

# Same-Sex Marriage: Should it be a Civil-right? A Biblical View

by David Orton

<http://lifemessenger.org/sex-marriage-civil-right-biblical-view/>

## Preamble

In view of the current shifts, particularly in the English speaking Western nations, in regard to same-sex marriage we have felt a constraint to release a paper that might resource Christians in "thinking the thoughts of God after him". Be warned though, it is a necessarily comprehensive response – and some – to the main arguments of the pro-homosexual apology.

With the UK government's Wolfenden Report of 1957, leading to the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1967, culminating in the Same-Sex Couples Marriage Bill of 2013, and the US Supreme Court's *Obergefell v Hodges* same-sex marriage ruling of 2015, the shift in the Western nations to full acceptance of homosexuality and imbuing it with full civil rights – including marriage – is virtually complete.

However, to answer whether same-sex marriage *should* be a civil-right, it must first be asked as to whether it is, in fact, a criminal act.

Behaviours that are not classified by the state as criminal, we are clearly free to do, which denotes that they are also a civil-right; thus with the gradual decriminalisation of homosexuality across the Western nations over the decades, it is consistent that same-sex marriage has become an issue of equity and justice—of equality before the law.

Therefore, to answer the same-sex marriage question, we must first discover the biblical ethic in regard to homosexuality itself—that is, its sinfulness and/or criminality.

## Issues

To do this and answer the marriage question we need to not only consider the texts that deal with homosexuality, but also consider the role of:

[Scripture](#)

[Hermeneutics](#) and [Exegesis \(interpreting Scripture\)](#)

[Law and Grace](#)

[Church and State](#)

Confusion in all four of these – and as to how they interface – has led to a revisionist and pro-homosexual theology that has not only overtaken the more theologically liberal denominations, but also more recently significant portions of evangelicalism; and consequently to their acceptance, if not outright advocacy, of same-sex marriage.

Clarifying these four issues, this paper will argue that homosexuality is antithetical to biblically orthodox Christianity. It will show that the church has a divine mandate to teach the state and civil society the ways of God, including his righteous standards, and that the state has a responsibility to uphold justice based on those standards.

## Scripture <sup>△</sup>

Our view of the world is grounded in our view of Scripture; and moreover, our view of Scripture is grounded in our view of God.

God's *sovereignty* (i.e. God's superintendence and support of all that is) guarantees that his verbal communication to mankind through human writers is reliable, sufficient, and authoritative. This means that the Scriptures are trustworthy as they touch upon the cosmos—not only existentially in our dealings with God but also objectively in history, science, and ethics (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20-21; Heb 11:3; Ps 19:7-11).

Consequently our ethical system is grounded in our view of Scripture. If one presupposes merely human authorship of Scripture, as does the higher critical school, clearly it will not carry the same ethical authority as a divine communication. Furthermore, if there is not one divine author, the diverse human authors will be pitched against each other, displaying irreconcilable differences and contradictions, thus denying the Scriptures any unity or certainty. Or if the role of human agency (i.e. human writers) – despite admission of “divine inspiration” – is overstated as in various other critical schools (e.g. source and redaction theories) Scripture’s reliability is again diminished. Denying divine authorship on one hand or overstating human agency on the other are clearly presuppositions (i.e. *a priori* assumptions prior to evidence) that fly in the face of Scripture’s own evidence:

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

1 Thess 2:13 ESV

Those who claim that homosexuality is acceptable to God do so either by downgrading Scripture or by reading into the text their own preferences—or a combination of both, which leads us to the issue of hermeneutics and exegesis.

#### **Hermeneutics and Exegesis: Interpreting Scripture [△](#)**

Biblical hermeneutics is the science and art of interpreting the inspired text – Scripture – using the normal principles of grammar (sentence syntax etc.) and language (literary genre etc.) in addition to the text’s historical context. Re-emphasised through the Reformation, but with roots in Hebrew antiquity (e.g. Ezra), this is often called the grammatico-historical method. This interpretative method looks for the plain sense of the text, as addressed to the original audience, using the normal laws of grammar and language.

Exegesis, on the other hand, is the verse by verse *drawing out* of the text’s meaning using these hermeneutical principles. Eisegesis however is the opposite—that is, *reading into* the text our preferences and presuppositions—in other words, using the text as a pretext for what we want to say. Nevertheless, we must let the text speak for itself as the Word of God.

As we discussed above, once the authority, sufficiency, or finality of Scripture as God’s Word and revelation to humankind is diminished, likewise, our interpretation. This occurs through a denial or downplay of divine authorship, with the flipside of human authorship overplayed. This then causes the Scriptures to be viewed as a disparate compilation of competing texts; with divine authorship denied or downplayed they are also denied one divine mind and voice. Thus, confusion reigns between competing texts – and usually between Old and New Testaments – robbing the Scriptures of objective moral certainty.

Once the absolute of Scripture has been relativized, God’s people inescapably adopt the *zeitgeist* – the spirit of the age – as its authority and hermeneutic; and so, the philosophical milieu of contemporary Western culture – of synthesis and relativization – causes a blurring of categories and distinctions. This prevalent mind-set then leads to obscuring of legitimate boundaries, producing well intended but misguided public policies of “antidiscrimination” and “inclusion”. And yet, Adam’s first task in the creation mandate was to name the animals—to distinguish things that differ (Gen 2:19). This task of taxonomy (categorization) is foundational to science and basic to thinking and reasoning. Consequently, with the loss of categories and also of antithetical thinking – for example, God exists (thesis) in contrast to him not existing (antithesis) – our culture is losing the ability to think clearly in terms of truth and error, resulting in a synthesis of ideas—a potpourri of equally valid mystical and rationalistic beliefs and worldviews; no one is ever wrong and every one is always right, except of course the biblically orthodox Christian. The categories of truth and error are so blurred they are in fact reversed. And so, the biblical believer is considered a fool:

The prophet is a fool; the man of the spirit is mad,

because of your great iniquity and great hatred.

Hos 9:7

Accordingly, to be truly counter-cultural the believer must be renewed in their thinking (Rom 12:2). And to think Christianly is to think in terms of a pre-interpreted universe—of categories interpreted (i.e. given meaning) by the creator-God through his enscripturated word, the Bible. This is especially true in regard to human sexuality.

Accordingly, with the downgrade of Scripture, the primary interpretative error of pro-homosexual theology is the confusing of categories, and thus likening apples to oranges—truth is considered as error and error as truth.

We will now consider several category confusions and false comparisons before we move onto an exegesis of the homosexual texts.

### *Women in ministry*

First, they compare the prohibition of homosexuality to the prohibition of women from public ministry.

The argument goes that large portions of the evangelical church relativize Paul's injunctions regarding women and public ministry as merely cultural, relevant only for his local audience. This being the case the prohibition of homosexuality is equally culturally bound, so the argument goes.

How can this be resolved? By distinguishing cultural context from biblical context (i.e. the whole of scripture context). While cultural and historical context can be extremely helpful in shedding some light on a text, it must not be used to contradict the clear tenor of Scripture—that is, all the biblical data on the issue, also taking into account other hermeneutical principles such as the progressive nature of revelation through the old covenant, climaxing in the new. Therefore darker texts must be interpreted by lighter texts—usually the New Testament casting light on the Old. Augustine's aphorism stands true: "The New is in the Old concealed, and the Old is in the New revealed."

If a cogent argument can be put forward for the situational and cultural application of Paul's injunctions concerning women in public worship in his letters to the Corinthians and to Timothy – which I believe is the case with both letters – the question then must be considered as to whether this is out of harmony with the rest of Scripture. The answer is that there is no other biblical data that corroborates a universal prohibition on women in public ministry. The cultural/historical context is therefore not in conflict with a larger biblical context. There is no other biblical data, and so, the situational interpretation may stand. Paul was addressing specific issues peculiar to Corinth and Ephesus (where Timothy was located).

