

something "unnatural," para physin. "Unnatural" in these passages does not refer to violation of so-called laws of nature, but rather implies action contradicting one's own nature. In view of this, we should observe that it is "unnatural," para physin, for a person today with a lesbian or gay sexual orientation to attempt living a heterosexual lifestyle. Romans 1:26 is the only statement in the Bible with a possible reference to lesbian behaviour, although the specific intent of this verse is unclear. Some authors have seen in this passage a reference to women adopting a dominant role in heterosexual relationships. Given the repressive cultural expectations placed on women in Paul's time, such a meaning may be possible.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:9-11

"So do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 6:9-10).

"The law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their father or mother; for murderers, fornicators, sodomites, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God" (1 Timothy 1:9-11).

Prostitution and pederasty (sexual relationships of adult men with boys) were the most commonly known male same-sex acts in the Greco-Roman culture in which Paul ministered.

In I Corinthians 6:9, Paul condemns those who are "effeminate" and "abusers of themselves with mankind," as translated in the King James version. Unfortunately, some new translations are worse, rendering these words "homosexuals." Recent scholarship unmasks the homophobia behind such mistranslations.

The first word - *malakos*, in the Greek text - which has been translated "effeminate" or "soft," most likely refers to someone who lacks discipline or moral control. The word is used elsewhere in the New Testament but never with reference to sexuality.

The second word, *Arsenokoitai*, occurs once each in I Corinthians and I Timothy (1:10), but nowhere else in other literature of the period. It is derived from two Greek words, one meaning, "males" and the other "beds", a euphemism for sexual intercourse. Other Greek words were commonly used to describe homosexual behavior but do not appear here. The larger context of I Corinthians 6 shows Paul extremely concerned with prostitution, so it is very possible he was referring to male prostitutes.

What is clear is that the type of relationships the apostle Paul is referencing in these passages are based on abuse and inequality and are not the same as the mutually loving and caring relationships between people of the same sex that is understood by the term 'homosexual' today.

The rarity with which Paul discusses any form of same-sex behaviour and the ambiguity in references attributed to him make it extremely unsound to conclude any sure position in the New Testament on homosexuality, especially in the context of loving, responsible relationships. Since any arguments must be made from silence, it is much more reliable to turn to the great principles of the Gospel taught by Jesus Christ and the Apostles. **Love God with all your heart, and love your neighbour as yourself. Do not judge others, lest you be judged. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is love . . . against such there is no law.**

When dealing with matters of biblical interpretation it is important to always keep in mind the role of the authority of the Bible in matters of faith and practice. While the Bible is an important witness to the relationship between God and humanity, it is not the ultimate revelation of God—Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, is.

LGCM

All the world's major religions are faced with having to come to terms with a modern understanding of homosexuality. The place of gay and lesbian people in the life of the Church is currently Christianity's most divisive issue. Confronting homophobia is its greatest challenge.

The **Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement** is proclaiming a basic Christian truth. It is working for the very love and freedom that Christ brings to his people through his life, death and resurrection. **LGCM** is working for love, for peace, for justice, and for the promotion of the Christian faith especially within the homosexual community.

Our Aims

To encourage fellowship, friendship, and support among individual lesbian and gay Christians through prayer, study and action, wherever possible in local groups, and especially to support those lesbian and gay Christians subjected to discrimination.

To help the whole Church re-examine its understanding of human sexuality, and to work for a positive acceptance of lesbian and gay relationships within the framework outlined in the statement of belief below, so that all homosexuals may be able to live without fear of rejection or recrimination, and that lesbian and gay Christians may be able to contribute fully to the life and ministry of the Church.

To encourage members to witness to their Christian faith and experience within the lesbian and gay community, and to witness to their convictions about human sexuality within the Church.

To maintain and strengthen links with other lesbian and gay Christian groups, both in Britain and elsewhere.

