



**DO YOU BELIEVE?**  
A BOOK SERIES FROM RATIO CHRISTI

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**WHAT DOES  
THE BIBLE SAY  
ABOUT SAME-SEX  
RELATIONSHIPS**

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BY CAMERON HODGE

 RATIO  
CHRISTI

**FAITH & REASON** are at odds in our culture. For many, faith has come to mean little more than wishful thinking and blind belief. Such a concept is completely foreign to the pages of Scripture and historical Christianity. As Edward Feser notes, “In short, reason tells us that there is a God and that he has revealed such-and-such a truth; faith is then a matter of believing what reason has shown God to have revealed. In that sense faith is not only not at odds with reason but is grounded in reason.”

## **WHAT IS RATIO CHRISTI?**

Ratio Christi, Latin for “the reason of Christ,” wants to help reverse this trend of anti-intellectual Christianity. We organize apologetics clubs at colleges, universities, and even for high school groups in order to strengthen the faith of Christian students and faculty and challenge the rampant atheism and secularism on most campuses. Our mission is to fill the intellectual gap, to make Christianity something worth thinking about, both personally and in the public square.

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## **A FEW WORDS BEFORE YOU READ...**

As I write this booklet, I am frequently reminded of my own journey concerning sexuality. As a former bisexual person, I too struggled with the biblical stance on same-sex relationships. What must be understood is that God, through his love for us, gives us boundaries that we should not transgress, which is for our best. God gives us boundaries for how we relate to others and Him so that we can have a relationship with him. Sin separates people from God, and the boundaries he establishes allow us to keep fellowship with him and avoid sin.<sup>1</sup> From a practical standpoint, one can relate this to how a parent loves their child, yet does not approve of everything their child does. Even in their love, they will chastise.<sup>2</sup> Jesus' love does not compensate for sin, no more so than a mother's love in itself corrects the wrongdoing of her child. What people fail to realize is that sin, of any kind, separates us from God, while God's desire is to have fellowship with us. Sin must be addressed and repented of in order to have a true relationship with him. Jesus loves people while they are sinners, and in his love, he calls them to repentance and faith in Him.

## INTRODUCTION

In a 2019 episode of *The View*, one of the cohosts responded to a Catholic bishop's disapproval of Christians participating in gay pride month festivities. She explained that her Catholic faith "always taught me, what would Jesus do? And I know Jesus would be attending that pride parade, with pride."<sup>3</sup> She went on to say "And I also know that God is love, Jesus is love, and love is love."<sup>4</sup> The assumed implication was that the bishop's disapproval was unloving and – more importantly – un-Christlike. Such sentiments are common among those who adopt a progressive attitude toward sexuality; love and acceptance are the driving forces behind what is considered morally right. While Scripture places homosexuality outside the bounds of God's plan for sex and marriage, societal attitudes toward homosexual practice are changing. Over half of Americans now support same-sex marriage,<sup>5</sup> and churches across America are seeing a similar shift in beliefs, causing widespread division. For example, the second largest Protestant denomination in the United States, The United Methodist Church, announced a planned split of the denomination due to disagreement over the acceptance of gay marriage and the licensing of LGBTQ+ clergy.<sup>6</sup>

Along with a cultural shift toward progressive sexual ethics, there has been a movement to reinterpret Christian scriptures to affirm homosexual practice. Since Scripture is the foundation of Christian teaching, such reinterpretations are necessary for any Christian movement to achieve widespread acceptance by the church. In light of this growing movement in the church to veer away from the traditional teaching of the church on homosexuality, it is important to provide a clear presentation of the traditional Christian worldview regarding same-sex relationships. This booklet will seek to do just that. First, we will discuss the traditional Christian view of sexuality. Then, we will address progressive responses to the traditional view.

### Good God

Foundational to the traditional Christian worldview is that God is good. As C.S

Lewis reflected “God is not merely good, but goodness; goodness is not merely divine, but God.”<sup>7</sup> God does not simply do good things, but God is goodness itself.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, this good God designed and created a good world and everything in it with a particular order, and purpose.<sup>9</sup> When we look at something as simple as a sunflower seed, or the way the clouds form in the sky, everything has an intended purpose and order. Creation itself gives evidence to this good God, and his good purposes for everything he created.<sup>10</sup>

## God’s Created Intent for Sexual Relationships

The traditional (or biblical) Christian view maintains that within this good order of creation, God created humanity. Human beings were designed to be relational, and God created man and woman to be in a particular sort of relationship with one another.<sup>11</sup> According to the traditional story, these two biological sexes were designed to complement one another physically, to form a marital union, procreate, and take care of the earth.<sup>12</sup> In Genesis 2:18 God says that he would create woman as the first man’s – Adam’s – *helper*, as his *complement* (HCSB). The word translated as “helper” in Hebrew (*ezer*) does not suggest an inferior, subservient role as some might infer.<sup>13</sup> God himself is also referred to as “Elohim-Ezer,” several times within Scripture which means “God my helper.”<sup>14</sup> In fact, “*ezer*” was also used in military terms to denote an ally.<sup>15</sup> The woman was uniquely designed to live alongside the man as an allied partner, with equal value and importance as they fulfilled God’s instructions. God desired a helper for Adam that would be *suitable* or *complement* him, not just physically, but emotionally and spiritually.