Similarly, if a cogent argument can be made that the prohibition of homosexuality in a given text is cultural and situational – which I will show cannot be done with any of the Old or New Testament texts – it must be asked whether this is at variance with the overall biblical data. I will show later, as we work through the texts, that it is at variance and that the prohibition, rather than local or situational, is in fact universal. We will see that any cultural context claims have no exegetical validity – and even if they did – the weight of the broader biblical prohibition of homosexuality is overwhelming.

We must distinguish accurately between those things that are of local (i.e. to specific time and place) or of universal (i.e. all times and places) application.

### *Slavery*

Second, they compare homosexuality with slavery. The argument goes that if the church has changed its position on slavery, despite the Bible's endorsement of it, she should also progress in her understanding of homosexuality despite the Bible's prohibition of it. They claim, "What is good for the goose is good for the gander"—what applies to one should apply to the other. Clearly, they argue, we are now more enlightened than were the Bible cultures on slavery—the Bible's handling of both was culturally bound.

The flaws of this argument are several. *First*, it is misinformed. Far from endorsing it, the Bible prohibits enforced slavery and the slave trade, which was punishable by death (Ex 21:16). Paul reiterates this prohibition in the very same sin list that ironically also prohibits homosexuality (1 Tim 1:8-11). They can't have it both ways—if the pro-homosexual argument wants to appeal to the more enlightened Christian view of slavery it must deal with the biblical data that informs it; and equally must deal with the biblical data that places homosexuality in the same category as slavery—that is, as sinful and prohibited. *Second*, for the sake of accuracy, the Bible does endorse a form of involuntary slavery as penal servitude for a theft where restitution has not been paid (Ex 22:3) or voluntary servitude for an unpaid debt (Deut 15:12). Unlike the slavery of other ancient

cultures, it served as a form of criminal justice and social welfare where prisons and state welfare were non-existent. Every Sabbath year the slaves and the debts were forgiven and released (Ex 21:1-2). Not only that they were sent on their way with their hands full, in payment for their six years of service (Deut 15:13-15). Another form of voluntary slavery was that of the love-slave who for love of his master chose not to leave on the Sabbath year (Ex 21:1-6). Clearly, so-called slavery in Israel served a judicial and welfare function. Slaves had some rights and position in the home (Gen 24:2), could share in inheritance (Prov 17:2) and were not to be returned if they fled their master (Deut 23:15-16).

#### *Modern science*

Third, they compare the church's rejection of homosexuality to its rejection of Copernicus and Galileo's revolutionary heliocentric (i.e. the sun as central) discovery. The argument goes that the church's obscurantist biblical literalism – in other words its hermeneutic – closed its mind to scientific development. Likewise, it is argued, the church has traditionally closed its mind about homosexuality, despite advances in science, because of a faulty hermeneutic—interpretation of the Bible.

The difficulty with this argument is that during the medieval era the Bible had actually taken a back seat to an Aristotelian worldview in both church and academy. And so, out of deference to this prevailing worldview, more than to the Scriptures, the church initially rejected the new scientific evidence. Though, it must be pointed out that even in our modern day scientists like the rest of us, speaking phenomenologically, refer to the “rising” of the sun – as does the Bible – without denying the facts of our solar system. The problem was not the Bible but rather the church adopting the prevalent secular philosophical worldview of the day. Let us be warned, lest we do likewise today! This, ironically, is the source of the contemporary confusion regarding homosexuality. Indeed, despite the medieval dominance of Aristotle, the Christian worldview gave birth to modern science; as C. S. Lewis famously said: “Men became scientific because they expected Law in Nature, and they expected Law in Nature because they believed in a Legislator (i.e. Law-Giver).” Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, and Isaac Newton in the next generation were all, undeniably, strong believers and motivated by their faith.

Additionally, this argument assumes a scientific consensus that homosexual orientation is genetically determined or at least prenatally conditioned. For the former, this is just not the case—there is absolutely no evidence that one's DNA determines homosexual orientation. This has been proven by studies of identical twins. If homosexual orientation was genetically determined it follows that 100% of twins possessing identical genes who are homosexual would have a twin who is also homosexual. However, this is not so—in twin studies only 11% of men and 14% of women are also same-sex attracted—see [“My Genes Made Me Do It! Homosexuality and the Scientific Evidence” by Dr N. E. Whitehead \(research scientist\), 290 pages, first edition 1999, 3rd edition July 2014](#). Using orthodox science and summarising over 10,000 scientific publications and papers, the book argues for a roughly 10% / 90% nature / nurture effect in homosexuality while asserting that any genetic effect is very indirect. The book shows that homosexual orientation is not biologically driven or fixed, but that change toward heterosexuality frequently occurs naturally without any therapeutic interventions.

#### *Race*

Fourth, homosexuality is compared to race. It is emotively touted as equivalent to a racial justice issue under the false rubric of the gospel's universality, quoting such verses as: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). This is a classic example of *eisegesis*—of reading our preferred meaning into the text.

In the context of the passage Paul is showing how God preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham by declaring, “In you shall all the nations be blessed” (Gal 3:8-9; Gen 12:3). Paul argues that the aberrant Jewish ethnocentric emphasis on justification by law was never God's intention, but rather that the blessing of Abraham – justification by faith – would come to the Gentiles (i.e. all nations) apart from the law (Gal 3:10-27). And so, verse 28, declaring that we are “all one in Christ Jesus” is a rhetorical exclamation underlining Paul's central argument that the gospel is not ethnocentric but universal—it is for all races and peoples. Consequently, now, in Christ, we possess a supernatural identity as sons of God (v 26) that transcends – rather than obliterates – any natural identification according to race, gender, or social status. Furthermore, there is absolutely no textual reference or allusion to homosexuality!

Using this text out of context (among others), politically correct demands for sexual “diversity” and “inclusion” are advanced as the ultimate – if not exclusive – Christian ethic, claiming Jesus as the model. Unfortunately, they forget that he is the same Jesus who warned he was bringing a sword and not peace and also who taught that at the Judgment there would be a separation from the sheep and goats—both imply the exact opposite of diversity and inclusion. It would seem that God's ethics are

somewhat counter-cultural.

Consequently, one cannot help but conclude that to equate the fight for same-sex equality to racial justice using the Bible is a manipulative and mendacious invention for propaganda purposes.

### Exegesis [^](#)

We will begin with the creation and Sodom accounts of Genesis, move through the Law and finish with the New Testament references to homosexuality.

#### *The Creation Account*

When God created the world he established a fundamental distinction in human sexuality: “male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27). The Hebrew word for male (*zakar*) and female (*neqavah*) refer to biological sexual distinction. These polarities between male and female are neither accidents of evolution nor cultural conventions. And so, the male-female sexual union – the “one flesh” relationship (Gen 2:24) – is God’s ordained design for human sexual relations. He has established heterosexuality as normative for the direction of sexual desire and behaviour. The fact that humanity is made in God’s image as male and female has defined sexual function, and thus, refutes the claims of homosexual apologists that human beings have the right to define their own sexual identity. In the light of the creation account, to do so is an act of autonomous man, replacing God’s distinctions with human decrees, and thus becoming as God.

The creation order, including the male-female distinction and sexual union, is affirmed throughout the New Testament (Mtt 19:1-12; Mk 10:6-8; 1 Cor 6:16; Eph 5:31). Scripture, on the other hand, is completely devoid of any positive representation of same-sex relationships – not even “faithful monogamous” ones – as normative.

Consequently, contrary to the pro-homosexual argument, homosexuals are made not born. While the possibility that environmental factors may predispose a person to same-sex attraction exists, it is still a learned disorder in defiance of God’s creation design. In light of the creation account and explicated by Paul in Romans 1, homosexuality is unambiguously a symptom of the disorder and disruption of creation by the Fall. Thus falling under the rubric of sin, homosexuality is included in Christ’s redemptive work; the believer can now account themselves as dead unto sin, including homosexuality (Rom 6:11), choosing to not let sin reign in their mortal bodies (v 12).

