

HOMOSEXUAL BEHAVIOR WHAT DID JESUS SAY?

It has become popular with some people today to claim that “Jesus never said anything about homosexuality,” implying he must have therefore been in favor of it. But as far as I know, he never said anything about light bulbs, Cadillacs, ibuprofen, or child prostitution, either. Is he, therefore, specifically *in favor* of those things? Such a question can’t be answered. It’s a basic rule in logic that you cannot argue from silence, that is, you can’t use silence as the first premise of an argument: “He never said this, therefore he must have meant that...”.

But to claim that “Jesus never said anything about homosexuality” *specifically* begs the question because unless we are deaf and blind we cannot fail to miss what his attitude toward sexuality and morality was in general. And the plain fact is that Jesus was not completely silent on the subject of homosexual behavior, if we digest the New Testament thoroughly. To the contrary, he specifically referred to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah as objects of God’s judgment (while adding that those who personally rejected *him* would fare far worse than those cities had!).

Sodom and Gomorrah, of course, were two cities notorious in Old Testament times as hotbeds (no pun intended) of homosexual immorality (Luke 10, 17, Matthew 10, and others). When God’s angels went to visit Sodom and Gomorrah to assess the wickedness rampant in those cities, they were greeted by men who sought to have sex with them while they lodged at Lot’s house (Genesis 19).

Now, was the homosexual behavior of those in Sodom and Gomorrah something minor, something insignificant? Not according to God, speaking through his angelic visitors:

Then the LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is *great and their sin is very grave*, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry which has come to me; and if not, I will know" (Genesis 18:20-21, *emphasis added*).

Some recent interpreters of the Bible have tried claim that Sodom’s sin (the origin of the term “sodomy”) was not homosexualism. Such interpreters are trying to read in a vacuum. Whatever they would like to believe, it is quite clear in both the Old and New Testament that the prevailing sin in Sodom and Gomorrah was sexual perversion, including homosexualism. Jesus’ brother St. Jude, for example, makes this unmistakable reference to Sodom:

Now I desire to remind you, though you were once for all fully informed, that he who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. And the angels that did not keep their own position but left their proper dwelling have been kept by him in eternal chains in the nether gloom until the

judgment of the great day; just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise acted immorally and *indulged in unnatural lust*, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire. Yet in like manner these men in their dreaming defile the flesh, reject authority, and revile the glorious ones (Jude 5-8).

Should we suppose one of the Lord’s own brothers did not know what Jesus taught on this matter?

What Jesus taught, and what he taught consistently, was the need for holiness and personal purity, in all aspects of our lives, including our sexual lives. Our Lord’s disciples make this clear. His closest disciple, St. Peter, says this:

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." And if you invoke as Father him who judges each one impartially according to his deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile. You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake. Through him you have confidence in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brethren, love one another earnestly from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord abides for ever." That word is the good news which was preached to you. Be holy, as your Father in heaven is holy (12 Peter 1:14-25).

Was the precious blood of Jesus spilled so that we could go on sinning, reveling in the sins of the moment, our sins of choice? Notice, Peter does not tell us to relax, hold hands, and love everyone indiscriminately. No, he advises us to “conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.” He knew the judge, personally. It is Jesus, who looked Peter in the eye that night during his trial, after Peter had denied and betrayed him. Peter knew the look of that eye. Do we? St. Paul similarly takes up the chorus of living in purity and holiness:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him Ephesians 1:3-4).

What about Jesus himself? Did he never “speak” about homosexual conduct? What about the Beatitudes:

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"
(Matthew 5:8).

Can we be pure in heart, but not in body? Can we miss the plain meaning of his words here? Can we engage in “unnatural lust” and still claim spiritual purity?

In that same chapter, Matthew 5, we find that Jesus himself *upholds* the rightness of the moral law of the Old Testament, a point many today would like to overlook:

"Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:17-20).

That moral law of the Old Testament, particularly Exodus and Leviticus, contains clear prohibitions against homosexual conduct. How then can anyone claim that “Jesus never addressed” this issue? The same moral law codified in the Old Covenant has been upheld over the centuries by the Christian Church, the New Covenant Israel. If sexual perversion was clearly condemned under the Old Covenant, how could Jesus “fulfill” that law by approving what had been so clearly prohibited? A good number of popular authors today studiously avoid this question.

In addition to all this, Jesus consistently taught about the importance and sanctity of marriage between man and woman, as here:

And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" He answered, "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one'? So they are no longer two but one (Matthew 19:3-6).

Notice that: *God* made them male and female. Those who want to see men engage in sexual union with other men, and women with women have to address this question: Did God make a mistake?

