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# 10 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE BIBLE AND HOMOSEXUALITY

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# INTRODUCTION



**PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT SITUATIONS** and with varying perspectives have asked us questions about the Bible's teaching on homosexuality. Sometimes it is from a Christian struggling with this issue personally. Other times it is from a parent trying to love and guide a son or daughter while also wanting insight from a biblical perspective. Still others want to know our position as a matter of record. In a highly politicized world, where important matters are reduced to sound bites and shouting matches, it is crucial to remember that we're dealing with people, not just issues.

The first obligation we have as Christians toward other people, whether believer or unbeliever, is to love them. Loving someone, however, doesn't mean acceptance of sin; in fact,

love sometimes calls us to warn, correct, and challenge. To affirm people as human beings is essential, but to affirm rebellion against God and harm against our neighbor is dangerous. Remember: "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy" (Prov. 27:6).

I want to offer ten basic biblical truths that guide Christian responses on this question. Like facets of a single diamond, they have to be taken together. One of the problems in the contemporary debate among Christians is that one of these components may be singled out while the others are ignored. Unless we take them as a whole, we'll end up with distorted and simplistic conclusions.

# GOD CREATED US MALE AND FEMALE TO BE “ONE-IN-DIFFERENCE”



## WE ARE TOLD IN GENESIS 1,

*Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”*

*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*

*And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth....” And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. (Gen. 1:26–28, 31)*

Notice that “God created man in his own image,” not merely as male but “male and female he created them.” On this basis, as his vice-regents, God commands Adam and Eve to “be fruitful and multiply.” Obviously, the gift of sex is tied to sexual difference. Children are the fruit of a loving union on God’s terms. Even the way he made us, with different anatomy, underscores this point.

In Genesis 2, we are told, “Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him” (Gen. 2:18). Although Adam named the

animals, “for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him” (v. 20), so the Lord created Eve from Adam’s side (vv. 21–22). The phrase “fit for him” is important: As grand a creature as Adam was, he needed someone equal to him but different. She is not a lower creature. In fact, the elation in Adam’s response is striking as he breaks into song:

*Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. (Gen. 2:23–25)*

For all of the talk about respecting difference, homosexuality itself is a refusal of the deepest difference of all among humans. Adam did not need another Adam, but an Eve. It was the difference from himself that made the two of them one complete unit, like two pieces of a puzzle.

This is why divorce, which is widely accepted now in our culture and in churches, is so tragic. In fact, in terms of devastating impact, heterosexual divorce trumps same-sex marriage as far as undoing God’s good design. Jesus told the Pharisees, “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” (Matt. 19:4–6).

# 2

# THE BIBLE TREATS HOMOSEXUALITY AS REBELLION AGAINST THIS CREATED DESIGN



**ALREADY IN GENESIS 18-19**, we find widespread homosexuality accepted and encouraged in Sodom and Gomorrah. God said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave” (Gen. 18:20). In this account, God destroys the cities with fire (Gen. 19). Homosexual activity was strictly forbidden: “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination” (Lev. 18:22). In fact, it was a capital offence under the old covenant theocracy (Lev. 20:13).

Even though the church is not a nation as Israel was and therefore has no authority to punish people physically, God’s view of homosexual practice has not changed. In fact, the capital crimes listed in Leviticus are similar to those mentioned in the New Testament for everlasting judgment. The apostle Paul specifically mentions homosexual practice as an example of how far people will go to “suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” The root is idolatry, when a society worships the creature instead of the Creator: “Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever!” (Rom. 1:24–25). They are “dishonorable passions” (v. 26).


*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. 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. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 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. (Rom. 1:26–32)*

Homosexuality is particularly offensive to God, because it is a rebellion against his good design in creation; it is unnatural, which anyone can recognize by the different anatomy of males and females. Yet this is how far people will go to “suppress the truth in unrighteousness,” to reject not only what is taught in Scripture but what is also known by natural reason. Warning of a heretical sect that included immorality, Jude says, “Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire” (v. 7).

# 3

# HOMOSEXUALITY IS NOT THE UNPARDONABLE SIN



**I HAD A FRIEND WHO, FOR A WHILE,** reveled in God's grace and forgiveness as the fuel for fighting his same-sex urges. During that time, he was celibate and grew in his walk with the Lord. But then he returned home, to his family and home church that had basically exiled him. "You have committed the unpardonable sin," his pastor told him, and this young man took his life that night.

The unpardonable sin was something specific to Jesus' context. Some of the Pharisees had accused Jesus of performing miracles by the power of Satan. In defense of a fellow person of the Trinity, Jesus said that all sins and blasphemies will be forgiven; in fact, even "whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come" (Matt. 12:32).

