

Why do some people think homosexuality is wrong ?

Aims:-

1. Look at the main arguments offered by both sides
2. Look at the main Biblical evidence
3. Look at the main scientific evidence

so that

4. You can make up your own mind in a well-informed way

It may help to remember that:-

- Sexual morality may be important, but it is not a matter of *fundamental* Christian belief
- Homosexuality is not *compulsory!*
- More is at stake for the *minority* of gay Christians than the *majority* of heterosexual Conservative Christians

The basic question

Why do some people think that homosexuality is wrong?

Three main types of answer:-

1. The Bible says so
2. It's unnatural
3. It's a perverse choice

1. The Bible says homosexuality is wrong - or does it?

Big problem No. 1:

How literally should we take the Bible?

Lots of views about *Biblical Authority* e.g.

a) **Bible = God's view of God**

Every word of the Bible comes *directly* from God, so the Bible can never be wrong. You should simply *obey* it.

(Fundamentalists, Biblical literalists, conservative evangelicals)

b) **Bible = Man's view of God**

Because the Bible contains particular human beings' *interpretations* of God's presence in their lives, it needs to be interpreted carefully.

(Liberals, most New Testament scholars, Rowan Williams)

Big problem No. 2:

Ancient ideas about sexuality - The Bible assumes that *all* people are, by their innermost nature, *heterosexual*: anything else is a *deliberate* and *perverse choice*. (e.g. Romans 1). For the Biblical writers, it is simply not possible to BE a homosexual, only to be a heterosexual who DOES homosexual ACTS.

Neither the experience of many contemporary gay Christians, nor the modern scientific view of sexuality, support these assumptions. The Bible therefore has nothing to say at all about this distinctively modern understanding of sexuality

Approaching the texts; initial problems

- Does the Bible say very much about homosexuality?
- Does Jesus say anything about homosexuality?
- Did the modern understanding of "homosexuality" exist in Bible times?
- What (if anything) does the Bible say about homosexuality?
- Have the words been *translated* accurately?
- Have the words been *interpreted* fairly?

What the Bible says . . .

Jesus says nothing about homosexuality.

The four principle texts which are sometimes held to condemn homosexuality are:-

- Leviticus 18: 22**
- Genesis 19: 1 - 19**
- 1 Corinthians 6: 9 - 11**
- Romans 1: 18**

Two other texts seem to present a very positive image of same-sex relationships:-

- 2 Samuel 1: 17**
- Ruth 1: 14 - 18**

Leviticus 18: 22 The Holiness Code:-

"Thou shalt not lie with a man as with a woman; it is an abomination"

"abomination" תועבה is the most serious term of condemnation in the Old Testament; guilty verdict usually led to death by stoning.

1. Part of the "Holiness Code"
2. Clear and explicit
3. BUT the Holiness Code also bans:-
 - wearing garments made of mixed fibres,
 - planting your field with two types of grain,
 - trimming your beard,
 - consulting your horoscope,
 - eating anything with blood on it,
 - having intercourse with a menstruating wife - or adultery

All get the death penalty

4. No mention of lesbianism (? so it's OK for the girls?)

Genesis 19: 1-19 Sodom and Gomorrah:-

Two "angels" arrive in Sodom and spend the night as guests in Lot's house. All the men of Sodom surround the house and call to Lot:-

"Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them"

God later destroys Sodom

O.T, Talmud and N.T. see the "sin of Sodom" as a gross violation of the oriental obligation to show hospitality to strangers, not homosexuality.

If anything, story depicts gang-rape by predatory heterosexual men (Lot tries to buy them off with the offer of his two virgin daughters instead)

"Sin of Sodom" seen as homosexuality only after 7th century A.D. Story not really about homosexuality at all.

1 Corinthians 6: 9-11 Paul's catalogue of wickedness

"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived.....neither male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders....will inherit the Kingdom of God."

**The two Greek words (μαλακοι and αρσενοκοιται) are rare and of uncertain meaning
More likely to refer to *masturbation* and *anal penetration* (neither are exclusively homosexual activities)**

**Paul's list also denounces gossiping, drunkenness and adultery with equal ferocity;
why isn't the Church so worked up about these?**

2 Samuel 1: 26 David and Jonathan

When King David hears that Jonathan, his lifelong friend and companion, has been killed during a battle with the Amalekites, David says:-

"I grieve for you Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women."

Ruth 1: 14-18 Ruth and Naomi

Naomi has two sons. One of them marries Ruth from Moab. When Ruth's husband dies, Naomi repeatedly tells Ruth to return to her people. After much kissing and crying, Ruth says to Naomi:-

"Wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me very severely if anything but death separates you and me."

2. HOMOSEXUALITY IS UNNATURAL - OR IS IT?

Common Theory 1

Some people have a "*gut feeling*" or *intuition* that homosexuality is somehow wrong; they feel homosexuality is unnatural (the "yeuk reaction").

Problems with this view:-

Not clear if such a feeling is *rational*.

Is it supported by evidence or argument?

Is it distinguishable from:-

- simple ignorance?
- prejudice?
- cultural conditioning?
- fear of the unknown?