According to the creation narrative, God intentionally fashioned Eve from Adam, giving her differences and similarities from Adam. Eve’s sameness was necessary in that Adam needed compatibility—someone like him spiritually, physically, and emotionally match. However, it was the sameness and differences together that made Eve (a woman) the best helper. The Hebrew word used to describe the type of helper that God desired for Adam, in Genesis 2:18, is *kenegdo* (כְּנֶגְדּוֹ). This is a compound word where *ke* means “as” or “like” and *neged* “opposite,” “against” or “in front of.”<sup>16</sup> This word denotes “what is in front of, corresponding to, beyond, before.”<sup>17</sup> Literally, this word is saying that God desired a help “as opposite him” Adam or “like against him.”<sup>18</sup> God desired a corresponding helper who was like Adam but also his opposite: a biological woman that was divinely created to complement man. The divinely created biological complementarity of the sexes forms the foundation of the traditional view of sexuality, in which sex properly forms a permanent, complementary union between a man and a woman that is ordered toward procreation.

Jesus’ words in Matthew 19 further reinforces the traditional biblical interpretation of marriage between man and woman. When asked about the lawfulness of divorce, Jesus says to the Pharisees “Haven’t you read the Scriptures?” Jesus replied. “They record that from the beginning ‘God made them male and female.’” And he said, “‘This explains why

a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.’ Since they are no longer two but one, let no one split apart what God has joined together.”<sup>19</sup> Jesus reaffirms the creation design for sexuality, demonstrating that the correct answer to the question of divorce is rooted in a correct understanding of the nature of marriage as a permanent physical and spiritual union between a biological male and female “from the beginning of creation.”<sup>20</sup>

## **Fallen Creation**

Crucial to understanding the traditional view is that sin and evil have corrupted God’s original design for creation. God originally created a perfect, sinless world. But sin entered the world through Adam and Eve’s disobedience to God’s commands. As a result, sin spread throughout the world, touching and marring every part of God’s created order.<sup>21</sup> The entrance and spreading of sin throughout the world is known as “the Fall,” since humanity and the world are now “fallen” from their original state of perfection and are now in a state of moral and physical degradation. The Genesis account of creation highlights the corruption of nature and the corruption of the relationship between men and women. Adam and Eve (man and woman) were originally designed to live in perfect harmony together, have children, and work together to take care of the earth.<sup>22</sup> However, sin would make the command to “be fruitful and multiply” painful and difficult.<sup>23</sup> Sin has corrupted how men and women relate to one another including how they relate to one another sexually. For this reason, those who hold to a traditional view see the creation story as an example of God’s created intent for sexual and marital relationships before the corruption of creation. Though sin has caused the creation to become imperfect, Scripture and nature still give evidence to God’s created design for humanity.

## **Natural Law**

Also central to the traditional Christian view of sexuality is the idea of “natural law.” “Natural law” refers to the moral standards and patterns in the natural world discoverable through human reason unaided by God’s special revelation. With reference to sex, Natural Law refers to the fact that someone can look at the nature of humanity and human sexuality, and through reason deduce what sexual practices ought to be followed. For example, natural law can teach us that sex is not just about the experience but includes morally significant purposes that serve to fulfill fixed and unchanging marriage and family functions.<sup>24</sup> In particular, natural law helps us rationally discern three major truths about sexuality.

First, maleness and femaleness are based on physicality. We can distinguish what being male and female are, based on the natural way our bodies are made for reproduction. In all sexually dimorphic species, reproduction requires two distinct body plans – one that produces sperm and one that produces eggs. “Male” is the label used for those whose body plans are ordered toward the production of sperm, and “female” is the label used for those whose body plans are ordered toward the production of eggs and – in mammals – the gestation of young. Some may point to the presence of intersexed individuals as evidence that more than two binary sexes exist. However, the information we have about intersex conditions contradicts that belief. Studies show that the vast majority (99%) of people who have an intersex condition are unambiguously male or female. For the 1% of people who have an intersex condition where the biological sex is ambiguous, no new biological sex has been created. As Preston Sprinkle points out, a more accurate description would be that some people exhibit a combination of both biological sexes.<sup>25</sup> Nature only provides humanity with two biological sexes which corresponds to Genesis’s account of creation, in which God created male and female.<sup>26</sup>

