appears that Paul would not approve of homosexual behavior. But was Paul's opinion about homosexuality accurate, or was it limited by the lack of scientific knowledge in his day and infected by prejudice born of ignorance?¹⁶

This statement is, I think, most telling. Spong essentially admits that even he cannot twist what this passage clearly states to mean something other than what most of us think it means. Paul said both the active and passive partners in homosexual activity are sinning and will not inherit the kingdom of God if they do not repent. The only thing left to do with the passage is declare that Paul was just wrong.

- D. Thus, if we believe the Bible is God's book, this passage says homosexual behavior is sinful. But please don't be upset as if we are singling out homosexuality. The passage also mentions idolatry, theft, greed, reviling, swindling, and drunkenness.

VII. The Bible says that those who have participated in homosexual behavior can repent and be saved.

- A. In **I Corinthians 6:11**, Paul pointed out when he made that list of sinful behaviors, he wasn't talking about people "out there" but "in here." "And such were some of you" (ESV). The Corinthian church was filled with people who had committed these very sins. But that was past tense. They had ceased. Additionally, they had been washed, sanctified, and justified.
- B. At this point, those who equate homosexuality with an identity or an orientation cry, "Foul!" "This is not fair," they will say. "Edwin, if you have sexual desire, you can marry a woman whom you want to marry. But for us, you are saying we have to do something we do not really want to do (have sex with someone of the same gender) or we have to remain celibate."
 1. First, this oversimplifies the issue. There are all kinds of people with heterosexual attractions asked to maintain celibacy: unmarried teenagers (perhaps the people who find it most hard to be celibate), the aging bachelor or bachelorette, widows and widowers, the divorced (especially those unlawfully divorced who are not permitted to marry again, cf. **I Corinthians 7:11**), the married whose spouses' physical health prevents them from engaging in sexual activity, the married whose spouses' sex drive is different, the married whose spouses have emotional and psychological issues with sex that prevent them from engaging in it. Further, there are many Christians in our modern times asked to have sex with someone they do not really want to. After all, in another sermon, I have to try to convince two people who don't love each other to stay married, part of which is maintaining a sexual relationship. They have to learn to love each other properly which will produce more intimate sexual relationship. Those who approve homosexual behavior think there are only two options, either be celibate or have wonderfully fulfilling sexual activity any time you want at the drop of a hat with the one person in the world you are sexually attracted to. That just isn't true. The fact is we are asking those with homosexual attractions to do the very same thing we ask those with heterosexual attractions to do. Do not let your

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ <http://www.religioustolerance.org/homclergy1.htm>

fleshly desires govern your behavior. Rather, channel whatever desires you have into biblically sanctioned activity and if you cannot, then remain celibate.

2. Second, we need to evaluate the use of “fair.” When I tell my children they have to go to bed at a certain time, they say it just isn’t fair. They are absolutely certain that because they say those words, it must be true. Consider the apostles of Jesus in **Matthew 19:3-12**. Jesus had just given His not so popular teaching on divorce. He claimed it was wrong, and if the divorced married again they would be committing adultery (with one exception). Notice what the apostles said in response to this: “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry” (ESV). They essentially said, “Lord, this isn’t fair. You mean we have to stay married to one woman for life. That is just not worth it. It would be better not to get married at all.” They are saying they don’t like the sound of God’s marriage law. Jesus responded that those who can’t do what He has said would be better off remaining celibate. He makes this comment in very strong language, saying that people who do not like the kingdom law on marriage need to become eunuchs. Do not misunderstand. Jesus was not suggesting literal castration. Rather, He was using intense language accomodatively to highlight what a difficult choice it would be. If Jesus would say that to men who did not want to have sex with the same woman for the rest of their lives, how much more would He say it to men who did not want to have sex with women at all?
- C. As we consider this, we need to think about what it means for us as a congregation. Could the same thing be said of us, “such were some of you”? This means we need to make sure we open our fellowship to those who are striving to leave this sin behind them. That means we should not block fellowship to those who admit to homosexual attractions and even to homosexual sins, so long as they are repenting of them. We should not treat this sin differently than any other. We would be thankful if an adulterer, thief, even murderer came to us and sought forgiveness and freedom from these sins in Jesus Christ. We must do the same with homosexuality. Further, we are going to have to learn how to address slips. We all have slips into sin. I imagine every single one of us would admit that we committed some sin this week, not because we are impenitent but because we are growing. We need to learn to respond in love and acceptance even to our brothers and sisters who are growing but slip with their sins even if it includes homosexuality. That is what we are here for, to help each other overcome and have victory over sin through Jesus Christ.

Conclusion:

Bishop Spong suggests that Christianity must change or die. He repeatedly asserts that the theistic God we believe in has died and is being replaced. He repeatedly asserts that the covenantal approach to the New Testament we have traditionally taken is useless and meaningless in our postmodern times. But as part of this he claims we need to give up on what he calls a “Fundamentalist” approach to the Bible. Or as said at religioustolerance.org over and over again, we need to quit taking the Bible at face value and so literally. Please recognize what is admitted in all of this. Spong and the writers at religioustolerance.org, for all of their attempts at making the Bible say something else, tacitly admit that if we just take what the Bible says at face value, we’ll come to all the conclusions we’ve learned in this lesson. To come to some other conclusion we have to twist what it says, change what it says, deny what it says, or even claim it just doesn’t matter what it says. The Bible teaches that we must abstain from homosexual behavior if we long to be part of God’s kingdom. But it also says that those who have fallen into this sin can be forgiven and set free.

I want to go out on a limb here. Bishop Spong makes a claim that I think would upset almost every one of us. In his book [Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism](#), Spong suggests that Paul himself had a repressed homosexual orientation. He does assert there is “no evidence to suggest that Paul ever acted out his sexual desires and passions.”¹⁷ Spong’s basis for this is **Romans 7:7-24**. To Spong, Paul demonstrates such guilt, shame, and self-loathing that nothing else could account for it but a homosexual orientation.

This foray into imaginative speculation about Paul demonstrates only this. That Spong has never truly faced the awfulness of any and every sin. I have known numerous people, myself included, who have felt every bit as much guilt, shame, and self-loathing as Paul did in this passage, but the sin of homosexuality had nothing to do with it. All sinners, no matter their sin, when they come face to face with the darkness of their soul in the midst of their sins feel this depravity. But here is the glorious message of **Romans 7**. Paul was not set free from whatever his struggle was by giving himself over to it and claiming a loving God would never condemn someone who was living in something so deeply entrenched in his flesh. Paul saw freedom in Jesus Christ (**Romans 7:25**). And that is what I want to proclaim to you. No matter your sin, guilt, shame, or self-loathing, there is a way to be delivered from your body of death. No, it doesn’t mean you will never be tempted to commit your sins again. Even Jesus was tempted. But it does mean you can grow in your ability to overcome sin. Come to Jesus. He will save you.

¹⁷ Spong, John Shelby, [Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism](#), Harper Collins, San Francisco, 1991, p 117.