Common Theory 2

Natural Law Theory of Thomas Aquinas: a Medieval ethical theory which attempts to provide a rational basis for feeling that some things are "unnatural" and therefore morally wrong.

Natural Law Theory is the basis of the moral thinking of the Catholic Church

It provides the Catholic Church with a rationale for arguing that both homosexuality (and many other things) are moral "evils"

Natural Law Theory for beginners:-

1. Reasoning and reflection discover a certain *order* or certain "*patterns*" in the world around us.
2. The world around us was made by God, so God must have *intended* these patterns to exist.
3. Therefore anything that breaks these patterns is wrong.

Applying Natural Law Theory to homosexuality:-

1. In the animal world, it is commonly the case that *males* and *females* pair up in order to procreate
2. God must *intend* that males and females should get together for mating purposes
3. Therefore, any other sort of pairing (or non-procreative pairing) is against God's will

The Catholic Church therefore teaches:-

1. that homosexual *acts* are *mortal sins* (those who die with such sins unconfessed go straight to Hell)
2. that being homosexual (even if the person is celibate) is an "*intrinsic moral evil*"

(see *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Care of Homosexual Persons*, 1986)

Problems with Natural Law and "intuitive" theories

1. It reduces morality to biology
the only sexual acts that are morally right are those that involve sperm being deposited in a vagina with reproductive intent. So non-reproductive sex, contraception, masturbation and even celibacy may be considered "unnatural" and therefore morally evil
2. It ignores the importance of *love* and *commitment* in assessing the moral worth of a relationship

3. If *God is love* (e.g. the life and work of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity) it seems un-Christian to make *biological procreation* rather than *love* the basis for Christian moral judgements

4. Natural Law Theory commits a fundamental error of logical reasoning; most moral philosophers argue that it breaks "Humes' Law" and falsely claims to derive an "ought" from an "is"

5. Even if we accept the arguments of Natural Law Theory, a close look at the evidence from the natural world leads us to opposite conclusions i.e. homosexuality is perfectly "natural"

Evidence for the "naturalness" of homosexuality

Zoological

Weinrich (1991) reports more than 60 reputable scientific studies of animals which document the existence of homosexual behaviour in animals (i.e. homosexuality exists in the natural world)

Biological

Several sibling studies (e.g. Dillard and Weinrich), as well as monozyotic and dizygotic twin studies (e.g. Heston and Shields, 1966) suggest that there may be a genetic predisposition to homosexuality, especially in males

Anthropological

Clellan Ford and Frank Beach studied 76 different human cultures; the majority accepted homosexuality as a *normal* human variant

Sociological

Successive sex researchers demonstrate that homosexuality is not at all uncommon e.g. Alfred Kinsey's extensive research, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* revealed that:-

37% of all American males had homosexual contact to the point of *orgasm*
4% were *exclusively* homosexual in their preferences
Modern Scientific understanding of Sexuality

A person's sexuality:-

1. need not be *exclusively* heterosexual nor homosexual in orientation
2. is an important, not a peripheral part of the personality
3. is influenced by social and personal experiences
4. is a result of a wide variety of factors
5. has a biological basis

The biological basis of sexuality

genetic e.g. Pillard and Weinrich one half of a pair of nonidentical twins have a 1 in 20 chance of being gay if the other is; identical twins have a 1 in 4 chance

embryological e.g. Martinez Vargas and Fox (1975) sex hormones released in early stages of embryological development imprint the brain

neurophysiological e.g. Le Vey or Swaab (2001); postmortem studies show gay brains are physically different from straight brains

Conclusion:

For some people, homosexuality is entirely "natural" (i.e. as "natural" as human heterosexuality)

3. HOMOSEXUALITY IS A PERVERSE CHOICE – OR IS IT?

Argument

Some religious groups (e.g. Conservative Evangelicals) believe that being homosexual is a *deliberate choice* that some people make. This choice is *perverse* and *sinful* because it is against God's will (revealed in Scripture) or his will revealed in the order of nature.

Counter-arguments

1. Most scientific studies on sexuality suggest that sexual orientation is *discovered*, not *chosen* (e.g. Savin- Williams)
2. Characteristically, a person becomes aware of an already existing sexuality, rather than choosing one off the shelf i.e. you don't choose to be gay or straight
3. If so, does it make sense to blame someone morally for something they cannot change? (Kant's "no ought without a can")

Evidence:-

1. A person's genetic predispositions and embryological development precede the existence of conscious choice
2. The consensus of modern scientific research suggests that sexual preference and gender identity like many other fundamental structures of the personality are well established before the age of five or six. i.e. before the usually accepted age of rational consent
3. Numerous studies on the experience of gay people reveal that first awareness of same sex attraction is *very early* (e.g. Savin Williams (1998) says as early as 3 years of age, and a mean age of 7.97 years of age)
4. Sensing potential social ridicule, gay people characteristically *resist* or *deny* their sexuality for many years

Conclusion:-

These clusters of evidence suggest that homosexual orientation *precedes* conscious choice; homosexuality is not a "perverse choice" because it is *not a choice at all*.

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