Second, the way our bodies are sexually designed points to the natural purpose or end goal for sexual intercourse.<sup>27</sup> The natural end goal for sexual practice is procreation, and the natural purpose of sexual pleasure is to induce sexual activity so that the heterosexual couple procreates.<sup>28</sup> Procreation is inherently heterosexual.<sup>29</sup> Some may respond that procreation is not a necessity for marriage, and it is true that some couples do not have children, whether out of choice or due to uncontrollable circumstances, and these couples still marry. However, those arguments miss the point: nature has a purpose for sex whether or not particular individuals are able or willing to fulfill that purpose. Natural Law is the discernment of normativity in nature: nature’s design and purpose. Neither genetic defects nor human decisions change the natural purpose of sex. When an infertile married man and woman have sex, they are acting in accordance with the natural design of their bodies, even though extrinsic health factors prevent the creation of a child. In contrast, when people engage in homosexual sex, they are intentionally going against the way nature designed their bodies to function sexually. While this statement may sound controversial, it really isn’t. One does not need to be religious at all to agree that the natural purpose for sex is procreation, and that homosexual sexual activity is violative of that purpose.<sup>30</sup> The controversial question (to which we turn next) is whether an intentional violation of this natural design is immoral.

Third, through natural law one can understand that violating the natural way our bodies were designed to function, can actually cause physical harm. Scientific studies of STD transmission are very helpful here. For example, a 2010 press release from the Center for Disease Control titled “*CDC Analysis Provides New Look at Disproportionate Impact of HIV and Syphilis Among U.S. Gay and Bisexual Men,*” produced alarming statistics as to the potential harm caused by homosexual activity.<sup>31</sup> This CDC analysis revealed that the rate of new HIV diagnoses among men who have sex with men is more than 44 times that

of other men and it is also more than 40 times that of women. The CDC also found that the rate of primary and secondary syphilis among men who have sex with men is more than 46 times that of other men and more than 71 times that of women. The CDC also reported that receptive anal sex is 18 times more risky for HIV acquisition than receptive vaginal sex. Furthermore in 2012, 75% of reported syphilis cases were among gay and bisexual men – a group which only makes up 2% of the population. The National LGBT Cancer Network reported that an estimated 61% of HIV-negative and 93% of HIV-positive gay and bisexual men have anal HPV (Human Papillomavirus) infections compared to 50% or less of heterosexual men.<sup>32</sup> The network also reported that men who have sex with men are at increased risk for anal cancer compared to the general population, and this is primarily due to the presence of HPV.<sup>33</sup> These negative effects point to the harmfulness of violating God’s sexual order. As Edward Feser explains:

*Since the final cause of human sexual capacities is procreation, what is good for human beings in the use of those capacities is to use them only in a way consistent with this final cause or purpose. This is a necessary truth; for the good for us is defined by our nature and the final causes of its various elements. It cannot possibly be good for us to use them in any other way, whether an individual person thinks it is or not.<sup>34</sup>*

We can perceive through the natural world that homosexual practice is harmful, not only because it subverts the natural purpose for sex—procreation—but because of the measurably deleterious health outcomes for those who engage in this lifestyle.

The focus on “natural law” raises an important question: does nature’s design carry with it a moral “ought” or “ought not”? It may be the case that what is best, or good for us sexually does not necessarily indicate what is morally good. Sure, we can look at nature and see that heterosexual sex is the natural ideal, because male and female bodies were made to fit together sexually and procreate. But why should we live in accordance with that natural reality? What is the driving force behind not only recognizing that heterosexual sex is the natural ideal, but that it is morally obligatory? Edward Feser gets to the heart of this by noting that the presence of the human will and intellect allow us to discern what is not only naturally best but also morally good.<sup>35</sup> Through natural law, we can determine what is best for our bodies sexually, and how sexual relationships are designed to function. And once we have understood the healthiest path forward, the moral choice is to align our will and actions with that which is good for ourselves and for others. Of course, natural law is not the “end-all-be-all” in regard to what is moral and what is not. But nature can help point us in the right direction. Remember, from the Christian perspective, we were created by the eternally existing, transcendent God who designed the world to function in a specific way. As Nancy Pearcey explains, nature gives us signs not only of God’s existence, but also of his purposes in creation.<sup>36</sup> Thus, the way our bodies are designed points to our purpose as humans. We are not meaningless beings left to create our own values. We are



unique human beings, made in the image of God, ordered toward love in a certain way. Homosexual practice violates the natural way God intended biological men and women to operate, and violating God’s will for humanity is immoral.

