

F.A.Q.s about the Homosexual Issue

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QUESTION: Doesn't the Bible tell us not to judge?

In point of fact for every one passage that speaks against judging, there are hundreds that compel us to judge, even command us to judge. How are we to understand this apparent contradiction? The simple answer is that we are to judge thoughts, words, desires and behaviors as being right or wrong, good or evil, holy or sinful, of the Spirit or of the flesh—according to what the scriptures and the Holy Spirit reveal. How else can we come to a knowledge of the truth and live moral lives ourselves before God? But we are never to judge people in the sense of accusing them (of being evil in themselves) or condemning them (as being unworthy of mercy and love). We are to learn how to separate the person from the sin (as our Father in heaven does), so that with love and compassion for others, we might be able to help them with their sin.

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." Matthew 7:1-5 ESV

QUESTION: Didn't Jesus reach out to and embrace people who were outcast by society?

It is a truly beautiful and instructive thing about our Lord that He loved, accepted and hung out with those who were outcast or otherwise marginalized by society: tax collectors, prostitutes, wine-bibbers (alcoholics) and gluttons. Clearly, we should all go and do likewise. But let us also be clear that He loved, accepted and hung out with everyone He met (who would let Him) and that He called everyone to repentance and to a radically changed life characterized by following Him and becoming like Him. Tax collectors gave back what they stole (see Luke 19:1-10 for the story of Zacchaeus), adulterers were commanded to sin no more (John 8:11), and prostitutes loved much because they were forgiven much (Luke 7:47). Jesus told Simon Peter and Andrew that He would teach them how to become fishers of men. What He showed the disciples is that unlike the Pharisees who expected the "fish" to clean themselves first, He caught fish first (with His love and acceptance) and then He cleaned them (with His call to repentance and entire devotion to Himself).

QUESTION: Jesus didn't say anything about this issue, did He?

Jesus never spoke directly to this issue for a very simple reason: it was a non-issue in His day. Judaism stood apart from the surrounding cultures in consistently, universally and emphatically rejecting homosexual behavior as sinful. Other cultures may have been mixed or moderate in their views, but Israel never was. The Hebrew Scriptures, both in



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the Law and in the writings of the prophets, rejected all homosexual activity without any dissenting voices in the texts. The better argument from silence is to say that although Jesus freely overturned Jewish miss-readings of scripture whenever He encountered them, He didn't oppose Judaism's stance on this issue, because He was in agreement with it. It is worth remembering that Jesus didn't speak directly to the sin of incest, or of bestiality, or of prostitution. Surely His silence doesn't imply consent to these sins.

But was Jesus silent on this issue? We have two clear indications that He was not. The first indication comes from the many references by which He completely affirmed the Hebrew Scriptures as being the unchanging Word of God.

"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. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:17-19 ESV

The second comes from His teaching on God's purpose in creation (also Mark 10:6).

He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." Matthew 19:4-6 ESV

Have we not also read this? The stated intention of the Creator is for the man to be joined to the woman that they might become one flesh. This is the union that God blesses, because it is the joining together that He does. Homosexuality contradicts the design of the Creator (in creating man for woman) and the purpose of that design (that they become fruitful and multiply and fill the earth).

QUESTION: Paul and the Old Testament may have been hard on this issue, but surely Jesus was more compassionate and understanding?

Actually no one in scripture is harder on sexual sin than Jesus. Far from removing the Law's strict ruling against adultery, Jesus went even further by declaring that both looking with lust and sexually desiring another (lust in the heart) are just as sinful as the act of adultery itself. By logical extension this teaching should also apply to the other sexual sins forbidden in Leviticus 18 (incest, bestiality, and homosexuality). Once the eye and the heart are touched by wrong desire, both are defiled. This is a hard word, but so is the remedy He proposes: better not to have an eye than to sin in this way.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell." Matthew 5:27-29 ESV (see also Mark 9:47-48)



We need to keep in mind the consistency of the Written Word with the Living Word. Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith: He was the pre-Incarnate Word speaking forth to the Jewish nation the eternal counsel of God through the Law (Leviticus 18 included) and He is the Resurrected Lord who personally commissioned St. Paul to be His spokesman to us the Gentile world (Romans 1 included).

QUESTION: What would Jesus do?

Happily we can infer very safely by analogy what Jesus would do when faced with this issue. Simply substitute "a person caught in homosexual sin" for the woman caught in adultery and read the passage through.

The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more." John 8:3-11 ESV

Many things can be noted. The law (Leviticus 20) commanded death as the punishment for many of the sexual sins listed in Leviticus 18, adultery included. Yet Jesus set the Law (His Law) aside. Why? Does this mean Jesus thought the punishment too severe? On the contrary, He knew the punishment to be just. He had come, not to overthrow the Law, but to take the punishment she rightly deserved upon Himself. He Himself would fulfill the righteous requirement of the Law by dying for her sins. He could therefore express to her freedom from accusation and condemnation in God's eyes for He Himself would be accused and condemned in her place.

