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Jesus and Homosexuality

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TOPICS: [SEXUALITY](#)

A booklet on homosexuality asks the question, “What did Jesus teach about homosexuality?” When you open it, you discover nothing but a blank page. The intended point of the pamphlet is clear—Jesus said nothing about homosexuality and therefore neither should those who profess to follow Him since we walk as He walked ([1 John 2:6](#)).

Was Jesus truly silent on the subject? If He was does this mean that we as His followers should be silent as well? What then are we to do with the passages which teach on the issue? Are the sounds of other Scriptures muffled by the Savior’s silence?

My contention in this paper is two-fold. First, that a proper understanding of both the Son of God and of Scripture should lead us to conclude that it ultimately would not matter if Jesus ever explicitly taught on homosexuality. Second, that though we have no record of Him using the specific words “homosexual” or “homosexuality,” it is dishonest at best to say that He did not teach on the subject itself.

It Would Not Matter

Context

Jesus Christ was born into a particular time and place. He lived His earthly life within the context of 1st century Israel and never traveled much further. His audience consisted almost entirely of Israelites, though He did pass through and teach in Samaritan and Gentile regions. By and large, His message was to a Jewish audience well-versed in the Hebrew Scriptures of His day.

The Mosaic Law was not neutral on the issue of homosexuality. [Leviticus 18:22](#) and [20:13](#) were clearly expressive of the moral will of God's law within the context of proper sexual expression. Unlike the ritual purity laws (not mixing cloths, prohibition against having sex during menstruation, etc.), laws against homosexuality were relegated to the first-tier of trespass.¹ Though the larger world of the Roman and Greek cultures would have had more ambiguity in regards to the impropriety of homosexuality, Judaism was staunchly united. Any Jew would have known the prohibitions. There was no vagueness, no uncertainty, no subtle hints in the text of the propriety of homosexuality.

What is the point of knowing the context in which Jesus taught? Simply put, we should not expect Him to spend much time teaching on that which was never questioned within that culture and was already clearly articulated within the authoritative Word of God. How many times have you heard a preacher

in our contemporary culture give an impassioned discourse discouraging incest? Does the fact that such speeches rarely happen therefore communicate that incest is acceptable to that particular pastor? Jesus Himself never spoke about incest, or rape, or bestiality that we know of. Should we therefore conclude that He was ambivalent toward or even approving of these sexual expressions as well?

The Nature of Scripture

Thinking about a pamphlet such as the one mentioned above, we should quickly consider what it implies about the nature of Scripture. As believers, we are to be committed to the authority of the entirety of Scripture, not just those texts which are printed in red ink. “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable” ([2 Timothy 3:16](#)). Although we certainly elevate the person and work of Christ over the person and work of Paul, we must not elevate the gospels over the epistles as truer, more inspired, or more authoritative. Such appeals to Christ’s teaching at the expense of Paul’s, while disguised as respect for Jesus, are actually rejections of the word which He constantly referenced, affirmed, and fulfilled.

Rather than restricting ourselves to the question of what Jesus explicitly said regarding homosexuality during His three years of recorded public ministry, let us expand our understanding of the nature of revelation and ask what the triune God has said about it. If Scripture is the Word of God and if Jesus is fully God, then what the Scriptures say, Jesus says, even if not verbally during His earthly ministry.

We find the greatest explicit New Testament evidence within the writings of the apostle Paul. Three passages are particularly helpful in this discussion:

- [Romans 1:26-27](#)
- [1 Corinthians 6:9-11](#)
- [1 Timothy 1:8-11](#)

There is little doubt that Paul rejected homosexuality as an appropriate expression of sexuality. Therefore, in order to justify homosexual behavior, attempt is often made to qualify the type of homosexuality which is condemned in the Scriptures. In particular, two qualifications are made to justify current homosexual behavior as being compatible with Christian faith and practice.

Qualification 1: The homosexuality of Paul's day was exploitive⁵ and thus Paul is not addressing the mutually reciprocated care⁶ of modern homosexual practice.