The sexual boundaries that the traditional Christian worldview upholds might seem damaging to those who hold more progressive views, because the traditional view implies that individuals should restrain or resist certain desires they may have. To modern ears, this sounds outright oppressive. We live in a culture that views life through a hedonistic lens which places great value on attaining personal pleasure and “finding one’s truth.” The pursuit of happiness is the goal, sometimes at any cost; but these are often vain pursuits that ultimately leave one empty. In the Hebrew scriptures, King Solomon achieved all the riches and pleasure and power anyone could want, and yet found all of his pursuits meaningless. He realized that all of the indulgences in the world could not provide ultimate meaning to his life. Solomon states:

*So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. <sup>10</sup>And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. <sup>11</sup>Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.*

**ECCLESIASTES 2:9-11**

If Christianity is true, then the ultimate meaning of life is “relationship” with God through Jesus Christ, and through that relationship becoming more like him—more conformed to his likeness— and in turn, modeling that “likeness” to the world.<sup>37</sup> Exemplifying Christ in our lives means properly loving God, and properly loving others. Loving others in a Christ-like manner involves proper sexual practice. Every person who decides to become a follower of Jesus is held to the same moral standard. LGBTQ+ people are no different. Everyone is faced with an element of suffering that accompanies the Christian life. Every day, people are faced with the reality of giving up things that they desire, for the sake of God’s kingdom. No one made this reality of sacrifice more clearer than Jesus who said such things as “Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me” and “If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you.”<sup>38</sup> The struggle against our destructive fleshly desires is part of what it means to be a Christian, so it certainly does not warrant a reinterpretation of Scripture. In fact, the presence of suffering in response to following Jesus is a clear mark of a disciple.<sup>39</sup> As a final note, the condemnations of homosexual practice in the Bible do not apply to sexual orientation. They apply only to homosexual acts. This bears repeating: Scripture is not condemning anyone’s sexual orientation, nor promising that God will necessarily change it for us, it condemns the embodiment—the acting out of—that orientation. Now that we have

addressed the foundational aspects of the traditional Christian view of sexuality, let's look at several scriptural references that Christians use to support the traditional perspective.

## THE BIBLICAL TEXTS CONCERNING HOMOSEXUAL ACTIVITY

There are five passages of scripture that explicitly reference homosexual practice: Leviticus 18:22, Leviticus 20:13, Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, and 1 Timothy 1: 9-10. These biblical references are often called the “passages of terror” or the “clobber verses,” as they are supposedly used to harm LGBTQ+ people. Pastor Colby Martin remarked that these six passages of scripture, “have been used to make gay people believe that you cannot be both gay and Christian. Being told that you are not welcome, that you do not belong, or that you are less than, is a clobbering of the heart, soul and mind.”<sup>40</sup> Thus, revisionists have sought to demonstrate that in these passages, and others, the Bible is not making judgements on homosexual practice. Let’s take a deeper look at each of these passages of Scripture.

### The Levitical Prohibitions

Leviticus 18:22 and Leviticus 20:13 are the two passages in the Old Testament that have been traditionally interpreted to explicitly forbid homosexual practice. Leviticus 18:22 reads, “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.”

And Leviticus 20:13 is similar: “If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. These two passages of Scripture are a part of what is known as the Old Testament Law which was given by God to guide the Israelites in properly relating to God and to one another as a holy people.<sup>41</sup> In this law, homosexual practice is not simply prohibited, but is called an *abomination*. From the traditional perspective, this passage indicates that God considers homosexual practice to be exceedingly wicked. This is not simply referring to homosexual practice as a cultural taboo, or as “especially bad.” The word abomination, used in this manner, indicates that homosexual practice is an unnatural violation of God’s created order and his design for human sexuality.

## The New Testament and Homosexual Practice

There are three passages of Scripture in the New Testament that address homosexual practice: Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, and 1 Timothy 1: 8-10. In particular, Romans 1:26-27 provides one of the most significant discussions of homosexual practice in scripture:

*For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature;<sup>27</sup> and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.*

The traditional Christian understanding of Romans 1 is that the people suppressed the truth about God. People became foolish and sinful in their thinking and worshiped created images of what they wanted God to be. Since people chose to worship other things instead of God, he let them indulge in whatever sinful actions their hearts devised. The passage points to a causal connection: perversion of worship leading to perversion of sexual relations. When one ceases to have a correct view of God, it distorts their perception in other areas of their life, Homosexual practice is one of the sinful acts in which man began to engage when God left him to do as he pleased.<sup>42</sup>

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1: 9-10 are additional Scriptures which look negatively on homosexual practice:

*Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,<sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.*

**1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-10**

*...understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers,<sup>10</sup> the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine...*

**1 TIMOTHY 1:9-10**

Both verses list homosexual practice among a vice list of sins. From reading these passages, it should not be hard to see why traditionalists take them to be condemning, and not condoning of homosexual practice. With this brief overview of the Scriptural

references to homosexuality, let's address the common objections that people raise to the traditional interpretations.