Tragically these are not the eyes through which Christians have looked upon people caught in sexual sin, whether heterosexual or homosexual. A grievous injustice has been done to homosexuals throughout the centuries by heaping upon them abuse, scorn and unrighteous judgment that has nothing to do with the gospel and everything to do with the nature of the Accuser. Surely the Lord is as grieved with the Church over this as He was with that circle of hypocritical men gathered around the woman (where was the man!) caught in adultery. Surely the Lord is ever at work to defend homosexuals against accusation, condemnation and abuse. But having cleared the way for them to be covered by His love, He would just as surely call them to repentance as well: "Go and sin no more."



QUESTION: Why do we follow these Old Testament commands when we don't follow others?

As faithful Christians, we are certainly not free before God to set any portion of scripture aside, unless the scriptures themselves show us why we should. Are there principles in the Bible that do just that? As noted above, according to New Testament revelation, the Law's punishments for sin have been set aside. Civil law may or may not require consequences of its own and sin itself carries its own consequences, but God's justice has been satisfied through the death of His Son. The dietary laws have also been set aside by New Testament revelation (see Mark 7:14-23; Acts 10:9-16; Acts 11:1-12; Galatians 2:11-15). The ceremonial laws touching on ritual cleanliness, the offering of sacrifices, the prescribed festivals, etc. have all been set aside now that the Temple is within us and the one Sacrifice towards which they all pointed has been made. Likewise, the civil laws of Israel do not apply to New Covenant believers, whose King and Kingdom are not of this world as the kingdom of Israel and her kings were. Even the Sabbath has been transformed through Christ from being one day of rest each week, to an endless rest of faith (Hebrews 4:1-10). To be sure these sections of the Law continue to be deeply instructive of the inward life with Christ, but the outward form is only still required (by the scriptures themselves) of Jewish believers who have not embraced the New Covenant. Much of what Israel experienced was a "shadow" or "type" of the new reality that has come through Christ and faith. What was outward and material for them is now inward and spiritual for us (1 Corinthians 10:1-11; Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 8:4-6; Hebrews 10: 1-2). What does this leave us to obey out of all the commands of the Old Testament? The moral law.

QUESTION: Doesn't it make a difference if the relationship is loving, caring and committed, or that the sex is consensual?

Let's begin by affirming what is true and good. Certainly our relationships with others are better if there is love, caring and commitment involved. We are in fact commanded by God to be loving and caring with everyone we meet and to live our lives committed to their well-being. So, naturally we admire these qualities when we see them and know from our own experience that it often takes something very right in the heart to embrace them and live by them. There is even a principle in scripture that love covers a multitude of sins (Proverbs 10:12 and 17:9). So, it is an act of grace to think kindly about someone with these qualities, even when we see sins (any sins) in their life, because the love we see in them is a better covering for the way they are living than hatred or strife would be. Indeed our own love wants to cover them, just as God's love covers us. But now let's go deeper. What is it that love is covering? If it is sin, it still needs to be forsaken.

In the same way the appeal to "consensual sex" is a misleading argument. The laws of our land are moving in the direction of allowing any kind of sexual activity, so long as consenting adults are the ones involved. Keep in mind that this may eventually include legal permission to practice prostitution, polygamy, incest, and bestiality. Despite its weaknesses, this trend protects us against two evils: it rejects forced sex (rape, abuse, victimization of minors, etc.) in any form and it gets the police out of our bedrooms. But the laws of our land know nothing of the holiness of God. What God views as holy and what God views as sinful are revealed to us by God in scripture. We are so desensitized to the holiness of God that this seems like a weak appeal. But just ask Isaiah what he beheld of God's holiness touching the way he used words (remembering he was a godly



priest and prophet devoted to the Word of God) and you will get a better idea of what God's holiness is like when confronted with our unclean, sexual expressions.

And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" Isaiah 6:5 ESV

QUESTION: What role does genetics play?

A great deal of effort is going into the search for a genetic determinate of homosexual desire and behavior, perhaps because it is thought that this would overturn the argument from design (that God created men and women only for each other sexually) and perhaps because this would imply some necessary acceptance and acquiescence with individuals so "created." There are many flaws with this reasoning.

In the first place it is highly unlikely that there will ever be discovered a single gene determinate of any human behavior. And it would not be a good thing if such a gene were found. All of the higher and better qualities of life flow through freedom: trust, love, sacrifice, devotion, worship, artistic expression, even joy. To say that any aspect of life is bound to us by necessity, is to say we are less than free to be who we have been created to be. On the contrary, these are the things we speak of as our addictions, or compulsions, or diseases. But the really unfortunate reasoning about such a "gay gene" is that from an evolutionary point of view it could only be viewed as an unhelpful gene, working against the survival of the species by keeping its bearer from contributing to the gene pool.

In the second place genetic predisposition does not remove individual responsibility. Research is also being done to find genetic determinates for criminal behavior and alcoholism. No one would suggest that individuals so afflicted (if the gene could be found), are released from the moral obligation to resist "their DNA"—even if a life-long struggle were required. Suppose genetic evidence could be gathered to show that it is biologically harder for heterosexual men to be chaste outside of marriage than for women. Would this absolve husbands from their vows and obligations to their wives? Certainly not. From a Christian point of view genetic research can never show us true moral obligation, because God gives grace (the help of His Spirit) precisely to oppose what is otherwise "natural" to us.