What We Believe

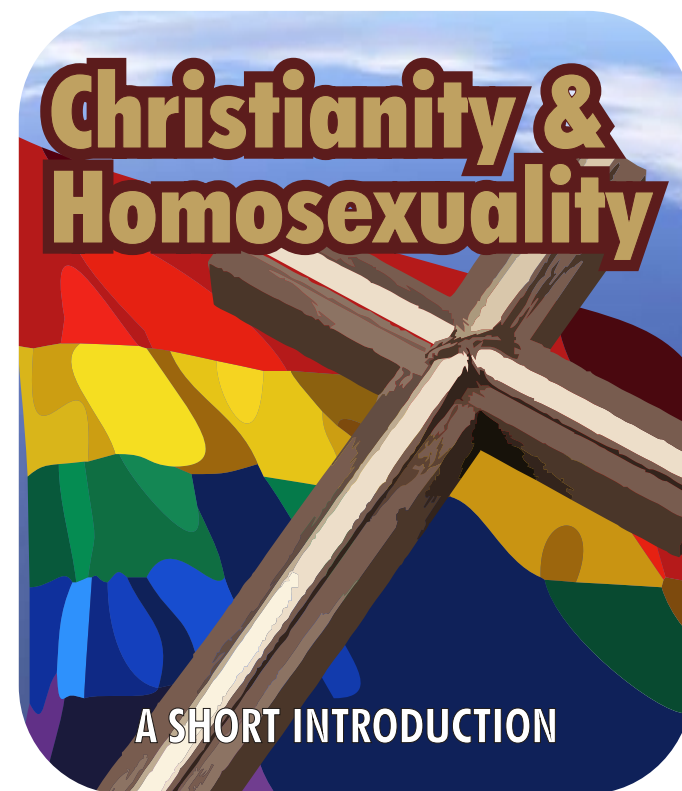
It is the conviction of the members of the Lesbian & Gay Christian Movement that human sexuality in all its richness is a gift of God gladly to be accepted, enjoyed and honoured as a way of both expressing and growing in love, in accordance with the life and teaching of Jesus Christ.

Therefore it is their conviction that it is entirely compatible with the Christian faith not only to love another person of the same sex but also to express that love fully in a personal sexual relationship.

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Registered Charity Number: 1048842

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Homosexuality Today

Being homosexual (usually referred to as lesbian or gay) means being attracted physically and emotionally to someone of the same sex. Lesbians or gay men want the same richness and depth that can only be founded on love in their relationships as heterosexual people.

All people are made as sexual beings and our sexuality is best explored in the mutual giving and receiving of love. For many years, and indeed for some people today, sexual activity was considered only acceptable between a man and a woman and for the sole purpose of producing children. However, our understanding of sex, sexuality and relationships has changed over the years and this is evident in the many changes in our laws as well as in social and medical practices.

Homosexuality is no longer considered to be a disease or a mental health issue and although gay people are in the minority that does not make homosexuality unnatural. You could draw a parallel with being left-handed. A hundred years ago you would have been forced to be right-handed but today it is accepted as a natural variation. Statistics show that approximately one in ten people are naturally gay or lesbian and that this percentage has remained stable across the years and across the world. Consequently, there is no 'cure' for homosexuality and therapies and exorcisms aimed at changing a persons sexual orientation have been found to be generally ineffective at their best and damaging at their worst. Unfortunately, some religious organisations still promote the use of 'reparative therapy' rather than offering understanding and acceptance.

Homosexuality is also no longer considered a crime in the UK. The law has been moving steadily towards equality. There is an equal age of consent, anti-discrimination laws in the workplace and for delivery of services (with some exceptions for religious organisations), and Civil Partnerships which give same-sex couples almost the same rights as straight married couples. Not everyone is happy with the changes in the law affording greater equality to lesbian and gay people. High-minded moralists ask for strict laws to protect the young from homosexuals even though the evidence shows that children and young people are at no greater risk of being molested by a gay man or lesbian than a straight man or woman. Some think that young people can be 'turned' gay or they will catch it like a disease, but no reputable psychiatrist would agree with this.

Being gay should not be a barrier to having a fulfilled family life and career or being fully accepted within the Christian community. And yet there are sections of society and the Church which refuse to acknowledge lesbian and gay people with respect. Sometimes they actively discriminate against them and use the Bible to justify their behaviour.

This is called Homophobia.

Homosexuality and the Bible

Many Christians have believed and most churches have taught that you cannot be a Christian and express your love for another person of the same sex in a sexual relationship. They believe that God has condemned this through the Bible and Church Teaching. So what does the Bible actually say?

Only a small number of passages in the entire Bible reference same-sex

sexual activity (out of the sixty-six books of the entire Bible it is mentioned in a few verses in only five of them). Obviously this topic was not of great concern to the biblical writers. Yet these verses have been used to justify hatred, condemnation and exclusion of God's lesbian and gay children.

The word 'homosexuality' is a modern term and did not exist during biblical times. Biblical writers had no concept of sexual orientation or sexual development as we understand these today. Therefore, passages that reference same-sex sexual activity should not be seen as comprehensive statements concerning homosexuality, but instead should be viewed in the context of what the ancient world that produced the Bible understood about sexual activity and human relationships.

