

# **A Biblical Response to the Pro-Gay Movement**

**By Bob Davies**

I was in the midst of a busy afternoon of correspondence at Love In Action, the ex-gay ministry where I work, when the phone rang. It was John, a friend I had known since we'd served together in short-term missions in Europe.

"Bob," he said, "you won't believe what I just heard on the radio." John had been listening to a local talk show. The guest was a member of the local pro-gay church.

"This guy was talking about Genesis 19," John reported. "He said that God didn't destroy Sodom and Gomorrah for their homosexuality. According to him, they were punished for their inhospitality toward the foreign guests. I couldn't believe it! Have you ever heard of this?"

"Actually, that's a common explanation of the passage," I told him. "And there are a growing number of theologians who support the homosexual lifestyle."

As I hung up the phone, I thought back over my own struggles with homosexuality. I'd grown up in an evangelical church, then realized in my early teens that I was sexually attracted to other men. During my freshman year at college, I went to the library to research the subject and found numerous books that taught homosexual practice was compatible with Scriptural teachings.

I was never totally convinced -- but I became familiar with many of the pro-gay arguments which today are finding acceptance in an increasing number of churches.

## **Confusion in the Church**

Thirty years ago, the pro-gay viewpoint was embraced in a few isolated congregations. Since then, however, many denominations have changed their traditional viewpoint on the subject of homosexuality.

Homosexuals and lesbians who go to these churches for spiritual counsel are welcomed. "Don't try to change," they are told. "God created you gay. Homosexuality is His gift to you!" Even married men and women have been encouraged to divorce their spouse, leave their children, and enter a same-sex partnership. Tragically, some of them have taken this ill-founded advice.

There have been several trends over the past 100 years which made today's debate over homosexuality almost inevitable. During the twentieth century, a growing number of churches began to drift away from the traditional view of the Word of God. The Bible's ideas were increasingly seen as dated and no longer applicable to our time and culture.

The latest findings of scientific research and the personal experiences of an individual rose to a higher place of authority than the Scriptures. What modern psychology or science said, or what my own experiences told me, became the most important criteria on which to evaluate moral issues.

## **Laying the Foundation**

In today's debate within the church, arguments about homosexuality usually center around a few

isolated biblical verses. Often overlooked is the foundational teaching on human sexuality, as presented in the first chapter of Genesis: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). Immediately after their creation, God commanded Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and increase in number" by means of sexual procreation (v. 28).

So Genesis chapter one is the foundational text for any discussion about sexual morality, as it clearly outlines God's intent: Sex is experienced between a man and woman in the context of a lifetime commitment.

Any alteration of this pattern is a distortion of God's original plan. When sex occurs between men and women without a lifelong commitment (fornication or adultery), or between two men or two women in a lifelong commitment (homosexual "marriage"), these acts are outside of God's will.

### **What About Sodom?**

In the books I read on homosexuality, one of the first passages I saw reinterpreted was the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19). What about the interpretation that Sodom's sin was inhospitality? Is this valid?

To fairly answer this question, I had to be careful not to read my preconceived ideas into this chapter. For example, the Bible never uses the word "homosexual" to describe the men of Sodom; neither does it say that God judged Sodom for homosexual behavior.

Much of the discussion about this passage revolves around verse five. The men of Sodom made a request to Lot regarding the male visitors: "Bring them out unto us, that we may know them" (KJV). The original Hebrew word translated "know" is *yadha*. Although this word occurs over 900 times in the Old Testament and only refers to sex in ten of these cases, the context of this story supports a sexual meaning.

For example, if the townspeople only wanted to "get acquainted with" the visitors, why did Lot respond, "Don't do this wicked thing" (v. 7)? And if the men only wanted to extend a warm greeting to the visitors, how can they be charged with "inhospitality"?

Here's another argument I've heard: "Even if homosexual acts occurred here, we're talking about rape, not consensual sex between two adults who love each other." But God did not destroy Sodom for this one incident. He had already declared the city to be wicked years before this incident (Gen. 13:13, 18:20), and simply sent His divine messengers to confirm the city's decadence. God's judgment brought an end to the rampant evil of every type -- including immorality -- that was part of Sodom's culture.

Some theologians point out that other passages referring to the sins of Sodom (Ezek. 16:49, Jer. 23:14) do not mention homosexuality. However, 2 Peter 2:7, Jude 7 and Ezek. 16:50 mention such sins as "filthy lives," "lawlessness," "sexual immorality" and "perversion." Taken together, these verses show us that Sodom and Gomorrah were judged for a wide variety of sins, one of which was homosexuality.

### **The Holiness Code**

Pro-gay churches argue that Christians are no longer under the Law, so we can ignore all Levitical commands, including those which mention homosexuality. But we must carefully

distinguish between the dietary or ceremonial laws (abolished in the New Testament -- Mark 7:19; Acts 10:14,15), and the moral laws (reinforced in the New Testament and still applicable today -- Mark 7:21; Matt. 5:27,28).

Differentiating between the two types of laws answers the question, "Why do Christians quote the Old Testament law on homosexuality, then ignore such commands as those which prohibit eating shellfish or wearing clothing of mixed fibers?"

The important distinction between these laws is reflected in the Old Testament penalty for breaking them: Disobedience to the ceremonial laws resulted in uncleanness (Lev. 11:24f); breaching the moral law meant death (Lev. 20:2f). God left no ambiguity in His description of homosexual acts; they are an "abomination" and "detestable" (Lev. 18:22, 20:13, NAS).

### **Natural or Unnatural?**

Romans chapter one is usually considered the most thorough and clear condemnation of homosexuality in the Bible (and it contains the only specific reference to lesbianism).

