



Homosexuality (Part 1): Clarifying the Issues

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Introduction:

Just over a week ago, President Obama made headlines as the first American President to endorse homosexual marriage. He declared he and his wife are practicing Christians, and their Christian faith in Jesus' sacrifice and teaching prompted this endorsement. This, of course, has caused a political firestorm. To be honest, I am not so much concerned about the political and legal ramifications of this statement. I am concerned that such a claim from such an authority figure might impact our perspectives, especially among our young people. The fact is the entertainment media is flooding the airwaves with messages that homosexual activity is lawful, not just in man's eyes, but God's. Television shows drop subtle and not so subtle messages making this claim. *Glee* is almost completely about learning to accept homosexuality. *Bones* showcased a homosexual affair pursued by a bisexual main character as if it were legitimate and had at least one episode that was specifically about God approving of homosexuality, transvestitism, and transgenderism. Ethan and I have taken to watching the new *Dr. Who*. Almost every other episode drops some comment about how homosexuality is acceptable. A little over a year ago Lady Gaga debuted at number 1 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 charts with "Born this Way" a song that says homosexuality is okay because people are "born this way," is on par with being born black, white, or Hispanic, and God doesn't make mistakes. Katy Perry was drinking too much one night and proclaimed "I Kissed a Girl and I Liked It." She claimed it was innocent, experimental, and natural. Pink asks you to "Raise Your Glass" if you are wrong in all the right ways. The video demonstrates that being wrong in the right ways includes being an overweight teen refusing to live by the culture's model of lookism, being a woman who wants to work outside the home, being a nerd who wants to have a good time too, and being a man who wants to participate in homosexuality. This video really puts it in the face of the religious as scenes imply Pink participated in unhappy sexual relations with a Jewish Rabbi, a Catholic Priest, an Eastern Orthodox priest, and then gets the opportunity to have a sexual relationship with a nun for which she is visibly thanking God in prayer. Facebook is peppered with cute sayings and thought-provoking pictures that claim homosexuality is acceptable behavior.

In addition to all of this, more and more people in "Christian" circles are accepting homosexuality as lawful before God and welcoming those who impenitently practice it into their fellowship. Wikipedia has a page that lists churches and denominations that affirm homosexual activity including The Metropolitan Community Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), United Church of Christ, Evangelical Anglican Church in America, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Episcopal Church in the United States, and even the Disciples of Christ.¹ Websites like religious-tolerance.org intimate that to be truly Christian, following in the footsteps of Jesus' love and acceptance, we would accept homosexual behavior as lawful otherwise we are intolerant and hateful.

I know all of this has to be confusing, especially to our young people. What should we think of this activity? If you have ever had any homosexual feelings or if you have ever experimented and found that you liked it, you may be wondering where this leaves you. What should you do with that? How do you determine your course of action? For those among us who are convinced that the Bible claims same gender sexual activity is sinful, we are amazed that professed Bible believers can hold a different position. Because of our amazement, we often end up in heated shouting matches, lobbing Bible verse grenades but making no headway. The reason we make no headway is because this issue is not fought and won based on particular verses. In fact, the battle has usually been fought and won with people on both sides long before they ever read the specific verses that say anything about homosexuality. We need to wage the battle where it is actually happening. Our look at this topic is going to take two lessons. In this one, we want to consider what is causing people who claim to believe the Bible to accept homosexuality as lawful before God. In the next lesson, we will take a look at what the Bible actually says about homosexuality.

Discussion:

- I. The two most important points to remember about our present civil and political controversy.
 - A. First, we live in a democracy. Because we live in a democracy, we are allowed to have our personal political opinions regarding every issue. We are allowed to believe that certain activities ought to be illegal or legal.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT-affirming_Christian_denominations

We are allowed to form our opinions from whatever basis we may choose, and no one is allowed to take that from us. At the same time, those around us are also allowed their views. In the end, we will vote on these matters or for candidates who will affect these matters. While we or others may protest the outcomes, while we may try to overturn them, in the end our society will speak, and the laws will be set. There is extremely little we can do about it except cast our own votes if we choose.