#### *The Sodom Story*

The creation order of Genesis is given ethical force by the story of Sodom in Genesis 19. The men of Sodom demanded to “know” (*yadha*) Lot’s two guests, precipitating the Sodomites being smitten with blindness and the destruction of the city. While later in Ezekiel (16:49, 50) homosexuality is not specified among her sins, reference is made to committing an “abomination” (*toebah*) which provides a link back to the Levitical prohibition of homosexuality which is described as *toebah* (Lev 18:22). Likewise Peter does not specify homosexuality as their sin but does hold up Sodom as “an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly” (1 Pet 2:7). Although Sodom is characterised by a general wickedness (Gen 18:20) it cannot be denied that their desire to “know” Lot’s guests is the offending sin of Genesis 19 and sufficient for her devastation (Gen 19:13; cf 18:21).

What exactly was this sin? The homosexual apologist argues that *yadha* is not the usual Hebrew word for homosexual coitus (*shakhabh*) and therefore should be understood in the ordinary sense of getting to know somebody. They argue that Lot, as a resident alien in Sodom, was responsible for the town’s hospitality and welcome of strangers, including checking their identity and credentials—it was for this reason that the Sodomites asked to “know” Lot’s visitors. The sin of Sodom is thereby understood as inhospitality to visitors.

This argument collapses under scrutiny.

*First*, rather than merely an alien resident in Sodom Lot was, in fact, a prominent figure who “sat in the gate” (Gen 19:1) and being well aware of the character of the populace was alerted to the moral danger threatening the visitors if they were to stay in the public square overnight (Gen 19:2, 3).

*Second*, when the men of the city surrounded his house, demanding to “know” the visitors, Lot did not perceive this as

innocent or a normal civil procedure, but as an act of “wickedness” (Gen 19:4-7). This provokes serious questions: (1) How would an innocent request to be acquainted with the visitors be considered a breach of hospitality; (2) How could this be deemed as “wickedness” in view of the city customs, which Lot as a prominent citizen no doubt understood; and (3) Why would this warrant such a severe divine judgment?

*Third*, how is Lot’s offer to substitute his daughters in place of the visitors to be understood (Gen 19:8)? Why would a father subject his daughters to violent sexual violation for the sake of a mere hospitality protocol? Additionally, how can Lot’s offer of his daughters who had not yet “known” any man be not construed as a sexual alternative to the original demand of the men of the city to “know” the visitors? This is exceptionally heightened by the use of *yadha* – to know – in both instances. How can *yadha* of verse 8 not be interpreted in the light of *yadha* in verse 5? Clearly, the request to “know” the visitors in verse 5 was sexual not social, particularly when the word *yadha* is also used elsewhere in Genesis for sexual relations (Gen 4:1). The NASB does in fact translate *yadha* in both verses as exactly that—“sexual relations”.

And so, the Sodomites were clearly demanding homosexual coitus with Lot’s visitors. How else is the severe judgment of Sodom to be credibly understood? The notion that Sodom’s sin was not so much homosexuality per se, but homosexual gang rape, will be answered under the following discussion of 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 10 where it will be shown that there is no biblical distinction between virtuous or non-virtuous homosexuality. It is mere speculation to claim – as some do – that Sodom was destroyed because of an idolatrous fertility cult involving homosexuality of which there is no mention in the text. Sodom was destroyed because “the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man” (Gen 19:4) had handed themselves over to unbridled homosexual debauchery, reflected in Lot’s righteous distress:

6 ... turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; 7 and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked 8 (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard);

2 Pet 2:6–8

Lot’s anguish was caused by Sodom’s “sensual conduct” and “lawless deeds”. While not the elect people possessing the written law of God that proscribed homosexuality (Lev 18:22; 20:13), they did have the law of God inscribed in their consciences (Rom 2:14, 15), and therefore, knew that they were accountable and that those who practice such things are “worthy of death” (Rom 1:32).

Jude leaves no doubt that Sodom was judged for violating God’s creation order:

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.

Jude 7 (emphasis mine)

The Sodomites “indulged in sexual immorality and pursued *unnatural desire*”. The Greek form, *ekporneuein*, for “sexual immorality” is intensive, denoting extravagant lust, which then “pursued” (*apelthousai*, adding further intensification, denoting utter abandonment) an “unnatural desire”. The object of their lust – “unnatural desire” (*sarkos heteras*) – can be literally rendered, “different flesh”. And thus, it was *unnatural* sexual intercourse, a departure from the laws of nature as ordained by the creator-God that placed Sodom under God’s judgment.

How is Sodom’s rebellion against God not being replicated by the post-Christian West’s abandonment to the sin of homosexuality? Moreover, how will there not be a greater judgment on the West than on Sodom? Christ declared that “it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for Sodom” than for those who witnessed his works and yet turned their backs (Mtt 10:15; 11:20-24). “To whom much is given much is required” (Lk 12:48). With her spiritual apostasy and advocacy of homosexuality as a virtuous lifestyle, like Israel of the first century, the contemporary Western church and culture has now, in fact, become “Sodom” (Rev 11:8).

*The Law*

The seventh commandment – “You shall not commit adultery” – protects sexual purity and the integrity of the family. Various case laws contained in the Pentateuch (five books of Moses) apply in practical specifics the moral equity of the Ten Commandments; and because the general moral equity of the judicial and case laws are grounded in the Ten Commandments they still have application today (Mtt 5:17-48; 1 Cor 9:8-10; 2 Cor 6:14; 1 Tim 5:18; Mk 10:19). Consequently, included under the general moral equity of the seventh commandment is the prohibition of various unnatural lusts, including homosexuality: “You will not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination” (Lev 18:22); “If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them” (Lev 20:13).

God’s law regarding homosexuality reflects his created order. When two members of the same sex practice intercourse with one another – expressed by the idiom “to lie with” – it violates God’s order and is viewed by him as an “abomination” (*toevah*, a term which carries overwhelmingly moral associations throughout its biblical usage).

Those who seek to suppress the implications of God’s created order for sexuality and reinterpret the sin of Sodom also – unsurprisingly – attempt to mitigate the full import of God’s law regarding homosexuality. These attempts are several:

*First*, it is argued that the prohibition of homosexuality is a purely arbitrary Jewish law without any social rationale—that is, the Bible doesn’t elucidate any harm it would cause to anyone else if it were practiced between consenting adults. However, if the divine authorship of the law (Lev 18:1-5), confirmed by Jesus and Paul (Mtt 22:39, 40; 2 Tim 3:16, 17), is not accepted it is superfluous to debate the moral code of Leviticus 18-20. If the law’s divine authorship is accepted a social rationale can be presumed, especially when God has declared that they are given for our positive benefit (Deut 6:24; 10:13; 30:15, 19, 20; 32:46, 47). The blessings and curses of obedience and disobedience to the covenant law of God for a society are critical (Deut 28).

*Second*, another more significant dispute claims that the Levitical prohibition of homosexuality (18:22; 20:13) is a ceremonial law not moral, and thus temporary. As a shadow, the ceremonial law is fulfilled in Christ as the substance. Hence, the cultic purification laws, for example unclean meats (Lev 20:25), were only local to Israel at that time, including the homosexual laws. However, while the category of ceremonial law is rightly affirmed as a shadow and type of Christ’s redemptive work and thus fulfilled (Heb 8:5; 10:1), there is no good reason to assign homosexuality to it. It must be asked as to how homosexuality prefigures, as a type and shadow, the redemptive work of Christ, as do the laws pertaining to priesthood, sacrifice, and sanctuary. Furthermore, the sanction of homosexuality by the death penalty unarguably identifies it as a civil and moral law, not as a ceremonial law.