- Response: This objection has recently been almost completely dismissed in light of the weight of evidence for mutually caring homosexual relationships in antiquity. There is no evidence to suggest that Paul was ignorant to the prevalence of such relationships within his own context. In addition, it is important to note that [Romans 1](#) says that "the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another." The desire was reciprocated and not merely exploitive. Though many forms of homosexuality in antiquity were oppressive, it is simply historically inaccurate to claim that the first century was ignorant of mutually reciprocated relationships similar to those observed in modernity.

Qualification 2: The homosexuality that Paul rejected was homosexuality which was not based upon orientation. In other words, Paul did not reject

homosexuality for those with a homosexual orientation, but rather rejected homosexuality for those who are heterosexual in nature.

- Response: Many have noted the degree of correspondence between [Genesis 1](#) and [Romans 1](#) in regards to the corruption of God's intended order. For example, notice the relationship between [Genesis 1:26](#) and [Romans 1:23](#) which both speak of birds, livestock, and creeping things. Both Moses and Paul then immediately enter into a discussion of sexuality. The point that Paul is making is that as idolatry is a reversal and perversion of the proper order of God's creative order, so homosexuality is a corruption of God's intended order for human sexuality. Humans were made to have dominion over animals, not worship them. Men were made to be united to women, not other men.

Authentic natural desires do not excuse a sinful action. All actions flow from desires. Each of us is born with genuine innate impulses which infringe upon God's will. If the reality of a desire is the basis of right and wrong, then sin has no meaning whatsoever. The gospel calls us continually not to look to and act upon our nature in Adam (that is the nature with which we are each born, one tainted with sin), but rather to be clothed with a new

nature which is being renewed in the image of Christ ([Ephesians 4:17-24](#); [Colossians 3:1-11](#)). Even if one were born with an orientation toward homosexual desire, such a proclivity would not evidence the legitimacy of that desire. Sin has radically affected every aspect of our lives and permeates all of our desires and affections and we are daily called to repent and trust Christ for strength.

He Actually Did

As far as we know, Jesus never used any of the Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek words which are typically translated as homosexuality.⁷ Why not? Does such silence indicate acceptance or even approval?

Arguments from silence are dangerous. One may not speak about something and might condone, condemn, or feel ambivalent about that thing. Silence itself certainly does not prove anything, and often does not even imply anything terribly convincing. Therefore, rather than building arguments upon silence, we would do well to consider what He actually said.

Porneia

In order to perceive Jesus' views on homosexuality in particular, we must understand the larger framework of His words on sexuality in general. Jesus was not silent on the issue of sexuality. He explicitly rejected all forms of sexual immorality by using the categorical term *porneia*. We see this specifically

in [Matthew 5:19](#) “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.²⁰ These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone” (cross reference [Mark 7:21](#)).

The phrase “sexual immorality” is the rendering of the English Standard Version (ESV) for the Greek *porneia*. What does the term mean?

- **Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament**

πορνεία, ας, ἡ (1) generally, of every kind of extramarital, unlawful, or unnatural sexual intercourse fornication, sexual immorality, prostitution (1C 5.1); (2) when distinguished from adultery (*μοιχεία*) in the same context extramarital intercourse, sexual immorality, fornication (MT 15.19); (3) as a synonym for *μοιχεία* (marital) unfaithfulness, adultery (MT 5.32); (4) metaphorically, as apostasy from God through idolatry (spiritual) immorality, unfaithfulness (RV 19.2)

- **The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament**

to commit fornication or any sexual sin. Fornication, lewdness, or any sexual sin.

- **Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains**

fornication, sexual immorality, sexual sin of a general kind, that includes many different behaviors ([Mt 5:32](#); [15:19](#); [19:9](#); [Mk 7:21](#); [Jn 8:41](#); [Ac 15:20](#); [1Co 6:18](#); [7:2](#); [2Co 12:21](#); [Gal 5:19](#); [Eph 5:3](#); [1Th 4:3](#))

- **Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains**

Fornication

• Enhanced Strong's Lexicon

translates as “fornication” 26 times. 1 illicit sexual intercourse. 1a adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, intercourse with animals etc. 1b sexual intercourse with close relatives; [Lev. 18. 1c](#) sexual intercourse with a divorced man or woman; [Mk. 10:11,12. 2](#)metaph. the worship of idols. 2a of the defilement of idolatry, as incurred by eating the sacrifices offered to idols.