- B. Second, in **John 18:36**, Jesus claimed that His kingdom was not of this world. Brethren, I am proud to be an American. I am convinced that this is the greatest physical nation that has ever existed on the face of the earth. I love my country. But, Jesus did not die to make Americans. He died to make Christians. No matter what path our nation takes, our citizenship is in heaven (**Philippians 3:20**). While I certainly support the efforts of every individual who wants Washington to support the Bible definition of marriage, we need to remember God did not give us the Bible in order to take it to Washington. He gave us the Bible in order to hide it in our hearts and to help hide it in the hearts of the individuals around us (**Psalms 119:11**).
- C. With these two points in mind, we remember that Paul did not have the luxury of living in a democracy. Nor did he have the luxury of even trying to remotely argue that he lived in an empire founded on biblical principles. But the Gospel was still having success—even the enemies of the cross could see this (**Acts 17:6**). Further, we look at our own society and can notice how many sins are legal—adultery, abortion, covetousness (lottery), outbursts of wrath, drinking alcohol and drunkenness, on and on the list goes. But the Gospel continues to save individuals out of these sins, causing them to repent whether or not our nation sanctions their sins. This is what we must focus on. Bringing sinners to repentance, no matter what our society says is legal. In fact, we need to recognize that souls will not be saved by making a sin illegal. They will only be saved by bringing them to repentance. That is our job.

II. What is causing the modern “religious” controversy?

- A. As I mentioned earlier, the real controversy regarding the Bible and homosexuality is not fought or won with the passages that say anything about homosexuality. We must discuss more fundamental issues first and then what the Bible says becomes clear. We must first clear up four important misunderstandings.
- B. People do not understand the Bible.
 - 1. Clearly, in one sermon I cannot possibly cover every aspect of how we got the Bible, why we can trust the Bible, and how to use the Bible. However, I can point out some basic issues that are misunderstood that affect our discussion of homosexuality.
 - 2. Explaining why some who claim to be Christians accept homosexual behavior as lawful, [religioustolerance.org](http://www.religioustolerance.org) explains that “Liberal Christians generally reject the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible.”² They misunderstand the Bible. We need to understand that the Bible, while penned by men, was actually authored by God Himself (**II Peter 1:20-21**). Therefore, when we read the Bible we cannot discount what is said based on the limitations that the men may have had. Paul may have been ignorant of a great many things, but the Holy Spirit who moved Paul to write was not and is not (*cf.* **I Corinthians 14:37; Galatians 1:11-12; Ephesians 3:3-4**).
 - 3. Again why some who claim to be Christians accept homosexual behavior as lawful, [religioustolerance.org](http://www.religioustolerance.org) says, “They acknowledge that the Bible consists mainly of material promoting the authors’ evolving beliefs.”³ They misunderstand the Bible. We need to understand that what was written is not subject to our own personal opinions. According to **II Peter 1:20-21**, the writers were not writing personal opinions and therefore we are not allowed our personal opinions. Rather, we must work to understand the scriptures and handle them accurately, otherwise we will face destruction (**II Peter 3:16**).
 - 4. Explaining the difference between those who do not accept homosexual behavior and those who do, [religioustolerance.org](http://www.religioustolerance.org) says, “Conservatives rely mostly on the content of the Bible, as they interpret it to mean... Liberals give far greater weight to the findings of scientific research, and are willing to abandon the traditional interpretation of biblical passages in favor of new analyses which harmonize the Bible and scientific discoveries.”⁴ They misunderstand the Bible. We need to understand that the scripture is all we need to determine what we ought to teach about this issue and any other. **II Timothy 3:16-17** says the scripture will make us perfect, thoroughly furnished for every good work. If it equips us to commit homosexuality, fine. But if not, we cannot turn to other sources to legitimize it. Do not misunderstand me, as I know some will. Certainly, we must use logic, reason, and common sense as we look

² <http://www.religioustolerance.org/homconlib.htm>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

to the Bible. Certainly, we must keep the scripture in context and even in its cultural context. However, we are not allowed to take the sociological and psychological studies of men and use them to change the Bible message.