*Third*, it is argued that the Holiness Code, including the prohibition of homosexuality, is given in the context of God’s warnings against the idolatrous practices of the Canaanites. Thus the prohibition is only concerning cultic homosexuality—that is, male temple prostitution, along with various other heathen religious practices such as boiling a kid in its mother’s milk (Ex 23:19). Hence, the issue is cultic defilement from the practices of alien religions, not homosexuality per se. The flaw of this argument is that God provided a specific law relating to cultic prostitution (Deut 23:17, 18) and there is no evidence in the context of the Levitical prohibition (18:22; 20:13) of a cultic application. This means that both laws together covered not only the cultic but also the personal practice of homosexuality. History confirms that the Canaanites were not only practicing homosexuality religiously but also hedonistically as a lifestyle. And so, the advocates of this argument illegitimately collapse both commands into one, effectively suppressing an aspect of God’s moral will, which would be similar to the interpreter who reads Rom 13:13 and 1 Cor 11:21, concluding that God only prohibits drunkenness at the Lord’s table, not in general. Additionally, if the cultic reinterpretation of Leviticus 18:22 was also applied to the next verse (23) bestiality would then be divinely sanctioned except for cultic practices, which appropriately defies our moral sensibilities; thus confirming the moral aptness of homosexuality’s general prohibition.

Concluding our consideration of God’s law, we are compelled to agree that it proscribes homosexuality with great moral force, describing it as an “abomination” and sanctioning it with the death penalty. It is to be noted that under the law “every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense” (Heb 2:2). Clearly, dissolving any distinction between the sexes is a transgression of great significance (Deut 22:5). The moral force concerning homosexuality is heightened by the fact that while other capital crimes allowed for ethical distinctions based on mitigating circumstances (Deut 22:23-29) and even motivations (Deut 19:4-13), the law concerning homosexuality did not. When these kinds of ethical distinctions are critical for establishing accountability and justice God provided with the law clear qualifications, thus not leaving the law open to

arbitrary speculation. However, regarding homosexuality, God gave only the bare command and sanction—no excuse, no consideration to circumstance, and no amendment allowable.

The various attempts to escape the binding character of God's word concerning homosexuality are futile. Twisting the text through exegetical gymnastics to fit one's sexual preference violates the interpretive principles of the broader context and analogy of Scripture. As we have sought to demonstrate, when cultural or historical context is given greater authority than the text itself it inevitably distorts the word of God.

#### *Romans 1*

The New Testament, and Paul in particular, confirm the Old Testament ethic concerning homosexuality:

26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. 32 and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

Rom 1:26–27, 32 NASB

In context, Paul is showing that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all those who turn from their proper relationship to the Creator; suppressing the truth of God that is plain to them, they become futile in their thinking and resort instead to idolatry, worshiping the creation instead of the Creator. Being thus dislocated from God, they are handed over to impure lusts and the dishonouring of their bodies—specifically, to homosexuality, which Paul describes with disapprobation as “impurity”, “degrading passions”, “indecent acts”, “error”, and the “improper activity of a depraved mind” (v 28). Homosexuality exchanges the natural use of sex for unnatural sexual practices (v 26, 27), manifesting immoral perversion in the most intimate of human relations and being “worthy of death” (v 32), Paul evidently drawing on the creation account and the law of the Old Testament as his authority.

Nonetheless, the homosexual apologist uses several arguments to evade Paul's clear indictment of homosexuality as aberrant.

*First*, it is argued that Paul's reference to homosexuality here is incidental rather than central to his argument. It is merely one among various results of humankind's dislocation from God. Nevertheless, in response, it is Paul's prime illustration of the dislocation that results from rebellion against God. While Paul is unmistakably demonstrating the relation of roots and results, the moral character of homosexuality is discussed in its own right and thus cannot be minimised. As both a sin and punishment for sin, it is a double-header (v 24).

*Second*, it is claimed that Paul is condemning lust and promiscuity, not loving monogamous homosexual relationships. It is assumed that the moral calibre of a homosexual relationship cannot be judged apart from the context and attitude with which one exercises it; if invested with love and faithfulness it should be morally distinguished from promiscuous homosexuality and therefore commendable as a Christian practice. In response, Paul was expert in distinguishing the finer points of moral and ethical dilemmas; for example, meats offered to idols, marriage and divorce, spiritual gifts, uses and abuses of the law. If homosexuality was to be more finely distinguished in its forms of practice and consequent ethical implications, Paul would have supplied these qualifications. In ancient culture various forms of homosexuality were well recognised: for example, as an ideal expression of love (in Plato's *Symposium*) or an aid to military prowess (in Spartan propaganda) versus prostitution and promiscuity. The former was encouraged, that latter not. As one well versed in the culture of his day, Paul chose not to recognise any distinctions whatsoever in his categorical condemnation of homosexuality. There is no more a Christian form of homosexuality as there is a Christian form of bestiality or adultery. It is simply an “error” (v 27).

*Third*, it is argued that Paul's concern, as a Jew, was about idolatrous contamination from Hellenistic culture and its association with homosexuality—thus, cultic prostitution. The sin list of Romans 1 was a cliché-ridden list of well-known sins common to Gentile cultures, thus placing all men under God's wrath, regardless of specific behaviours. It follows that no sexual behaviour is therefore inherently virtuous; in fact, even heterosexuality could be equally sinful if idolised. And so goes the argument that a true understanding of Paul would allow one to be “graciously gay”. In response, a warning must be given

to interpreters that they not “twist” the Scriptures “to their own destruction” (2 Pet 3:16). Without a fear of God and a reverence for his Word we will bend the Scriptures to suit our own inclinations. This argument is a serious perversion of the doctrine of God’s grace and wrath. To say that God’s law condemns all men is not the same as saying God’s law condemns all attitudes and behaviours; there are behaviours that God commands (e.g. six days work each week) and behaviours he condemns (e.g. Sabbath breaking and stealing). Even though all men universally stand condemned under God’s law, it does not render heterosexuality and homosexuality ethically neutral. Accordingly, just as there can be no Christian form of murder, there can be no Christian form of homosexuality. Paul indicts homosexuality as a specific behaviour condemned by God as he also does murder (v 29); and rather than sourcing it from a popular vice list of the day, he has been informed by the righteous requirements of God’s holy law (Ex 20:13) based on the conviction that *all* Scripture is inspired by God and suitable for reproof, correction, and training in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16, 17). Although, if he had sourced it from a vice-list of the day it would not effect the moral authority of his indictment as there are numerous instances of Paul’s citation of secular writers as he wrote under inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, the fact that Paul shifts from his discussion of idolatry to homosexuality does not suggest an exclusive reference to cultic homosexuality. This cannot be the case any more than his judgment on prostitution in Corinth as restricted only to its cultic practice (1 Cor 6:15). Paul’s overriding concern in Romans 1 is not a specific form of homosexuality, but rather homosexuality – in general – as the primary outworking of mankind rejecting the creator-God. Consequently, Paul’s referencing idolatry could be seen as an allusion to the Fall and the generic human condition of becoming as gods (Gen 3:5). The central focus of Paul’s project in the larger context of Romans 1-3 is to demonstrate the universal sinfulness of man, rooted in our first parent’s rebellion.

*Fourth*, perhaps the most creatively ingenious argument is the one that claims the “exchange” of natural inclinations for those contrary to nature (Rom 1:26, 27) is really the heterosexual person who has inappropriately adopted homosexuality. Their orientation is actually toward the opposite sex, but for whatever reason – against their nature – they have adopted same-sex behaviours. Therefore, the person who has never had opposite-sex attraction and is thus “constitutionally” (i.e. naturally) homosexual is outside the scope of Paul’s judgment. Indeed, we are told, it would be a perversion, according to Paul, for the naturally same-sex attracted person to turn to heterosexuality; it would be an exchange of the natural for the unnatural. What was the strongest argument for the inherent immorality of homosexuality has now become its greatest defence!