Every major Greek lexicon includes “fornication”⁸ as at least an aspect of the meaning of “*porneia*.”² This definition would certainly include such things as homosexuality, bestiality, adultery, et al. The first definition given above sums it up well as “every kind of extramarital, unlawful, unnatural sexual intercourse.”

Therefore, for sexual activity to be acceptable and good from a biblical perspective, it must meet the following requirements (with overlap between categories):

1. Be practiced within the context of marriage – excludes pre-marital sex and adultery
2. Be practiced according to the law (overarching moral law) – excludes adultery, close kinship, etc.¹⁰
3. Be practiced according to nature¹¹ – excludes homosexuality, bestiality

If *porneia* indeed includes homosexuality as nearly every major Greek reference work would require, then here is a sharp response to the claims of Christ's silence on the matter. If He explicitly prohibited *porneia*, and if *porneia* includes homosexuality, then we have a strong statement by Jesus on

the issue. Any sexual expression outside of the one flesh marital relationship between one man and one woman is prohibited by the Scriptures in general and Jesus in particular.

Overall Sexual Ethic Commanded by Christ

In addition to Jesus' prohibition of *porneia*, it is also imperative to look at what He taught about sexuality in general. What was the basis for the sexual ethic which Jesus prescribes?

In [Matthew 19](#), the Pharisees approach Jesus to test Him with a first-century dispute over the application of the law of divorce developed from [Deuteronomy 24](#). How does Jesus answer this test? He does so by going back to and arguing from Genesis.

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 the two 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](#):

Jesus appeals to the text of [Genesis 2](#) to articulate His teaching on the proper sexual ethic. In other words, Jesus explicitly declares the validity of one type of sexual relationship, one which is grounded in the one flesh relationship found in monogamous, heterosexual marriage. Therefore, we see yet again that although Jesus did not use the words "homosexual" or "homosexuality" He certainly taught on the issue.

For those who think that this is a weak argument, read through the gospels and notice the number of times that Jesus uses the words idol, idols, idolatry, or idolatrous. You will find zero references. Does this indicate that first-century Jews had somehow outgrown the fundamental fallen human condition and were no longer engaged in idolatry? Are we to deduce that Christ was unconcerned with idolatry or that it was somehow peripheral to His ministry? On the contrary, His entire ministry was predicated upon the idolatry of mankind. Though the gospels do not record Him using the word, they drip with the concept of idolatry. Failure to use a term does not indicate failure to teach on a topic.

Conclusion

To walk as Jesus walked does not mean that we only say what He explicitly said or do what He actually did, but rather that we follow Him in love for God and others. To claim a love for God while hating those whom He has created, betrays itself as an empty lie ([1 John 4:20-21](#)). Those who claim to honor God by their oppression or ridicule of those who struggle with homosexuality are called to repent and pursue love. At the same time, to claim to love God while neglecting His Word and condoning what He has condemned is just as sinful and calls for repentance as well. As John writes in [1 John 2:5-6](#), walking as Jesus did is equated with keeping the Word of God. We must not love God in a manner that denies the call to love our fellow man, just as we must not love others in a way that excludes or restricts a love for God.

Relying primarily upon shock value, arguments based upon a presumed silence of Christ on the matter of homosexuality are deceptive and misleading. Not only does such reasoning subjectively divide the Word of God into authoritative and non-authoritative sections, but it also rejects the rather precise portrait of sexuality which Jesus Himself paints within the red letters.