C. People do not understand sin.

1. What is sin? According to **I John 3:4**, sin is lawlessness. Whenever I violate God's law, I have sinned. But we must dig deeper. What causes sin? According to **James 1:13-15**, sin begins with personal desires.
2. What is the great spiritual battle for every Christian? The flesh vs. the spirit. **Romans 8:1-12** describes this battle. **Galatians 5:16-26** also demonstrates this. We are to crucify our flesh, along with its desires to do what God wants us to do, no matter what our flesh wants.
3. Why does all of this matter regarding the debate on homosexuality? Because the great defense of homosexuality among the "Christian community" is that homosexuals are born that way. They have a great desire that they cannot help because it is genetically wired in their flesh or because they did not develop as the majority did in the womb. First, this has not been proven, no matter what you have heard. And given the extremely difficult nature in such studies to determine cause and effect, distinguish between causation and correlation, and to truly have a control group, is almost impossible to prove. Second, even if it is proven, how does that make homosexuality different from every issue we agree is sin? Every sin we commit, we do so because we have a desire in our bodies. Our flesh wages war against our spirit. One of them must win out. We must sow to the spirit and live by the spirit, putting to death our fleshly desires (**Galatians 6:8**). Those who want to commit homosexuality claim we are asking them to do something we do not ask anyone else to do. That simply is not the case. We are asking them to do the same thing we ask everyone drawn to any sin to do. Listen to Paul in **Romans 7:14-25**. Doesn't his bout with sin sound exactly like modern bouts with sin, including homosexuality? Sin had a seemingly overwhelming natural hold on him that he couldn't control. Did he claim that meant he was just born to sin so he shouldn't feel any guilt, should accept it, and sell himself out to it? No. The answer was to be reborn in Jesus Christ, who could set him free from it.

D. People do not understand sexuality.

1. In today's vernacular, homosexuality is a lifestyle. Once again, [religioustolerance.org](http://www.religioustolerance.org) explains the issue saying, "Religious conservatives, whether Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or of another religion, often define homosexuality in terms of behavior. Homosexuality and heterosexuality is what a person does. ... Most religious liberals, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, human sexuality researchers, therapists, etc. define homosexuality in terms of feelings and self-identification."⁵
2. We need to understand that sex is an activity, not an identity. It is a behavior, not a state of being. Sex is something we do, not something we are. Further, attraction is not the same as sex. Love is not the same as sex. Additionally, sex is not the all-encompassing, all-driving force that we just can't help but pursue. Sex is a choice. Sex is optional. Our culture can't imagine trying to control sexual feelings or submitting your sexual feelings to the control of a Power higher than yourself. So they can't imagine suggesting to someone that if the activity they are attracted to is sinful, they should not engage in it.
3. And yet, nearly everyone in our society recognizes some limits. When priests are attracted to young boys, they are told that particular sexual activity is wrong (and it is), and they should control themselves. A few years back, I knew of a preacher who "fell in love" with a 13-year-old girl in his congregation. They were going to run off together until she got cold feet. Now he is in jail because even our society says that no matter how deeply he felt an attraction, no matter how little control he had over the feelings and desires, what he did was wrong. You may have homosexual attractions, bisexual attractions, lesbian attractions, heterosexual attractions, bestial attractions, or pedophilic attractions. But that is not the same as engaging in sexual activity. The concern is not your natural sexual triggers; the concern is moral action.