## ADDRESSING OBJECTIONS TO THE SCRIPTURES

### Leviticus 18: 22 and Leviticus 20:13

The traditional interpretations of scripture as prohibiting homosexual practice are widely seen as irrelevant, not only to the broader culture, but to many who consider themselves Christians. There are two primary reasons why “progressive” (for lack of a better term) Christians dismiss such passages: (1) They argue that the Old Testament law is no longer binding for Christians, and (2) the prohibitions reflect an ancient patriarchal and pagan culture which influenced the negative beliefs about same-sex relationships. We will look at each of these arguments in turn.

It is commonly said that Christians no longer need to abide by the Old Testament law in Leviticus because Jesus Christ fulfilled the Old Testament law, as he himself said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matt. 5:17). Progressives argue that Jesus came and fulfilled the requirements of the law, thereby making it obsolete and there is now no need to follow the law in order to be right with God. The law therefore has no ongoing authority.<sup>43</sup> Thus, the laws prohibiting homosexual practice are therefore no longer binding.

First, it is correct that the Old Testament legal code is not universally binding for the Christian today. Much of the legal code included civil and ceremonial laws that were indeed fulfilled by Christ. However, while the full legal code is not binding, the moral instruction contained within the law is unchanged. In fact, the New Testament affirms the continuing authority of the law’s moral principles that transcend time and culture. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus gives the contemporary Christian the hermeneutical principle needed to understand their relationship with the Old Testament law. To quote a standard textbook on Biblical interpretation, “All of the Old Testament applies to Christians, but none of it applies apart from its fulfillment in Christ,”<sup>44</sup> So when reading an Old Testament law, we can ask two questions: **1) Does the law explicitly teach a moral principle?** and **2) Is the law reaffirmed in the New Testament?** Both of the Old Testament verses quoted above contain a clear moral condemnation of homosexual acts, and the New Testament

reaffirms these condemnations.

The second response to the so-called “clobber” passages is that homosexual practice was prohibited because ancient societies were patriarchal. These patriarchal societies considered women inferior, and a man assuming the role of a woman in sex (being penetrated) was generally seen as negative. This negative perception of men in homosexual practice would have been the reason homosexual practice was prohibited. The primary problem with this reasoning is that both men and women were considered equally guilty in the sinfulness of homosexual practice “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” (Leviticus 20:13). The patriarchy argument does not fit well here because both parties (the penetrator and the one being penetrated) are held equally culpable.

What about the idea that these passages only condemn homosexuality in the context of pagan worship? Even if homosexual practice was conducted in the context of pagan worship, that has no bearing on the Scriptures pertaining to homosexual practice. In both Leviticus 18:22 and Leviticus 20:13, homosexual practice is listed with other sins that have nothing to do with idolatry. Even when the prohibitions of homosexual practice are restated in the New Testament, there is no connection to paganism as the reason for the prohibition. Leviticus consistently prohibits any and all forms of homosexual practice.

In response to the labeling of homosexual practice as an abomination in Leviticus, progressive Christians often argue that this word only describes pagan worship and idolatry. However, the word abomination (*to'evah*) is used in other places in the Old Testament that have nothing to do with idolatry:

*There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him: <sup>17</sup>haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, <sup>18</sup>a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, <sup>19</sup>a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.*

**PROVERBS 6: 16-19**

The meaning of the word *to'evah* is not limited to pagan idolatry,<sup>45</sup> and the context of both Levitical prohibitions do not support that reasoning.

These acts were not sinful only for the Israelites; God prohibited homosexual practice for every nation.<sup>46</sup> God accused the nations around the Israelites for sinning against him by engaging in homosexual practices, and it was those sins, among others, that warranted God’s judgment. This indicates that the laws against homosexual practice were not simply temporary or culturally, as some revisionists suggest. God’s prohibitions of homosexual practice in Leviticus transcend time and culture, and they are relevant for the Christian today.

## Romans 1:26-27

Much debate surrounds Paul's words in Romans 1:26-27:

*For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.*

Those who aim for a more culture-conforming interpretation of these passages of scripture often argue that Paul is not referring to loving, monogamous same-sex relationships, but rather to excessively lustful same-sex relationships, homosexual practice committed in idolatrous worship, and patriarchal standards of sexual practice. All three objections will be addressed below.

