

SOME SIMPLE FACTS ABOUT THE BIBLE AND HOMOSEXUALITY

The condemnation of gay men and lesbian women by the church, is destroying – literally – the worth of millions – again literally – of homosexuals by robbing them of all self-esteem, forcing them to live in closets in constant fear that will be found out, driving them out of churches they have grown up loving, keeping them out of our churches where they might hear the gospel, and driving them to suicide.

I don't believe the church wants to do these things. The church condemns homosexuals because a common interpretation of the Bible is that the Bible condemns them.

The truth that this is not so can be found, I believe, in laying all interpretation aside and examining facts that can be accepted by anyone as truth.

I

Same-gender sex was practiced, particularly in Bible times, by people who unquestionably were heterosexual.

Much of this practice had little to do with sex. It originated in the low and often despised place of women in the culture. If a man had a grudge against another, if he could subdue the begrudged, he would rape him, thus reducing him to the place of a woman. When an army conquered another army or besieged a walled town until it capitulated, the conquering army (at least 90-96% heterosexual) degraded all their captives or the men of the town by raping them. Sex was incidental; heterosexuals, certainly, and homosexuals, possibly were degrading and humiliating people they despised.

We need to examine the Bible passages referring to those practicing same-gender sex for evidence of any identity of sexual orientation.

The Sodom Story – Genesis 19

Many use this story to condemn homosexuals, saying the mob at Lot's door wanted to "know" his male guests, i.e., to have homosexual sex with them.

The scripture tells us "all the people, *to the last man*, [my italics] surrounded the house." (RSV) If current percentages prevailed, at least 90% of these men were heterosexual.

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

22 You shall not lie with a male as with a woman, it is an abomination.

13 If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination, they shall be put to death.

There is no indication of the orientation of the persons performing the act.

Romans 1:26,27

26 . . . women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, 27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men . . .

Paul here explicitly speaks of heterosexual women and men who gave up natural sex (i.e., sex with the opposite gender) and exchanged it for same-gender sex. "The persons Paul condemns are manifestly not homosexual . . . Paul [discussed] only homosexual acts committed by heterosexual persons."

I Corinthians 6:9; I Timothy 1:10

Two Greek words, *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*, are translated by some as "homosexual." The first, found in the Corinthian passage, means "soft"; the KJV translates it "effeminate." The second, found in both passages "meant 'male prostitute' until well into the fourth century." There is no indication of orientation (nor of homosexuality).

Conclusion

- (1) We cannot equate same gender-sex with homosexuality.**
- (2) Except in Romans 1, the practice of same-gender sex could have been by either heterosexuals or homosexuals. If we do not know which is referred to, we cannot say the Bible condemns homosexuals.**

II

The Bible does not discuss what moral sex is.

The Bible condemns in some places opposite gender sex and in some places same-gender sex. We know that not all opposite gender sex is condemned.

Conclusion

If the Bible's condemnation in some places of opposite-gender sex does not mean all opposite-gender sex is condemned, we cannot say that the Bible's condemnation in some places of same-gender sex means all same-gender sex is condemned.

III

The meaning of any scripture is the meaning in the mind of the writer when he wrote it.

We cannot always be certain of what the writer meant, but if there is something the writer could not have known, we can be certain he did not mean that something. No Bible writer could have talked about electricity; it wouldn't be discovered for hundreds of years. No Bible writer could have talked about homosexuality; it wouldn't be discovered for hundreds of years.

Until the 19th century, when the word "homosexual" was used for the first time, everyone understood that everyone was erotically attracted to people of the opposite sex. Until then, those were the only kind of people the Bible writer—or anyone else—could talk about. The writer knew of persons practicing same-gender sex, and some of these could have been homosexual. But in the writer's mind, they were all heterosexual with some choosing to practice same-gender sex.

So when a Bible author writes of same-gender sex, it can refer only to these people who are (what we would call) heterosexual. Same-gender sex between two heterosexuals undoubtedly would be lustful. Lust is always condemned by the Bible. We would expect the writer to condemn same-gender sex by heterosexuals.

Conclusion

If no Bible writer could have said anything about homosexuality, gays or lesbians, or anything they do, nothing in the Bible refers to

homosexuality, gays or lesbians or anything they do. Every reference to persons practicing same-gender sex is to heterosexuals.

IV

Some may want to believe that the Bible condemns the act of same-gender sex regardless of whether it is by homosexual or heterosexual persons.

Ethicists remind us that only people have morality, only people are moral or immoral. Not words, not acts. We commonly speak of good or evil acts, but it is always figurative (as frequently used in this writing) for the good or evil is in the mind and heart behind the act, and we must separate the person from the act. Pointing a gun and pulling a trigger is an act without morality. It is the person who is possibly murdering, exercising self-defense, putting a suffering animal to sleep, having target practice. All acts, including all sex acts, heterosexual or homosexual, in themselves, are simply acts, without morality.

The Bible tells us, "God looks on the heart." He judges hearts, not acts. God judges people. When the Bible talks about "good" or "evil" acts, it is talking about people.

Conclusion

If no sex act, in itself, heterosexual or homosexual, has morality, we cannot judge or condemn the act of same-gender sex, per se.

V

If the Bible is silent about homosexuality, perhaps we can find the answer to the morality of homosexual sex from the principles of the Bible.

God's judgment of sexual practices is based on love or lust in the minds of those engaging in the sex.

Lust is always condemned.

From much evidence there can be no question that gay men and lesbian women cannot love someone of the opposite sex but can and do love their partners just as fully in every way as married partners love their spouses.

If God is love, loving acts are God-like, heterosexual or homosexual.

Conclusion

If God looks on the sex acts of gays and lesbians and finds love in their hearts, those acts are moral and blessed by God.

No Bible interpretations that are divisive are included in the above. If these five conclusions are indeed based on facts commonly accepted, the church can and should welcome gays and lesbians to full fellowship and affirm them as other members can be in any position in the church. The church would be particularly blessed; psychologists tell us and practical evidence shows us that gays and lesbians have gifts and potential often greater than that of most heterosexuals.

And the terrible, indescribably wrongful and hurtful condemnation by the church of these children of God would be no more. Sagacious Will Campbell observed that [denominations] have apologized to Blacks for our treatment of them in history. Then he said, “some day we’ll apologize for what we are doing to gay and lesbian Christians and non-Christians. But not yet, for we ride the waves of culture.” God, hasten the day!

Bruce Lowe
bamlowe@bigplanet.com