It is often overlooked that homosexuality was not the only sin of Sodom. In Ezekiel 16:49, the Lord says, "Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy." Likewise, in the lists of sinful practices barring one from the kingdom (1 Cor. 6:9–10; 1 Tim. 1:9–1), homosexuality is mentioned along with some sins that self-respecting Christians often take lightly: greed, gossip,

adultery, theft, and slavery.

Even in the often-quoted passage from Romans 1, Paul includes "unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice . . . envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness." He says generally of the pagan world of his day, "They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless." Yet he reminds the Jewish audience in the next chapter that they are no better: "Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things" (Rom. 2:1–2). In fact, their very boast—that they have the law of righteous rules—testifies against them, he goes on to argue.

When we look at the lists, we can only conclude, as Paul does in Romans 3:10, that "there is no one righteous, no not one." No one is left standing. This is why we all need a Savior. To say that there is any sin beyond Christ's all-sufficient sacrifice is a blasphemy against the Father and the Son. This too can be forgiven, as Jesus said in Matthew 12:32, but it is the greatest outrage and offense against God's majesty.

# 4

# SIN IS A CONDITION BEFORE IT IS AN ACTION



**“IN SIN MY MOTHER CONCEIVED ME”** (Ps.51:5). Under Adam’s headship, we are all born into the world, “dead in the trespasses and sins in which [we] once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind” (Eph. 2:1–3). Being born spiritually dead, under the power of sin, is a condition. Since the Fall, our nature has been corrupted. We are guilty and corrupt from the womb. We are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we’re sinners.

Among other implications, this means that we are all “by nature” sinners. We are all predisposed toward sin. That doesn’t mean, however, that everyone is predisposed toward the same sin. Some people are prone genetically (yes, “by nature” means that the Fall has corrupted our

genes as well) toward alcoholism even if they don’t take a single drink. Others may be predisposed toward anger, anxiety, fear, or domination.

This means, on the one hand, that we still call this condition “sinful.” The desire is sinful even if it is never acted upon. We are all guilty “in Adam” for the condition and the sins we commit. It means, on the other hand, that we are not personally responsible for having this particular predisposition. There is no basis for self-loathing because we are predisposed to certain sins, but for vigilance and repentance so that we do not give in to them. Because sinful predispositions are part of our fallen condition, one may certainly say, “I have a same-sex attraction that I did not choose for myself.” This in no way infers that because I didn’t choose it myself, “It’s just the way God made me.” No, it is part of the Fall, and we must oppose rather than embrace it.

# 5

## WE ARE BOTH SINNERS AND SINNED-AGAINST



**NOT ONLY ARE WE PERPETRATORS** of sinful actions; we are also victims. Victimization has become so much a part of identity politics (that is, where one group claims to be a victim of another group). In reaction, many people, including some Christians, downplay the reality of being a victim. As we have seen, the Fall has warped our nature. But nurture plays its role as well. While there are plenty of instances of homosexual desires being independent of such factors, there is no doubt that the family, classmates, online activity, and the broader attraction to LGBTQA in entertainment and the media can play a role.

Parents can't bear responsibility for nature (the fallen condition), but they have a key role to play in shaping their children's understanding and experience of sexual difference and identity. Many young people would never have wrestled with their sexual and gender identity a generation ago in the way that they do now. Much of this is due to a cultural celebration of queerness and sexual experimentation. But, again, don't forget the "nature" component. Nature and nurture are both warped by the sinful condition and the sinful actions that makes us victims as well as transgressors.

# 6

# THE NEW BIRTH IS A REAL AND RADICAL TRANSFORMATION AT THE CORE OF OUR EXISTENCE



**“AND SUCH WERE SOME OF YOU.** But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11). This is Paul’s joyful announcement after listing the practices that deny access to the kingdom of life. There are some people in our churches who had practiced homosexuality (which is included in Paul’s list). They, however, no longer do. They are now new creatures in Christ.

When we are united to Christ through grace-given faith, we are no longer dead branches, cut off from life but grafted into the life-giving Vine (John 15). Paul says,

*What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a*

*resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. (Rom. 6:1–6)*


In other words, no one can say, “I really like the idea of Jesus being my Savior from condemnation, but I don’t really think of him as liberating me from slavery to sin. I’m forgiven, that’s all that matters.” No, Paul says that this is cutting the gospel in half: it’s taking the cross without the resurrection. Jesus not only died for our forgiveness, but he also rose again to raise our souls and one day our bodies from the dominion of death. You can’t tear Christ apart. If you’ve been baptized into his death, then you’ve also been baptized into his resurrection. So don’t use “I’m just a sinner” as an excuse.

The new birth is real! You no longer love the things you used to, and you find it delightful to know God and serve your neighbor. “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:13-14).



# 7

## THE CHRISTIAN'S IDENTITY IS DEFINED BY CHRIST



**THERE ARE TWO LEGAL CATEGORIES** and types of existence: “in Adam” and “in Christ” (see especially Romans 5). When Paul speaks of practicing particular sins, he means not merely sinning but living in sin. In other words, it’s who you are, it’s where you live and find your identity.