As believers, we must wrestle deeply with what legitimizes sexual expressions, the reality of our wants or the revelation of God's will. If our desire is ultimately authoritative, then sin no longer has any meaning whatsoever and each man becomes his own standard and judge. Though our eyes may burn as they are adjusted to the light of God's Word, the result is that we might better see our fallen selves and the radiance of our exalted Savior. Scripture must be the lens through which we view all things and it must be the standard by which we measure them.

There is always a danger of twisting the Scripture ([2 Peter 3:16](#)), particularly where we fail to perceive our presuppositions and prejudices. The peril of bending the Word to fit ourselves and justify our behaviors and biases looms for us all, whether we do so by singling out homosexuality to the neglect of other sins or by disregarding the words which we have been given by God on this subject. Faithful biblical interpretation avoids both extremes. It preaches a holistic gospel from the entirety of the Scriptures with the horror of sin and the necessity of holiness neither minimizing nor minimized by the power of the cross and the grace and mercy of our loving God. In this message we see

a Son sent to rescue and redeem us from ourselves and all of our lawless deeds and to awaken us to the satisfaction and joy that is found only in Him.

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Recommended Resources

Resources on Homosexuality in Particular:

- For a biblically-informed and pastorally-sensitive response to homosexuality, see the various resources available from [Desiring God](#).
- For a more thorough academic discussion of the biblical material, consider the work of Dr. Robert Gagnon, a leading scholar on New Testament sexual ethics. In particular, check out his book, "The Bible and Homosexual Practice" which is considered to be a definitive work on the subject, and his DVD lecture entitled, "Love, the Bible, and Homosexual Practice."

Resources on Sexuality in General:

- [Sex and the Supremacy of Christ](#) – John Piper and Justin Taylor
- [At the Altar of Sexual Idolatry](#) – Steve Gallagher

Relevant Ministries for Those Struggling with Homosexuality:

- [Living Hope Ministries](#)
- [Recovery Groups at The Village](#)

Footnotes

¹ Theologians have pointed to a number of significant differences making Mosaic purity laws poor analogies for laws dealing with sexual impurity.

Among these are the severity of the penalty, the absoluteness of the prohibitions, the distinctions between moral and ritual purity, and use in the New Testament.

2 *malakos* - derived from a word meaning soft, it is used as an indication of being passive in a same-sex relationship.

3 *arsenokoites* – derived from *arsen* "male" and *koites* "lay" (from which we get the English word "coitus"), it is used broadly to indicate one who engages in same sex activity and specifically to the one who takes the active role in such a relationship.

4 *malakos* – see note 2 above

5 Certain forms of sexuality rely upon one person's exploitation of another. Two of the more common forms in the sphere of homosexuality are the rape of a boy by an older male (pederasty) or that of a slave by his master. Both forms were common within the first century.

6 Consensual caring relationship

7 Jesus said and did much more than is recorded in the Scriptures ([John 21:25](#)) so it is possible that He did actually explicitly address the issue of homosexuality, but such a possibility is purely speculative.

8 This too should be defined. According to Webster's 11th Edition Collegiate Dictionary, "fornication" is "consensual sexual intercourse between two persons not married to each other."

9 While some would like to claim that porneia only includes non-consensual or non-committed acts of sexual deviance, such a restriction ignores 2000 years of Greek scholarship and thus is completely untenable. In other words, even consensual sex within a committed (yet non-marital) relationship is explicitly condemned by the Scriptures.

10 Care must here be applied as to what elements of the Mosaic Law should be seen as binding. It is helpful to be cautious particularly where there is no explicit New Testament mention of a particular facet of a Mosaic restriction. For instance, interracial marriage, though forbidden in the Old, has movements in the text to suggest that such a prohibition is not binding. There is no New Testament movement toward acceptance of homosexuality. Rather, there is universal and unambiguous rejection throughout the epistles

11 The word "nature" must be interpreted within its context. In passages such as [Ephesians 2:3](#), the term refers to the nature which we possess through association with Adam's sin. The use of nature in the definition above carries the nuance of God's created order. Anything contrary to the one man and one woman union expressed in the creation account would be considered "unnatural." This use explains how Paul uses the term "unnatural" in [Romans 1:26-27](#).