Social science research into gender and sexual relationship patterns of the ancient Mediterranean world of the Bible have shown that in these societies sexual acts between men did happen, but they happened in order to show dominance of one group of men or a man over another, especially during times of war. It was not uncommon for men who had conquered a foreign army to rape them in order to show they were dominant and of a higher status. Professor Mary Tolbert summarises that research in the following statement:

'The single most important concept that defines sexuality in the ancient Mediterranean world, whether we are talking about the kingdoms of Egypt or of Assyria or whether we are talking about the later kingdoms of Greece and Rome, is that approved sexual acts never occurred between social equals. Sexuality, by definition, in ancient Mediterranean societies required the combination of dominance and submission. This crucial social and political root metaphor of dominance and submission as the definition of sexuality rested upon a physical basis that assumed every sex act required a penetrator and someone who was penetrated. Needless to say, this definition of sexuality was entirely male—not surprising in the heavily patriarchal societies of the Mediterranean.'

Tolbert, Mary (2002). "Homeroiticism in the Biblical World: Biblical Texts in Historical Contexts." Paper delivered at Lancaster School of Theology, published on the web at www.clgs.org.

The Old Testament

Genesis 19 - The story of Sodom and Gomorrah

Understanding the cultural context is helpful when we read the story of the city of Sodom, Lot, and the visitors (or angels). The men of Sodom want to 'know' (yadah - a Hebrew word that can mean sexual intercourse) the foreigners who have come to Lot's house. In essence they want to rape them in order to show their social and cultural dominance over them.

This story is not a condemnation of homosexuality, but is a story about rape and inhospitality. In other biblical texts (Ezekiel 16:49, Luke 10:11-12; 17:28-29) Sodom's 'sin' is not identified as homosexuality, rather, their sins were pride, failure to help the poor, and lack of hospitality to foreigners.

Leviticus 17-26 – The Holiness Code

"You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination." (18:22)

"If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them." (20:13)

These verses are part of the Holiness Code, a ritual for Israel's priests,

that attempted to spell out the ways the people of Israel would act differently than their Mediterranean neighbours. In light of the previously mentioned sexual practices of Israel's neighbours, it becomes clear that this prohibition in Leviticus was an attempt to preserve the internal harmony of Jewish male society by not allowing them to participate in anal intercourse as a form of expressing or gaining social and political dominance. These verses in no way prohibit, nor do they even speak, to loving, caring sexual relationships between people of the same gender.

Much is made of the term 'abomination' but again we need to be clear about it's meaning at the time it was written. For the writers of Leviticus, an 'abomination' is that which God found detestable because it was unclean, disloyal, or unjust. Several Hebrew words were so translated, and the one found in Leviticus, *toevah*, is usually associated with idolatry, as in Ezekiel, where it occurs numerous times. Given the strong association of *toevah* with idolatry and the canaanite religious practice of cult prostitution, the use of *toevah* regarding male same-sex acts in Leviticus calls into question any conclusion that such condemnation also applies to loving, responsible homosexual relationships.

Rituals and Rules

Rituals and Rules found in the Old Testament were given to preserve the distinctive characteristics of the religion and culture of Israel. But, as stated in Galatians 3:22-25, Christians are no longer bound by these Jewish laws. By faith we live in Jesus Christ, not in Leviticus. To be sure, ethical concerns apply to all cultures and peoples in every age. Such concerns were ultimately reflected by Jesus Christ, who said nothing about homosexuality, but a great deal about love, justice, mercy and faith and taught the importance of love and commitment in relationships. He condemned the Pharisees for keeping only to the letter of the law and for ignoring the fact that the law served a higher purpose.

The New Testament

Jesus is recorded as having spoken about all sorts of relationships and practices that affect relationships such as divorce, but said absolutely nothing about homosexuality. It is only in the letters from Paul that we find any mention of same-sex sexual activity.

Romans 1 – Idolatry and Unnatural Practices

"For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error." (1:26-27)

By now it should be clear that these verses must be read in the cultural context of the Mediterranean world that understood socially acceptable sexual behaviour to happen only one way: among unequals with the dominant partner always an adult male.

It is also important to read these verses in Romans within their larger context. At the beginning of his letter to the church in Rome (where he had not yet visited) Paul was attempting to lay out for the Roman church his theology of grace (all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; but are justified by the gift of grace in Christ Jesus, 3:23). He is writing to a Jewish and Gentile audience. In chapter one he tries to demonstrate the Gentiles' need for God by pointing out behaviours that keep them alienated from God. In chapter two he does the same thing for his Jewish audience.

Significant to Paul's discussion is the fact that these "unclean" Gentiles exchanged that which was "natural" for them, physis, in the Greek text, for