It is, of course, true that homosexual practice was a part of pagan idolatry in the Greco-Roman world, and during Paul's time, same-sex relationships were sometimes seen as born out of excessive desire and lust.<sup>47</sup> However, even though historical evidence demonstrates a perception of homosexual practice as a manifestation of excessive sexual desire in the ancient world, there were other perceptions of same-sex relationships that were not considered excessive. For example, it was publicly known that Emperor Hadrian (first and early second century) was explicitly homosexual though he was married.<sup>48</sup> Hadrian had a young lover named Antinous whom he was known to deeply love.<sup>49</sup> Those seeking to revise Scripture must account for the examples of homosexual relationships in Paul's time that contradict the "excessive lust" interpretation of Romans 1.

A careful reading of Romans 1 challenges the idea that Paul was referring only to homosexual practice done in the context of idolatrous worship. In the verses that precede Romans 1:26-27, the apostle Paul signals that engaging in homosexual practice was a sign that humanity had fallen away from God's creational order. Beginning in verse 18, Paul explains that Gentiles (non-Jews) had suppressed their knowledge of the truth about God, and turned idolatry:

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.<sup>19</sup> For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.<sup>20</sup> For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.<sup>21</sup> For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.<sup>22</sup> Claiming to be wise, they became fools,<sup>23</sup> and exchanged the*



*glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.*

**ROMANS 1:18-23**

In these passages of scripture, homosexual practice is listed among other sins in Paul's "vice list." A vice list is a set of qualities or behaviors that characterize morality or immorality. Vice lists are used in various areas of literature.<sup>50</sup> Homosexuality in Romans 1: 18-23 is a symptom of a heart that has rejected God's truth:

*And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.<sup>29</sup> They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips,<sup>30</sup> slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,<sup>31</sup> foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.<sup>32</sup> Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.*

**ROMANS 1: 28-32**

The argument that Paul's view of homosexual practice was only sinful due to idolatry, would have to extend to all of the sins with which homosexual practice is listed. The progressive would also have to make the argument that the other sins Paul lists, such as murder and insolence, are only deemed sinful when practiced in the context of idolatry. This line of reasoning does not make sense within the context of Romans 1. There is nothing within the context of Romans 1 that limits the negative view of homosexual practice to the context of idolatry, excessive lust or anything else. Paul makes the claim that all male and female homosexual practice are the consequence of a heart that has rejected the truth about God.

Paul writes that homosexual practice is "contrary to nature" (*para physin*) in Romans 1:26-27. Many explanations have been given to explain-away what seems the fairly obvious meaning of Paul's phrase. Many progressive revisionists have argued that Paul's use of "contrary to nature," is rooted in the patriarchal views of Paul's time. The Hellenistic culture around the early Christians was patriarchal and society generally viewed women as inferior. Thus, homosexual practice placed a man in the sexual position of a woman which was looked down upon. However, Paul's theological perspective must be considered. Paul had a Jewish upbringing. His scriptural references would have been those of the Old Testament, and the Torah which prohibited homosexual practice. Paul's utilization of "nature" in Romans 1:26-27 appeals to an intuitive conception of what "ought to be" in the world God designed.<sup>51</sup> When Paul wrote that homosexual practice was against nature, he was explaining that homosexual practice was contrary to the way God created men and women to relate sexually. Paul's argument in Romans 1 points to the concept of

natural law which will be addressed later.

Paul's sexual ethics are rooted in creation, just as Jesus' sexual ethics were (see, for example Matthew 19:3-6 and Mark 10:6-9). Paul saw homosexual practice as a major indication of a life disdainful of God's lordship. Paul's sweeping condemnation of homosexual practice was in stark contrast to the Greco-Roman world around him that condoned homosexual practice under certain circumstances, such as between master and slave. Sexual morality was a major distinction between Jewish (and Christian) culture and the pagan, Hellenistic cultures.

## 1 Corinthians 6: 9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:10

The hermeneutic debate over 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy centers around how to correctly translate two terms the Apostle Paul uses: *arsenokoitai* and *malakos*. It is commonly argued that *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi* refer to specific exploitive homosexual acts like pederasty, or to the patriarchy of the time that saw women as inferior to men. It is further argued that Paul's words are vague and unclear when he uses *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*.

Let's start with the first word: *malakos*. The literal definition of *malakos* is delicate, soft, gentle, or effeminate.<sup>52</sup> And *malakos* is indeed used in other scriptures to mean "soft" or "delicate."<sup>53</sup> However, there is historical evidence that *malakos* was also used to denote the receptive partner in homosexual practice, and effeminate men.<sup>54</sup> *Malakos* had a wide-range of meaning in Greek literature and its meaning depends on the various ways ancient authors used it.<sup>55</sup> In both 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 Paul uses *malakos* as part of a vice list of actions that he considers profoundly immoral. These sins hinder people from entering heaven. It is unlikely that Paul would have made such a serious judgment simply about effeminacy. When we see that Paul uses *malakoi* in tandem with *arsenokoites*, it becomes evident that Paul was referring to a more serious sexual infraction. To see how, let's look at Paul's use of *arsenokoites*.