Finally (it is an involved question), certain diseases are transmitted through the generations by means of the genetic code. Most people want to get free of such diseases and be restored to health—regardless of what their DNA is telling them. Are they going "against their nature" in that quest? There is a further analogy: from the point of view of divine revelation, the scriptures declare that disease entered the world through human sinfulness and that it was never a part of God's creative activity. Diseases of the body and dis-eases of the soul alike stem from the Fall and their remedy flows through the Cross. Could these anomalies in the genetic code be the Creator's way of passing the consequences of sin down through the generations (Exodus 34:7)—until the root causes of it are brought to repentance?



QUESTION: Isn't the church's stance denying homosexuals a chance for happiness and fulfillment?

Only an age and culture such as ours could have come up with this one! There is such a powerful belief at work in our day, manifesting in our media, that sex is the best thing going. Certainly, as with everything the Creator made, it is "very good." Even when it is soiled and spoiled by dragging it outside of God's boundaries, not even sin can cancel its created goodness. So, one can understand how the unbelieving world might fall for the false promises of fulfillment (of finding heaven on earth) that sexual lust inspires. But to Christians has been revealed the King and the Kingdom. We know that only in entire devotion to the Person of Jesus Christ can anyone be truly fulfilled. Nothing can hold a candle to the joy of a heart set right in Him. Need we remind ourselves that Jesus, being fully human, lived chaste His *entire* life and lacked nothing of personal happiness and fulfillment? In fact he recommended it as a way of life to his disciples when they faltered at the severity of His teaching on marriage and divorce.

The disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." But he said to them, "Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it." Matthew 19:10-12 ESV

QUESTION: But they can't change, can they? Can homosexuality be healed?

No truly besetting sin is easy to overcome. Always a death is involved—an often slow and painful death of self to the habitual thing that has had such a tenacious grip on our desires or our will. Deep inside of us in our besetting areas we know this and that is one reason why we layer them with excuses or denial and are so slow to bring them to the cross. And yet when we have the courage to confess our sin as sin—that is, as something death-dealing and inexcusable before God—and take responsibility for it, God meets us in the besetting area and delivers us as we struggle (often failing) by stunning revelations of His mercy and faithfulness (most especially as we fail). This is the common testimony of Christians committed to the holiness of God who have discovered throughout the ages a Power at work to rescue them out of bondages too strong for their will or desire alone.

Alcoholics Anonymous knows this to be true of people caught in alcoholism. The program they follow is thoroughly Christian in the design of its steps, but they are steps only people desperate for freedom from the besetting thing become willing to follow. People have to really want it to work, to work it (but this is true of the life of faith generally). Inevitably, they discover that the alcoholism, though the root of many troubles in their life, was itself only the fruit of deeper issues which the painful process of recovery at last enables them and forces them to face. Always falling back is a possibility. Always the old desires must to some degree be crucified. Always the dependence upon God takes them at times well beyond their comfort zones. But the freedom is worth it. The discovery of a Friend who meets them in their struggle is worth it. The newfound community of transparency and mutual struggle against the besetting thing is worth it.



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Recovery from homosexual sin and the healing of homosexual desire are very real—every bit as real as recovery from alcoholism. Many have already walked the upward path into freedom leaning hard on the arm of their Beloved. Groups like Exodus, International (P.O. Box 77652, Seattle, WA 98177-0652), and Regeneration (P.O. Box 9830, Baltimore, MD 21284-9830) help their brothers and sisters come out of the lifestyles which formerly held them captive. Two books among many can be recommended: *The Broken Image* by Leanne Payne and *Homosexuality: Can it be Healed?* by Francis MacNutt. Not everyone wants to be free. Not everyone who wants to be free is willing to do what the proven paths of freedom require. Mercifully, however, grace has made a way for those who desire with all their hearts to find it. This may seem like a very narrow way, but Jesus says He requires exactly this kind of devotion *from all of us*.

"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."
Matthew 7:13-14 ESV

QUESTION: Is compromise possible on this issue?

There is at least one part to this issue around which compromise is clearly impossible. Is homosexual intercourse sinful or is it holy? There is no conceivable middle ground here and so we are in a genuine valley of decision where we have to choose between right and wrong. The scriptures say that such intercourse is indeed sinful and the worldwide Church has held consistently and universally to this traditional interpretation of scripture until recently. But if the scriptures are wrong and/or the Church's interpretation is wrong, then a massive injustice has been done to homosexuals and the Church needs to repent immediately and thoroughly. Those who take the homosexual side in their interpretation of this issue cannot be expected to compromise on this point (that homosexual intercourse is not sinful in their view) any more than the orthodox can on theirs.

Repentance alone offers a way forward as the Holy Spirit reveals truth to those who live in darkness. May the Lord enable us to abide in His Word, so that He may cause us to know the truth and use the truth to make us free (John 8:32).



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