But some people say that Paul's statements are "culturally bound," that is, they are addressed to first century Jews and therefore don't apply to us. On the basis of that logic, we could dismiss the entire Bible, as none of it was written to twentieth century church-goers! But God is clear that His moral laws do not change and that His Word "stands forever" (Isa. 40:8).

Or was Paul only condemning perversion (heterosexuals who abandon their normal sexual desires for homosexual activities), and not inversion (the condition of being "born gay")? There is no conclusive evidence to date that anyone is born homosexual, despite some sensational media reports (see *Born Gay?* in this library).

What did Paul mean when he said that homosexual acts were "unnatural"? Contrary to what a person feels is natural? Not necessarily, as many homosexuals will say, "I've always felt this way. I remember being attracted to my own sex from the time I was four or five years old."

We live in a fallen world. Sin has distorted our perception of truth (Rom. 1:18). So what someone feels is "natural" can still be wrong.

I believe that Paul was referring to the natural order as God originally created it. As we saw in Genesis, woman was made for man. So "unnatural" in this passage means contrary to God's original intention for human sexual behavior, plainly visible in the complementary function of the male and female sexual organs.

### **Degrees of Sin?**

The first chapter of Romans also sheds some interesting light on another common question: "Is homosexuality worse than other sins?" Or does God view one sin the same as any other?

In one sense, all sins are the same: They separate us from God and grieve His holy nature (Rom. 6:23). But other consequences of sin can vary. A lustful thought impacts a marriage differently than the physical act of adultery. A hateful word does not have the same legal results as the act of murder.

I don't believe that God hates homosexuality because it is the "worst" sin; rather, He hates the devastation that it brings into a person's life. Romans 1:23-26 mentions three kinds of exchanges that illustrate man's pursuit of his fallen nature. First, the worship of God is exchanged for various forms of idolatry (v. 23). Then the truth about God is exchanged for lies (v. 25). Finally, natural sexual relations are abandoned for unnatural ones (vv. 26, 27).

The result? Those who practice these sins "receive in their own persons the due penalty of their error" (v. 27). In today's society, homosexuality is reaping a bitter harvest. Homosexual men are six times more likely to have attempted suicide than heterosexual men. Between 25 and 33 percent of homosexual men and women are alcoholics (the national average is 7 percent). Currently, 70 percent of Americans with AIDS are male homosexuals or bisexuals. Homosexual involvement reaps deep devastation in the lives of many who practice it.

### **Wrong Translation?**

1 Cor. 6:9 mentions "homosexual offenders" in a long list of persons who will not inherit the kingdom of God. This passage seems perfectly clear--until the discussions begin about the exact meaning of the original Greek word. Some say that *arseno-koitai* refers to male prostitution or to lustful, unloving and uncommitted relationships -- not to loving, permanent relationships between two men or two women.

But the literal meaning of this word is "a male who lies [sexually] with a male," showing that Paul is not simply referring to one category of homosexual behavior. There are no qualifications -- homosexual behavior is forbidden, no matter what degree of love or absence of lust is involved.

### **What Jesus Said**

The cover of one pro-gay tract reads, "What Jesus said about homosexuality." The inside pages are blank. Does this argument bolster the pro-gay position?

There are many things Jesus said that the Bible doesn't record (John 21:25). So He could have mentioned it, although He probably had no occasion--homosexuality was a capital offense among the Jews of the first century.

There are many other subjects Jesus did not mention (incest, rape, bestiality), but that doesn't mean they are permissible. Besides, Jesus always upheld the Old Testament law (Matt. 5:17-19), which strictly condemned homosexual acts. He spoke of legitimate sexuality only in a heterosexual sense, affirming celibacy as the only legitimate alternative to marriage (Matt. 19:12).

### **The Way to Freedom**

In 1 Cor. 6:9, the Apostle Paul says that homosexuals will not inherit the kingdom of God. Then he makes a startling statement: "And that is what some of you were. 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" (v. 11).

This verse contains the whole Gospel for any man or woman struggling with homosexual issues. "And that is what some of you were." What is Paul saying here? He knew former homosexuals in the church at Corinth! God had delivered Christians from that lifestyle, so here is biblical evidence that change is possible.

"You were washed." Homosexuality is not a clean, wholesome lifestyle. It defiles us, but God is able and willing to wash away the stain.

"You were sanctified." To sanctify means to set apart for God's use. So, despite the arguments of the gay theologians, a person is not walking close to the Lord when accepting and pursuing homosexuality.

"You were justified." God does not approve of homosexuality, but He is willing to call us "righteous ones" if we turn away from that behavior and follow Him. Many Christians have left homosexuality; the changes in their lives are lasting and genuine. This is the good news that men and women in the pro-gay movement need to hear.

Today, members of the gay community are aggressively pushing for acceptance of their lifestyle. They seek minority status, legalized same-sex marriage, and the right to adopt children. Anyone who opposes their agenda is labeled a "homophobic bigot" or "gay-basher."

In the face of such organized aggression, it's easy for the church to retreat. To ignore the issue. To hope that new laws will control the problem. But the issue is not that easily resolved.

Ultimately, homosexuals and lesbians will be reached just like anyone else, by a personal confrontation with the claims of Christ (see *When A Friend Says, 'I'm Gay'* in this library). We earn the right to speak that message by extending love to everyone we meet, even those involved in blatant immorality. We accept them as individuals created in God's image, knowing that their sins grieve His heart.

And remember that homosexuality is not just a problem "out there" in society. Many of our fellow church members are struggling with this issue. They need to know that God has an answer for their deepest needs. Will you tell them?

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