The most compelling evidence that Paul is referring generally to all homosexual practice is the word *arsenokoitai* and its use in tandem with *malakos*. This is a unique word that does not appear in any literature before Paul.<sup>56</sup> Paul coins a word from the Levitical prohibitions, which prohibit all homosexual practice; he creates "*arsenokoitai*" from its use in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament). In the Septuagint, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 reads as follows:

Leviticus 18:22: meta **arsenos** ou koimēthēsē **koitēn** gynaikos ("you shall not lie with a male as with a woman")

Leviticus 20:13: hos an kith meta **arsenos** **koitēn** gynaikos ("whoever shall lie with a male as with a woman")

When Paul pens 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:10 he writes:

*Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality (oute malakoi oute arsenokoitai),<sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.*

**1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-10**

*...understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers,<sup>10</sup> the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality (arsenokoitai), enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine...*

**1 TIMOTHY 1:9-10**

Paul is clearly referring to the homosexual practice as mentioned in Leviticus. The words that Paul uses in the Greek which he borrows from the Septuagint are *arsen* which is defined as “male” and *koite* which is defined as “bed.” The word Paul uses is *arsenokoites*, and he uses the plural form of the verb (*arsenokoitai/arsenokoitais*) when he references homosexual practice in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10. New Testament theologian Robert Gagnon points out that the word *koites* has a sexual connotation and the (t)es suffix of the word translates “a man/one who.”<sup>57</sup> Consequently, the word that Paul constructs is *arsenokoitai* and can be translated as “bedders of men,” or those who take males to bed.”<sup>58</sup> That the word *koites* has a sexual connotation can also be seen in other passages of scripture and in Greek literature.<sup>59</sup> For example Oedipus, the Greek mythological King of Thebes, was described as *metrokoitēs*, “a man who lies with his mother.”<sup>60</sup> If one wants to make the argument that Paul had a narrower meaning in mind when he referenced homosexual practice, there are other words like *paiderastes* that Paul could have used if he was referring to exploitive homosexual practices like pederasty.<sup>61</sup> Yet Paul does not do that. He uniquely coins the word *arsenokoitai* from the Levitical Holiness Code which prohibits all forms of homosexual practice. When used together with *malakos*, it becomes explicit that Paul is referring to all forms of homosexual practice, to both parties in the act. Now that we have addressed some of the common objections regarding the scriptural prohibitions of homosexual practice, let’s address the argument from fixed sexual orientation.

## SEXUAL ORIENTATION IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

One of the primary reasons the orthodox biblical view of homosexual practice has been challenged in recent years, is due to the belief that the ancient world had no concept of sexual orientation. A Sexual orientation refers to an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to men, women, or both sexes.<sup>62</sup> Sexual orientation also includes a person's sense of identity based on those attractions, related behaviors, and membership in a community of others who share those attractions.<sup>63</sup> The argument is that since the ancient world had no concept of sexual orientation, and we do in contemporary times, the writers of the Bible were not referring to same-sex attracted individuals as we think of them today. Sexual orientation is believed to be a modern concept, and this new way of understanding sexuality warrants a new understanding of the scriptures regarding homosexual practice. The ancient world saw homosexual practice as a sexual preference, or a choice one makes, rather than coming from a fixed, internal orientation.<sup>64</sup>

While it is true that many ancients saw homosexual practice as a choice, historical evidence does point to awareness of sexual orientation in the ancient world. In fact, there is a wealth of evidence that contradicts the claim that the ancient world had no concept of sexual orientation.<sup>65</sup> Feminist scholar Bernadette Brooten provides crucial historical evidence concerning astrology that shows there was an awareness of sexual orientation in the ancient world. She explains that astrology, which was widely practiced, was used to determine one's sexual orientation. For example, Brooten documents the work of several astrologers like Dorotheos of Sidon in the first century A.D. He wrote that when Venus and the Moon are in a certain location, a woman will be a lesbian, or a man will be homosexual.<sup>66</sup> She documents several other astrologers from the first century and onward who share similar perspectives about the forming of one's sexual orientation: Manetho Claudius Ptolemy, Vettius Valens, Hermes Trismegistos to name a few. According to her analysis, ancient astrologers believed the configuration of the stars produced a spectrum of sexual inclination and orientations.<sup>67</sup>

Another key piece of evidence comes from the third-century church father, Hippolytus. Hippolytus condemned the practice of astrology and called the sexual orientations

they were perceived to produce as “unnatural lusts.”<sup>68</sup> This is important because it reiterates that there was a general concept of sexual orientation in the ancient world, and that same recognition existed among Christians.