In the Greek original of 1 Corinthians 6:9, Paul doesn’t say “people who have same-sex attractions” or “people who sometimes lust” or “lie” or “gossip,” but the murderers, the adulterers, the greedy, the homosexual. It’s their identity. They practice this sin. In other words, they don’t fall into it, repent, confess, and receive Christ’s forgiveness and rely on

the Spirit’s strength to fight it. No, they practice this sin like a lawyer practices law and a doctor practices medicine. It’s what they do because it’s what they are. It’s their identity and they embrace it with reckless abandon. They are “in Adam,” condemned and enslaved, all along thinking that it leads to life and happiness.

But if you are a believer, you are simultaneously justified in Christ and sinful in yourself. So find your identity in Christ and not in yourself. That’s the answer to the guilt and dominion of sin.

# 8

# THE WHOLE OF OUR CHRISTIAN LIFE IS A WAR WITH INDWELLING SIN, AND THE BODY MATTERS



**SOMETIMES I'M ASKED,** “Can I possibly be a Christian if I still commit the same sin?” I tell them, “Well, it depends on what you mean by can?” If it’s an excuse for sin, then no. Our bodies don’t belong to us, but to God in Christ. Paul says, “Flee sexual immorality” because our bodies are a holy temple not to be desecrated:

*And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.” But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (1 Cor. 6:14–20)*

Believers aren’t just joined to Christ as souls. He became flesh for us. We are united to the whole Christ, as human and divine, in body and soul. Our body doesn’t belong to us, Paul says. Too often we think that we can give our heart to Jesus and do whatever we want with our bodies, but that’s a gnostic heresy. No, we cannot use the fact of continuing sinfulness as an excuse.

It’s not only possible but normal to struggle with the same sins again and again. We formed these patterns over a long time, and so they can’t be undone overnight. Even after describing the decisive transfer from death to life in the new

birth (Rom. 6), the same apostle now tells us in Romans 7 about his own struggle. He does the very things he doesn’t want to do and keeps on doing what he doesn’t want to do—yet all along he says he loves God’s law and agrees with it. Non-Christians don’t have this struggle. There is no war within. They are at peace under the domain of sin—that’s their home country. But we’re now citizens of another country, the kingdom of Christ. And yet we find that we still bring our sinful selves into that new country.

So when people ask if we still commit the same sins that we hate, we have the apostle Paul’s experience to back up a resolute answer, “Yes!” If you find yourself fighting these same sins, this is not evidence that you’re not really a believer but that you are. Even though we hate it and fight it, it remains a struggle.

It is entirely possible for those who are born again to fight the same sins their entire life. So when some Christians rightly stress the liberation and new life of Romans 6, they shouldn’t forget the reality of indwelling sin in the previous chapter. Some Christians will identify with Paul’s experience in Romans 7. They still fight lust, greed, gossip, and other sins. But they will not allow that some of their brothers and sisters will fight same-sex attractions, even lust, for the rest of their lives. It is spiritual malpractice to tell a brother or sister that the new birth takes their sinful tendencies away any more than it renders anyone sinless. Even the holiest in this life make but a small beginning in that holiness that we should have and will have on the last day. If you had same-sex attractions before you became a Christian, you will probably struggle with them afterward and maybe for the rest of your life. But claim Christ’s victory over sin’s guilt and power and from that decisive triumph and put to death indwelling sin (Rom. 6:12).

# 9

# JESUS CHRIST IS THE ANSWER TO SIN'S GUILT AND CONDEMNATION, PERIOD



**DO YOU TRUST JESUS CHRIST** as your only redeemer, rescuer and intercessor? Then I assure you, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). We are justified by Christ through faith plus nothing. Your tears, repentance, and promises of turning over a new leaf cannot reconcile you to God. Only Christ is righteous. Only he can exchange your rags for his robe. Only with this good news can you really fight sin, whatever it is. We never move on from the gospel; we stand on it in our sanctification. We fight from Christ’s victory, not toward our own. Savor the words of Romans 8:30–39. They are for you:

*And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to these*

*things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

# 10

# WE ALL EAGERLY AWAIT THE RESURRECTION AND GLORIFICATION OF THE SAINTS



**SALVATION IN JESUS CHRIST** encompasses three phases. First, we are saved from the guilt of sin. Second, we are saved from the tyranny of sin. These first two phases are glorious gifts to us when we are joined to Christ in our salvation. The final phase is when we will be freed finally from the presence of sin when Christ returns and raises out bodies in incorruptible glory.

Our glorification means we will be free from our sinful condition and every sinful predisposition of our sinful nature and every act of sin that makes us victims and transgressors.

*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the*

*revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (Rom. 8:18–25)*