This argument rests on three different interpretations offered by homosexual apologists of the phrase “against nature” (*para phusin*): (1) Paul was referring to that which is contrary to the nature or essence of a thing, but how is what is natural to be determined—is homogenised milk condemned because it is unnatural? (2) Paul was speaking of that which is contrary to what is natural for a culture or custom, so homosexuality cannot be viewed as intrinsically evil—it is merely unnatural to a particular culture; (3) Paul was referring to that which is contrary to one’s normal inclinations, so Paul is merely censuring the heterosexual person who has adopted homosexual behaviour contrary to their opposite-sex nature.

While each of these justify an individual response, for the sake of space, let us bulk them up with one reply: we must discern the proper meaning for Paul of “against nature”—in the immediate context he is speaking of the knowledge of God available through the created world, rendering them morally accountable to God (Rom 1:18-25); men are responsible for knowing certain things – including moral truths – from the objective condition of the world including human nature (1 Cor 11:14), and so, can know instinctively the things that are true concerning God and themselves, doing by nature the things of God’s law (Rom 2:14).

In the New Testament “natural” pertains to the created world and its present order as created by God. Consequently, God has ordained the “natural function” for sexual relations in his creation order: the normative pattern of male and female becoming one flesh. Man’s inherited condition and ordinary biological makeup without artificial intervention or reorientation is heterosexual. Therefore, in the light of Scripture there is no such thing as “natural homosexuality” (i.e. homosexual orientation). It is a perversion of the created order.

Furthermore, to interpret the phrase “exchanged the natural function for that which is against nature” as a personal and psychosexual orientation requires a forced exegesis. Rather, Paul was referring to “the natural function” regardless of whether individual homosexuals have consciously experienced heterosexual desires or acts. He is explicating what is normal for mankind, not for individuals. He was concerned not with the sexual natures of diverse individuals but with the generic and categorical sexual function ordained by God for mankind. For example, it may be individually “natural” for someone to be a kleptomaniac, but is nonetheless a perversion of God’s prescriptions for man. Likewise, to say that heterosexual desires and

acts are not “natural” to those who are – supposedly – constitutionally homosexual plainly suppresses Paul’s point. Homosexuality per se is always unnatural.

In conclusion, Paul represents homosexuality as the cultural culmination of rebellion against God. It is the burning out of man and his culture (Rom 1:27). They are not only given up to a debased mind, but also filled with all manner of unrighteousness—the full harvest of their defection from the creator-God has come. In spite of their instinctive knowledge of him and his decrees, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they have recklessly abandoned themselves to godlessness as a society, publically endorsing such aberrant behaviours (Rom 1:32). Subsequently, in light of the creation order, the law of God, the Sodom story, and Romans 1 – not to mention the West’s Christian roots – how can the decriminalising of homosexuality and the granting of same-sex marriage not be viewed other than the climactic devolution and judgment of the West?

*1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 and 1 Tim 1:8-10*

The Christian ethic necessarily looks to the design of God in creation and the law of God as definitive for his will in our lives. Add to this the salient lesson of the Sodom story and Paul’s seminal teaching of Romans 1, the censure of homosexuality as sexually deviant (i.e. deviating from a norm) is inescapable. This censure cannot be side-stepped by seeking to distinguish between homosexual orientation and homosexual acts. The Scripture categorically defines homosexuality, without distinction, as a sin—a wilful perversion, whether merely in orientation or in act. However, it also sets forth the hope that men and women engaged in homosexuality can experience the transforming power of God’s grace, setting them free from the power of sin. Within this framework it is possible to derive direction from God’s Word as to how the Christian can relate to the homosexual in both the church and in the affairs of the state.

The voluminous rhetoric of unorthodox churchmen – increasingly including evangelicals – that homosexuality should be normalised and that the church should side with homosexuals as an oppressed minority calls upon biblically faithful believers to be clear on a response.

In contrast to the politically correct rhetoric, Paul clearly placed homosexuals outside the kingdom of God:

9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

1 Cor 6:9–10 ESV

Earlier in the passage Paul provides a catalogue of sins that places anyone that calls himself a brother also outside of the church (1 Cor 5:9-11). He now expands the list to amplify more specifically “sexual immorality”; it now includes: “adulterers” and “men who practice homosexuality”. And so, they are not only outside the redeemed community but also do not inherit the kingdom of God.

The two Greek terms rendered as “homosexuality” are *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* (the latter is also used in 1 Tim 1:10). The former (literally meaning “soft, gentle”, and in moral contexts “yielding, or remiss”) refers to those who allow themselves to be misused in the passive role of homosexual coitus; the latter is in the masculine gender and is a compound of two words for “male” and “bed” (English transliteration, *coitus*), thereby referring to men who have intercourse with men; it is analogous to the Old Testament reference to men who go to bed with (“lie with”) other males—that is, those who take the active role in homosexual intercourse.

Paul introduces this amplified sexual sin list with the injunction: “Do not be deceived”. It is in these very issues – of sexual sins – that humanity is most prone to self-deception; this is nowhere more evident than in the deceptive manoeuvres of the homosexual apologist in regard to the Scriptures. The believer is not to be deceived about the status of homosexuals in relation to the redeemed community nor to the kingdom of God. They are disassociated from the former and disinherited from the latter. Contrary to the claims of the unorthodox, Christianity and homosexuality are mutually exclusive.

The church is not to admit those whom God has excluded, let alone ordain them to the ministry—that is, *unrepentant*

homosexuals. True concern for the homosexual is not expressed by controverting the revealed will of God in regard to human sexuality. Therefore to receive practicing homosexuals into the covenant community is an act of pseudo-compassion, attempting to be more compassionate than God himself.

Paul concludes his excoriation of immorality with the good news:

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

Clearly, the church of Corinth – a city synonymous with immorality – numbered those among them who were previously homosexual, but had been set free by the power of God. The Lord will honour those who honour him— if God’s righteous standards are upheld by the church he will indeed honour his own word and draw those who are destined to salvation. We are not to be deceived by misguided notions of the church’s “relevance” to society for its success. We are to “stand still” in this regard to “see the salvation of God”!

Defenders of homosexuality do not see Paul’s words as we have, for several reasons, but for the sake of brevity we will consider the primary one.

They claim that the Greek word *malakoi* denotes any form of immorality (including heterosexual) and *arsenokoitai* refers to excess sexual behaviour and thus to male prostitution, as an abusive form of homosexuality. An amplification of this theme specifies pederasty as the abusive form of homosexuality that Paul is excoriating, not homosexuality in general. Pederastic men (*arsenokoitai*) hire the services of child or teenage “call boys” (*malakoi*). Thus, Paul is not prohibiting all forms of homosexuality (e.g. monogamous, consensual adult relationships).

However, these claims are refutable on several grounds: (1) the claim of “general immorality” fails logically on the level of comparison—if homosexuality and heterosexuality were equivalent sexual practices there would be no need to specify any sexual category beyond adultery and fornication; (2) the claim of “excessive immorality” fails in its application to the remainder of the catalogue of sins—“excessive” theft or greed, for example, are nonsensical; (3) their refutation that Paul is addressing “homosexuality in general” fails because it presupposes there are positive and virtuous forms of homosexuality, which again is logically inconsistent with the remainder of the sin list—for example, how is it possible to have virtuous forms of “greed” or “swindling”; (4) the claim that *malakoi* means “call boy” is refuted by the most solid scholarship, showing that in classical Greek, in the Septuagint (Greek translation of OT) and in the New Testament it carries the broader sense of “effeminate” or “soft” and is never used as a technical term for pederastic “call boys”, but rather when used in juxtaposition with *arsenokoitai* refers to the passive male partner in homosexual coitus; (5) the claim that *arsenokoitai* refers to pederasty fails because Paul bypasses any possible connotation of a specific form of homosexuality by not using any of the usual terms familiar to the Greco-Roman world—instead Paul, as a Greek speaking Jew, has drawn from the Septuagint and, in fact, coined the term as a compound of the two words for “male” and “lie with” in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, thus grounding his definition of homosexuality in the law of God, providing the most general description of male-to-male sexual acts.