In summary, the belief that there was no concept of sexual orientation in the ancient world is not historically accurate. The Apostle Paul, who wrote the prohibitions of homosexual practice in The New Testament, was well-educated and well-traveled, and well acquainted with Greco-Roman culture. It is quite likely that he was aware of the culture’s varying perspectives of sexuality, and sexual orientation. However, whether or not the biblical writers knew of sexual orientation would not have been a factor in their inspired writings which deemed homosexual practice a sin. The primary argument was God’s created intent for human sexuality.

The sexual orientation argument also fails because it neglects the theological truths of God’s omniscience and biblical inspiration. God is omniscient, which means he is all knowing. This indicates that he has infinite knowledge about everything and everyone that has ever existed. Thus, when God created humanity, he knew the complexities of human nature and knew everything that we would ever experience and feel. This omniscient God inspired the biblical authors to write what they wrote concerning sexuality. God directed the thoughts of the writers so that they communicated the thoughts that God desired to be expressed, including the statements about the wrongfulness of homosexual practice.<sup>69</sup>

## **Where Do We Obtain Our Definition of Love?**

As mentioned in the introduction to this booklet, the phrase “Jesus is love,” and “love is love” are popular. The word “love” is used by progressives who advocate for a more inclusive reading of Scripture and to substantiate same-sex relationships. Same-Sex relationships are argued to have the same ability of heterosexual relationships to embody love and sacrifice. However, whether or not same-sex couples truly love one another is not in question. For the Christian, the question is “are we loving in the right way?” Love cannot be divorced from truth, since an action may seem loving at first blush but ultimately be destructive. As a simple illustration, imagine you find a woman who is severely malnourished, and because you love her and want to help her, you give her a full meal. What you fail to realize is that her body is so malnourished that it cannot digest a full meal, and she dies as a result. You may have felt that you were helping her, and even sincerely cared for her, but because you failed to understand the truth about her needs, you ended up harming her instead. Because there is an objective reality to what is physically good for a person, it is impossible to properly love someone without understanding and pursuing what is physically good for them.

There is no doubt that same-sex couples may deeply care for one another, and willingly

sacrifice their life for the other. However, loving someone involves desiring what is best for them, and from the biblical standpoint, that best is rooted in righteousness. Jesus said the Old Testament law could be summed up in two commands: love God and love others (Deut. 6:4-7; Matt. 22:34-40; Mk 12:28-34; Gal. 5:13-15). The basis of the Old Testament law was to govern the Israelites in how to love God and others. The prohibition of homosexual practice was a way in which God commanded the Israelites to love one another properly. The sexual practices that were prohibited were designed to show the Israelites how to properly relate to one another sexually. Violating these commands violated God's order for human sexual relations and violated the way in which he designed people to love and relate to one another. After Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament law, thus putting an end to it, Paul explains that we are now under the law of Christ (Gal. 3:24, 6:1-2).<sup>70</sup> The law of Christ reiterates the basis of the Old Testament law, which commands people to love God and love others.<sup>71</sup> Biblically loving someone is rooted in the advancement of truth and righteousness. Homosexual relationships are not righteous or holy. The Bible considers them sinful, and engaging in homosexual practice is not properly loving the other person. No matter how loving same-sex relationships are, they are never biblically acceptable.

Love is not what ultimately makes a marriage biblical and morally acceptable in the eyes of God. Love is an aspect of biblical marriage,<sup>72</sup> but that is not the defining factor for what makes a marriage biblical. The Bible is clear that biological sex is a major factor in what constitutes a biblical marriage. No matter how much a same-sex couple loves one another, their marriage would not be biblical. Nor does love between a homosexual couple erase the consistent biblical determination that homosexual practice is a sin. Homosexual practice does not cease to be sinful simply because two people love one another. The love that a same-sex couple has for one another does not erase God's standard that marriage is between a biological man and biological woman. When we truly love another person, we desire, not only a righteous relationship with them, but that they would live righteously before God. Entering into homosexual practice violates a fundamental aspect of what the Bible indicates what it truly means to love someone else. Thus, while loving someone else is a powerful affection, it is not enough to make a union biblical if the union is not biblically righteous in the eyes of God. The Bible does not support loving same-sex marriages.

## CONCLUSION

Finally, Jesus does love everyone, including those who identify as LGBTQ+. Every man and woman, no matter their sexual or gender identity, is valued by God. Every person that has ever existed and that will ever exist was made in the image of God. Jesus unequivocally loves everyone. Nonetheless, his love does not indicate his approval. The love Jesus has for each and every person does not mean that he approves of everything they do. The traditional Christian worldview affirms the goodness of God and his intended purposes for his creation including sexual relationships between one married man and one married woman.





## ENDNOTES

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2 Proverbs 3:12, Hebrews 12:6.

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28 Ibid., 118.

29 Ibid., 116.

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