E. People do not understand the issue.

1. If you begin to talk to people about why they support homosexuality, you will quickly find that a lot of people either simply do not understand what the issue is or are purposefully trying to obfuscate the issues. Smokescreens and straw men abound. Let's see if we can clear away some of the confusion.
2. Some will say that God loves everyone; therefore we ought to love everyone. But that is not the issue. I could not agree with any statement more than this one. But this is not the issue. Certainly God loves everyone. **Romans 5:8** demonstrates God loves all sinners and sent His Son to die for us. The issue is not does God love homosexuals, the issue is does God claim homosexuality is a sin for which those who

⁵ <http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom6beli.htm>

have committed it need the blood of Christ. If you have committed homosexuality, God loves you and sent Jesus to die for you. Further, brothers and sisters, the only reason this argument even holds water is because too many Christians have demonstrated hate. Rather, than sacrificing themselves to help others find freedom in Jesus, they have lived in fear and hatred, bullying and making fun of others. When we show love for others no matter their sins, we disarm this mistaken defense. Remember what we learned about living as forgiven sinners among sinners in **Titus 3:1-7**.

3. On the flip side, some will say we are not allowed to hate anyone. Therefore, we should not hate homosexuals. I agree with this statement too. But again, that is not the issue. Today the proponents of homosexuality present a false dilemma. They act as though we must either accept homosexuality as godly or we are tyrannical, homophobic bigots and hatemongers. That is just not the case. As we said above, we must not hate, but love all mankind. The issue once again is not about hate, but about teaching. I claim that drinking alcohol is a sin; that doesn't mean I hate people who drink alcohol. I claim that fornication is a sin; that doesn't mean I hate fornicators. Telling people they shouldn't drink and drive is not construed as hating drivers who drink but as loving them and protecting them. Telling people that smoking causes lung cancer is not construed as hating smokers, but rather loving them and trying to help them. Telling people that meth is addictive and destructive is not construed as hating drug users, but as loving them and trying to help them. Telling people who practice homosexuality that God does not approve, but instead condemns the behavior and will judge those involved in it should not be construed as hating those who practice it, but rather loving them and trying to help. Which is more hateful, to warn someone of the dangers of their actions, especially if they have eternal consequences, or to let someone blindly walk a destructive path?
4. Some will say that we should not judge others. God is the judge. They will even appeal to scripture for this (**Matthew 7:1**). However, this is not the issue. Clearly, neither you nor I will ever be the judge. We will not declare the sentence of eternal damnation or eternal life on anyone. But every one of us must make judgments about what we are going to teach is right or wrong. **John 7:24** says we must make righteous judgments. Further, are not the people who claim we should accept homosexuality as lawful making a judgment when they judge homosexuality as acceptable? Why are they allowed their judgment but we are not ours.
5. Some will say we are not allowed to tell people who they can love. That is not the issue. You can love anyone you choose. In fact, biblically you must love everyone (**Luke 10:27-37**). The issue is about who you can participate in sexual activity with. Remember, sex is not the same as love. And by the way, this is understood in society. Even today, in the midst of this debate, the number one thing said over and over again is about people engaging in homosexuality in a loving, committed relationship. Are we to believe that those with homosexual attractions are only ever sexually attracted to one person? It isn't that way with people with heterosexual attractions. But we all agree that no one is allowed to act on all of their attractions.
6. Some will say we are not allowed to tell people who they can marry. People ought to be able to marry anyone they wish. But that is not the issue. Because, in fact, everyone already believes we are allowed to tell people who they can and can't marry. What if the man wanted to marry two sisters? Can we tell him, "No"? What if he wanted to marry his own sister or his own mother? Can we tell him, "No"? What if he wanted to marry your 12-year-old daughter? Can we tell him, "No"? What if he wanted to marry his pet monkey? Can we tell him, "No"? The issue is not about telling people who they can marry; we already do that. Our government does that and will always do it. And we all believe it ought to be done at some point. The issue is whether or not God approves of homosexual behavior.
7. What is the issue? The issue is about God's plan for sexual fulfillment. Is it lawful to fulfill sexual desires with someone of the same gender? Once we determine what God's word says about that, everything else falls into place.

Conclusion:

The fact is the arguments regarding homosexuality are typically not fought and won based on what Bible passages actually say. They are fought and won around the issues discussed in this lesson. We need to get these issues cleared up before even addressing the Bible passages, which we will do in our next lesson. The Bible really is God's Word. Let's live by it.