#### Law and Grace [^](#)

For many, including revisionist pro-homosexual apologists, it is argued, “We are not under law but under grace!” (Rom 6:14). Likewise, Paul declares, “I died to the law so that I might live for God” (Gal 2:19; also Rom 7:6; 1 Cor 9:20). Therefore, the Old Testament law has been abolished, they claim, including the laws concerning homosexuality.

And yet, Paul affirms that “the law is holy, and the commandment holy, righteous and good” (Rom 7:12), also citing it as warrant for his ethical judgments among the churches (1 Cor 9:9; Eph 6:1-2). He candidly states, “In my inner being I delight in God’s law” (Rom 7:22).

So, how do we understand this apparent ambiguity concerning the law in the New Testament?

Paul resolves it when he declares, “But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it *lawfully*” (1 Tim 1:8 NASB). As we have

already seen, he affirms it as good and holy. He also affirms it as “spiritual” (Rom 7:14), so that those who live “according to the Spirit” will indeed fulfil the “righteous requirement of the law”, whereas “the mind set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law” (Rom 8:4, 7). So, clearly the law of God and walking in the Spirit are not mutually exclusive—one’s response to God the Holy Spirit is revealed in one’s obedience to the law.

Nonetheless, as Paul explains to Timothy, it is possible to use the law of God *unlawfully*. The law must be used according to God’s purpose for it. For example, the Pharisees and Judaizers used “the works of the law” for self-merit before God—for their own justification. This was not God’s design for the law, producing – even though the law is good and holy – a far from “good” effect: a pharisaic pretence of righteousness.

So, how does one use the law *lawfully*? As Paul explains, according to the *law of faith*; and thereby, distinguishes between the *works of the law* and the *law of works*:

27 Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a **law of works**? No, but by the *law of faith*. 28 For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from **works of the law**. 29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, 30 since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.

Rom 3:27–30 (emphasis mine)

We may define the **works of the law** as obedience to the law’s moral injunctions; and therefore, as good, holy and spiritual. It is using the law *lawfully*—that is, for the purpose of *sanctification*.

We may define the **law of works** as pursuing the righteousness of the law through a principle of self-effort and self-justification, in contrast to the **law of faith** that places confidence in Christ and *his* justifying work. The *law of works* uses the law *unlawfully*—that is, for the purpose of *justification*.

The Pharisees and Judaizers used the law *unlawfully* by attempting to do the *works of the law* (i.e. obedience to the law with its rabbinical additions) through the *law of works* (i.e. the principle of self-effort and self-justification), thus rejecting the *law of faith*; for as Paul shows, “... ‘The just shall live by faith’” (Rom 1:17b). Paul explicates this further later in Romans:

30 What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; 31 but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. 32 Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. ...

Rom 9:30–32

So, when Paul declares “we are no longer under law but under grace” (Rom 6:14) what does he mean? He means that the believer is not under the *law of works* as a justifying / condemning principle, which only leads to death because of our inability to obey the law (Rom 2:25-27; 3:19-20; 7:5-12; 2 Cor 3:6; Col 2:11-14); instead we are now under grace through the *law of faith* because Christ has satisfied the law on our behalf:

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. ... 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Rom 3:23–26

So, what now happens to the Old Testament law?

In the last verse of Romans 3 Paul poses this very question: “Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the

contrary, we uphold the law” (Rom 3:31). The law is to be upheld—that is, the *works of the law* must still be done.

While, in Christ, we are dead to the law so as to live by the Spirit (Rom 7:4-6), the law itself is not dead—it is to be upheld. But what does it mean for the believer to be dead to the law? It means to be dead to the *sin-enlivening effect* of the law and its consequent condemnation, for the law itself remains holy, righteous, and good (Rom 7:7-12)— and thus to be maintained.

Our Lord himself makes this clear:

17 “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. 18 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. 19 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.

Matt 5:17–19

Putting aside the arguments about the meaning of “fulfil” (v.17), it is clear that the law is not repealed, nor is the believer freed from its moral imperatives and commands. In fact, the one who teaches this is considered to be least in the kingdom of God. As earthly kings establish their domain through their laws, likewise, the kingdom of God is exercised through his law.

It beggars theological belief to imagine that the mission of Christ was to render it now morally acceptable to engage in behaviours contrary to the law of God: murder, stealing, bestiality, adultery, rape, or homosexuality! Christ did not come to change the righteous standard of the law, but rather the means by which it is to be obeyed. Not only was Christ the *eschatological* (final) fulfilment of all that the “law and the prophets” foreshadowed typologically, but also the *soteriological* (salvation) fulfilment—“in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us” (Rom 7:3). The law’s moral imperatives still apply! Rather than the believer attempting to obey the law in their own strength for their own justification they can now obey the law through the power of the Holy Spirit unto sanctification (Rom 7:4-7; 8:1-8).

Heaven and earth will not pass until every detail of the law is accomplished—in us and, as we will see momentarily, in the whole world when we consider the role of church and state. The Great Commandment to love the Lord and our neighbour is merely a summary statement of the Ten Commandments and their application through specific case laws in Israel’s daily life (Mtt 22:35-40; Ex 20-23). The Great Commandment, as a comprehensive statement of the law, cannot be pitted against the law’s specific details, as some attempt to do—the New Testament summary statement and the Old Testament detailed specifics go hand-in-glove. Thus Christ reiterates the moral requirement of the law in all its specifics, which includes homosexuality.

At this point it is necessary to appreciate the three-fold distinction of the law (moral, civil, and ceremonial), which a revisionist pro-homosexual theology seeks to disregard, preferring to teach that the whole law – without distinction – is superseded. The three-fold distinction is far from arbitrary; rather it emerges from Scripture’s own internal logic as it interprets itself: moral law defines justice, including its civil applications, while ceremonial law guides redemptive restoration in the light of that justice. The moral *and* civil law answers the question, “How should I live?”; the ceremonial law symbolically answers the question, “How can I be restored to God’s favour after breaking His moral law?” Recognising this distinction, consequently clarifies both the *continuities* and *discontinuities* between Old and New Testaments.

As we have already shown, the moral requirements of the law are restated by Christ and the apostles, and thus, continue through into the new covenant. However, the ceremonial laws of sacrifice, priesthood and temple discontinue; although they do continue as type through to antitype, from shadow to substance, as spiritual realities, having been fulfilled in Christ (Heb 8-10; Col 2:11-17). As cultic laws they no longer apply.

Some argue that the prohibition of homosexuality is a ceremonial law, and thus temporary; but one must ask how, as such, it serves as a type of Christ’s redemptive ministry. Additionally, the fact that homosexuality was sanctioned by the death penalty demonstrates conclusively that, in fact, it was treated as a moral and justice issue. We will discuss Israel’s civil (and judicial) laws and their potential applicability for today under the head of church and state.

In concluding this section, it remains to be said that pitting law and grace – Old Testament law and New Testament gospel

(grace) – as antithetical either/or options echoes the heresy of Marcionism.

Around AD 144 Marcion dualistically represented the God of the Old Testament as a vengeful tyrant while the superior God of the New Testament was one of love and forgiveness—and never shall the twain meet! This heresy is alive and well as many Christians buy into the false antitheses between Old and New Testament as one of law and grace. It is not biblical Christianity and leads to antinomianism—a gospel of grace to the exclusion of objective ethical requirements; thus opening the way for homosexuality to be considered as either a virtue, or at least as morally neutral. And yet, Jesus declared, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (Jn 14:15; also 15:10) and Paul that “love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom 13:10b; see also 1 Jn 2:3-6; 5:3; 2 Jn 6; 1 Pet 2:21). Clearly love and law-keeping are not antithetical. As we have already seen, both the Old Testament law *and* grace apply in the dynamics of the gospel: the law – in summary and specifics – is written on the fleshly tables of our heart (2 Cor 3:3; Heb 8:10).

The situation Jude confronted is being revisited in the contemporary homosexual apology:

4 For **certain persons** have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who **turn the grace of our God into licentiousness** and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

5 **Now I desire to remind you**, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe. ... 7 **just as Sodom** and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and **went after strange flesh**, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.

Jude 1:4–7 NAS (emphasis mine)

Through a misinterpretation of the scripture, “we are not under law but under grace”, the grace of God has been turned into licentiousness. By divorcing the law of God from the grace of God a revisionist homosexual theology has justified an immoral behaviour clearly censured in both the Old and New Testaments.

#### Church and State [△](#)

In understanding the biblical role of church and state – and its implications for homosexuality – we must first understand the transformational nature of God’s kingdom.

Christ is not only “head over all things to the church” (Eph 1:22), but also “ruler of kings on earth” (Rev 1:5). Through Christ’s resurrection and ascension he has been given “all authority in heaven *and* on earth” (Mtt 28:18). This was in fulfilment of the Old Testament’s anticipation of a Messianic kingdom that would fill the whole earth and rule the nations.

Daniel, in particular, foreshadowed this with his interpreting of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, providing a prophetic forecast of universal history. Appearing to Nebuchadnezzar was the great image of a man – representing human autonomy and its pretensions to power in the flow of history. In descending quality of materials, it foretold human history, beginning with Nebuchadnezzar as its head and shoulders of gold, to its chest and arms of silver, middle and thighs of bronze, and finally legs of iron with feet of part iron and clay (Dan 2:31–45). The majority of commentators agree that this superlative human image represents four major consecutive empires of human history: Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman.

Rather than an evolutionary upward trajectory, humanism (represented in this image of a human colossus) is exposed as, in fact, devolving from gold down to iron and clay, climaxing history in a “stone cut out by no human hand” thrown onto the feet of the image. Not only are the feet destroyed but also the whole idolatrous image collapses with the stone becoming a mountain that fills the whole earth.

The *stone* and the *mountain* are none other than Christ and his kingdom, invading human history in the period of Rome’s rule. It not only crushes the Roman Empire and the Caesar-cult, in particular, but also collapses the whole humanistic system of autonomous man. Thus Nebuchadnezzar’s image is a potent prophecy of the transformational nature of God’s kingdom and its ultimate victory in history:

And in the days of those kings [the Roman Empire] the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever

Dan 2:44

The book of Revelation, in the time of the Roman Empire, declares that *now* – in the climax of history this has been fulfilled: “...The kingdom of the world *has* become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ...” (Rev 11:15, emphasis mine). The kingdom of God has already been inaugurated in the person of Christ.

And so, we might ask, “What is the role of the church in the advance of Christ’s kingdom in the world?”

Isaiah provides the answer as he also prophetically proclaims the coming age of God’s reign on earth:

2 It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, 3 and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Isa 2:2–3

As we have already seen in Daniel 2 (v 35, 44-45) the “stone cut out without human hands” becomes a *mountain* that fills the whole earth. In biblical symbolism *mountains* signify nations and kingdoms (Jer 51:25; Ps 72:3; Heb 12:22, 28; Rev 17:9-11).

But here we not only see a mountain but, specifically, the “mountain of the *house* of the Lord” that is lifted above all others. God’s *house* (church) is established upon the supreme *mountain* (kingdom), foreshadowing the church being built upon the rock of the revelation of Christ and his kingdom thus prevailing over the gates (authority) of hell (Mtt 16:18).

Therefore, with the rise of this “mountain of the house of the Lord” above all others the nations spontaneously respond by saying, “Come, let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may *teach* us his *ways*... For out of Zion shall go the *law*, and the *word* of the Lord...” (v 3).

Here we discover the role of the church. It is to *teach* the nations, as they “flow to the mountain of the Lord”—that is, as they respond to the supremacy of God’s kingdom and power. Precedents already exist for this in history: as the gospel spread and prevailed throughout the known world of the first centuries it drove back the demonic darkness of a pre-Christian world and ultimately establishing the Christian nations of Europe, leading to the missionary expansion to the whole planet.

However, we must ask as to *what* the church teaches the nations: it is God’s *ways*, *law*, and *word* (v 3).

These law-words were not only given for Israel’s own prosperity but also as a demonstration of God’s wisdom and ways to the nations:

1 “Now, O Israel, **listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to perform**, so **that you may live** and go in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. 2 “You shall not add to **the word which I am commanding you**, nor take away from it, that you may **keep the commandments** of the LORD your God which I command you. ... 5 “See, **I have taught you statutes and judgments** just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. 6 “**So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples** who will hear all these statutes and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ 7 “**For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him?** 8 “Or what great nation is there that **has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?**

Deut 4:1–8 (emphasis mine)

Israel's role as a missionary nation to the earth is also revealed in Exodus:

5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel."

Exod 19:5–6

As a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" she is to model God's economy for all nations, not only through her cultic life (redemptive economy) but also through her ethical life (moral/legal economy) by obeying his voice and keeping his covenant. It is significant that the ethical stipulations of the covenant follow immediately on the heels of the revelation of Israel's missionary purpose in Exodus 19. The Ten Commandments are given in Exodus 20, followed by their application in various case laws through chapters 21-23.

Clearly, God's purpose for old covenant Israel as a missionary nation has now been expanded to the new covenant church (in whom there is neither Jew nor Gentile), as evidenced by Peter's citation of this very passage as applicable to believers (1 Pet 2:9).

Using different language, Paul picks up the same thought, also applying it to the new covenant church:

8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light what is the administration [*oikonomos*] of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; 10 so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

Eph 3:8–10

The apostolic mission to the nations was to bring to light, through the gospel, the creator-God's economy ("administration" – *oikonomos*, literally, the law of the house) for the world.

Nevertheless, like Israel of old, God has purposed that a people will model that plan: "that the manifold *wisdom of God* might now be made known *through the church* to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places."

The new covenant church is now mandated to extend the kingdom of God by teaching and demonstrating God's multi-faceted wisdom and ways before a watching world (Mtt 28:18-20).

How does she do this except by obeying God's revealed will for the totality of human existence—in her communal life and relationships, in her economic practice, in marriage and family, in sexuality, and in ethics and holiness. And how does the redeemed community know the will of God except through the Scriptures; and so, according to Paul, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). *All* Scripture categorically includes the law, without which God's people are ill equipped for their own obedience and for teaching the nations God's ways.

The redeemed community's mandate to teach the nations to obey all that our Lord *commanded* is revealed in the Great Commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...*teaching* them [i.e. nations] to observe all that I have *commanded* you" (Matt 28:19–20, emphasis mine). Our Lord who taught the disciples during his earthly ministry is also the Lord who gave the law through Moses. The law of God not only provides an objective ethical standard for the believer's life, but also for social and political policy. This was well recognised by both the early church Fathers and the Reformers, but has been sadly forgotten by the contemporary church. And as a result we have lost our savour and thus our prophetic voice to the state and civil society.

The modern secular humanist exorcism of Christianity from the public square claims a false notion of the separation of church and state that is foreign to the framers of the American constitution, not to mention the biblical view of church and state. The rationale of the American constitution, rather than prohibiting Christianity from a voice in public affairs was, in fact, to prohibit an “established” church – as in the Old World – and a consequent sectarian favouritism. Additionally, it would save America from the abuses of the unholy alliance of church and state, as so often experienced in the European Christendom construct. For the Christian to claim that the church has no business “foisting” its ethics on society is to buy into the secular humanist argument. It presupposes the existence of ethical neutrality. But if one is to think biblically, in terms of the human condition, neutrality is a myth. To think that a secular humanist state will be objective in its ethical judgments is to bury one’s head in the sand. In a fallen world of antithesis – of sin and righteousness and of truth and error – there is no ethical neutrality. Secular humanism while denying a religious status is exactly that—a religion; and as such will seek to establish laws based on its belief system, rooted in the ultimacy of autonomous man. Consequently, the state will inevitably be governed according to an ethical system—the only question, is which one.

Separation of church and state was first modelled in Israel. Under God, the political and cultic were separate spheres, governed by kings and priests respectively. Independent of both, the prophets spoke as God’s voice to violations of the covenant in either sphere. Furthermore, Israel modelled federal principles of government: although David was divinely called to be king he made covenant with the tribal leaders for the equitable functioning of his kingly authority. Federalism – a sharing of powers by independent states – as a political system was rooted in the covenant life of Israel. In fact, our word “federal” comes from the Latin *foedus* for covenant. The Swiss Reformers first recognised these covenantal principles, developing a political theology that travelled from the continent to the British Isles, and thence to America. So, from the biblical view, God is sovereign over all human governments and spheres, including church and state, covenanting with them and delegating his authority to them. Each sphere is divinely defined and limited; nonetheless, God speaks into them with moral and spiritual authority, without violating their delegated authority and function.

Christ taught that we should render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's (Matt. 22:21). There is a clear distinction between two spheres: the civil and the ecclesial. The state wields its authority by the sword – that is, by force of arms (Rom 13:4) – whereas the church wields its authority also by a sword, but in its case by the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God (Eph 6:17) – that is, not by the force of arms, but by the force of truth; the former is coerced obedience, the latter un-coerced.

The church is not to rule over the state nor vice versa. Both, though, are sovereign spheres under God—all authority devolves from him (Rom 13:1). Paul teaches that the state is a “servant of God” and must be obeyed as an “avenger of God’s wrath on the wrongdoer” (Rom 13:4-6). The role of the state is to enforce God’s justice, but how will it know what justice is unless the church fulfils its role to teach the nations the word of God? Clearly, then God’s word contains the wisdom and ways of God for the governance of nations—for public policy and ethics.

The civil applicability of biblical law has been explicit throughout the history of the Christian movement. From early Christian Europe through to Anglo-Saxon Christian England to the Reformation and beyond, the ethical influence of Christianity, including the Old Testament law, has been potent in establishing an objective standard for justice. King Alfred the Great (AD 871-924), for example, understood that the Old Testament law had not been rescinded by Christ, maintaining the judicial law’s general equity in a non-Israelite setting. He thus codified the Ten Commandments, as well as the judicial law and biblical case laws, into his Law Code, establishing a transcendent ethical foundation for justice and the development of English Common Law. Biblical law was thus foundational for the law-system of the English-speaking world.

Consequently, to claim that Christianity, including the Old Testament law, should have no influence over the state and society is contrary to history and more especially God’s design for the world. While maintaining the integrity of the sovereign spheres of church and state, God’s people are responsible to be a prophetic voice to their culture. How can this occur unless that voice is in harmony with the law of the Old and New Testament?

This is what Paul calls the lawful use of the law as discussed earlier under law and grace. The law provides God’s holy and righteous requirement in human behaviour and social relationships. Its exercise through the state into society is not for the justification of Christians but for unbelievers in the curbing of sin:

8 Now we know that **the law is good, if one uses it lawfully,**

9 understanding this, that **the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, 10 the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine,**

1 Tim 1:8–10

This sin list, addressing aberrant behaviours, is clearly an allusion by Paul to the civil application of the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 21-23.

One issue space prohibits us from addressing in this regard is that of capital punishment as found in the judicial law of the Old Testament. Explicating a biblical penology would necessarily demand a separate paper. Nonetheless, suffice to say that we resonate with the Westminster divines that the “general equity” (Westminster Confession, Chapter 19) of the judicial law must be distilled for its contemporary application. And this will require a great measure of wisdom and social intelligence under the leading of the Holy Spirit for Christian leaders to advise policy makers appropriately.

Nevertheless, we have seen from our discussion above that the role of the church in its relation to the state and civil society is educative, teaching the ethical system revealed by God in the Scriptures, whereas the role of the state is judicial, administering justice in accordance with that ethical system. We established that for the church to be obedient to the Great Commission to disciple the nations it demands a teaching role—and this includes the teaching of both the law *and* grace. Thus, while the law defines God’s righteous standards the gospel provides the ability through God’s grace to obey it. Consequently, while the state’s role is to uphold that righteous standard through the sword of the civil magistrate, the church’s role is to uphold it through the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. It is not for her to enforce the law judicially, but to teach it and at the same time offer to the sinner – in this case the homosexual – the free gift of God’s grace. This necessitates speaking the truth in love (Eph 4:15)—in Christ mercy and truth have met (Ps 85:10). There is no place for the state, civil society, or the church to persecute homosexuals and deal with them unjustly.

#### Conclusion

In summary, while seeking to answer the question as to whether same-sex marriage should be a civil right we have considered: the nature of the Scriptures as God’s reliable and authoritative revelation of his moral will to mankind; the deleterious effect on thinking and reasoning (i.e. false comparisons: e.g. homosexuality and slavery), utilising God-defined categories (e.g. male/female, truth/error), when the divine authorship of Scripture is either denied or diminished; the effect this has on how we interpret Scripture; the unity of biblical data on the subject of homosexuality; the coherence of law and grace; and the complementarity of church and state.

Consequently, in conclusion, the biblical view as to whether same-sex marriage should be a civil right has become evident. We have seen that the Bible nowhere represents homosexuality as a positive model for sexuality. Rather it is undeniably censured as a violation of God’s creation order and of his moral nature. The Genesis accounts of creation and Sodom clearly explicate this, re-enforced by the law and reiterated irrefutably in the New Testament where law and grace function in complete harmony. When the biblical data is considered without prejudice – particularly the nexus between the moral and civil laws of Israel – it is also evident that homosexuality is not only a private personal sin but also a civil sin—a criminal act. On this basis same-sex marriage should not be a civil-right. But for that to occur the states and nations that have decriminalized homosexuality would need to reverse their laws. And for that to happen there would need to be widespread societal regeneration through the power of the gospel. While it is the church’s role to educate the state and civil society through the gospel (law *and* grace) it is not her role to usurp the authority of the state and enforce righteous legislation. Nor would it work if the state attempted to enforce the law of God on a populace that is anarchic and given wilfully to a godless pursuit of immorality, in this case homosexuality. In the meantime, the church – discharging her ministry of reconciliation – will need to faithfully teach the word of God to *first* re-educate Christians as to the role of the law and the church as a prophetic voice to the state and civil society and *secondly*, fulfil her educative mandate to disciple the nations in the power of the Spirit. This demands cultural engagement by Christians raising their voice in the public square. And this she will do until the whole earth has been transformed by the power of Christ and his kingdom.

Print-friendly pdf: [A biblical view of same-sex marriage](#)

References:<sup>^</sup>

G. L. Bahnsen, *Homosexuality: A Biblical View* (Grand Rapids: Baker Bookhouse, 1978, 1999).

“ *By This Standard: The Authority of God’s Law Today* (Tyler: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985).

R. A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001).

S.N. Gundry (ed), *Five Views on Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999).

R.J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 1973).

D. E. Malick, “The Condemnation of Homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150:600 (1993): 479-492.

N. E. Whitehead, *My Genes Made Me Do It!: Homosexuality and the Scientific Evidence* (self published, 1999, third edition 2014). Accessed August 4, 2015. <http://www.mygenes.co.nz/index.html>.

G. A. Moots, *Politics Reformed: The Anglo-American Legacy of Covenant Theology* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2010).

Joe Dallas, “Christianity and Homosexuality.” Accessed August 8, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9D8BNogNVCK>

F. N. Lee, “King Alfred the Great and Our Common Law.” Accessed August 7, 2015.

<http://www.dr-fnlee.org/king-alfred-the-great-and-our-common-law/13/>

The author is especially indebted to Dr G. L. Bahnsen for his work in biblical law and ethics, particularly his exegesis and close reasoning on the matter of homosexuality.

---

Copyright © 2025 Lifemessenger Inc.

[www.lifemessenger.org](http://www.lifemessenger.org)

Facilitating biblical teaching & thinking for church & culture

REPRINT AGREEMENT: Duplication and re-transmission of this writing is permitted provided that complete source and website information is included