A side note. Some today who say the Church should approve homosexual conduct make the argument that the Church has now “approved” divorce so it should likewise

“approve” homosexual conduct and relationships. This claim is false. The Church has not changed its teaching on divorce. Divorce, except under the conditions spoken of by Jesus, is sinful. It is a breaking of solemn vows taken before God. A person who divorces his husband or wife under conditions other than those allowed by our Lord has committed sin and needs to confess it. What the church *has* done in recent years, with the onslaught of rampant “no fault” divorce is to clarify its rules for remarriage after divorce. A judgment on the matter is required from the bishop. But allowing a remarriage under specific limitations is not condoning the divorce which preceded it, nor is it in any way a proclamation that the divorce was not sinful.

Back to our topic. Our early Christian ancestors confronted homosexual activity, homosexual relationships and other sexual perversions in the popular cultures all around them. St. Paul in fact quotes the same verse from Genesis that Jesus himself cited in upholding marriage as the context of sexual relationships:

Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (Ephesians 5:28-31).

Sexual purity is part and parcel of holiness. As Christians, we are all called to a life of purity as scripture defines it, a definition based on nothing less than our Lord’s own life:

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure (1 John 3:1-3).

Sexual perversion, and homosexual perversion in particular, are not some new problems that cropped up in the 20th century. Homosexuality, the practice of “preferring” sexual relations with the same sex, was both popular and widely accepted in the pagan cultures of both Greece and Rome. Jesus, St. Paul, and all our Christian forebears confronted it. From the beginning, the Christian Church spoke forcefully, directly, and unashamedly, about it:

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral men; not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But rather I wrote to you not to associate with any one *who bears the name of brother* if he is guilty of immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not

those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. "Drive out the wicked person from among you" (1 Corinthians 5:9-13).

Paul's advice is clear — advice many in the Church today wish to ignore, or downplay. The fact is, while we are not to "condemn" others for their sins, neither are we to ignore within the fellowship of Christ's Body those "who bear the name of brother" yet revel in notorious sin. Many clergy today would like to forget the disciplinary rubrics on page 409 of the Book of Common Prayer. Many lay people would like to forget them too. What would Jesus say to such an attitude? That "everything is permissible as long as it is done in love"? Many a wife abuser and child abuser has spoken those words, "I'm doing this because I love you." Do we judge people by their claims, or by the unvarnished reality of their actions? We must be clear: it is not *we* who judge, but the Gospel that judges us all equally. When we refuse to call sin "sin," we have judged the Gospel to be false, or ineffective for our time, or culture.

St. Paul is even more specific and clear regarding homosexual conduct in the often quoted passage from the 1st chapter of Romans:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness *suppress the truth*. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct. They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to

parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them (Romans 1:18-32, *emphasis added*).

"Haters of God." That's pretty emphatic language. We must be careful, however, not lose sight of the fact that in this passage, while Paul highlights homosexual conduct as a major example of sin, human depravity and idolatry, he goes on to lump such sexual sin right in with many other kinds of depravity, such as being gossips or being disobedient to our parents. We must not point a finger at someone trapped in homosexual conduct as if his or her sin were somehow worse than all the rest. God hates sin of every kind because it violates his holiness and violates the holiness he calls each of us to live in Christ Jesus.

Notice too that in addressing sexual perversion Paul again points out, as he did in Ephesians, that pursuing unnatural and perverse lust is a dishonoring of our own bodies. What does he say in 1 Corinthians, another scripture many today would also like to forget? This:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. 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 in the Spirit of our God...Shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man *sins against his own body*. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body (1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 18-20).

But, some will protest, these are the words of Paul, not Jesus. True, but that complaint is a sharp two-edged sword: those who know the developmental history of the New Testament know that the words of Paul were most almost certainly written down many years before the gospels as we now have them. Thus Paul's works are "closer to source" in time. And the Church throughout history has certainly credited Paul with divinely inspired wisdom, and has given equal authority to his teaching alongside the gospels. To argue otherwise is to ignore history. In that wisdom Paul, contrary to the tendency of many today, did not mince words:

Now we know that the law is good, if any one uses it lawfully, 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 murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, immoral persons, sodomites, kidnapers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in

accordance with the glorious gospel of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted (1 Timothy 1:8-11).

The author of Hebrews was also clear about Christian morality and the Christian attitude toward sexuality and marriage:

Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for God will judge the immoral and adulterous (Hebrews 13:4).

Significantly, one of the images Jesus used most often for the Kingdom of God was the relationship of marriage, the union of man and wife, and the wedding feast (Matthew 22, Matthew 25, Mark 2, Luke 5, Luke 12, Luke 14). St. John the Divine used the same image powerfully (Revelation 19). Paul picks up the analogy in Ephesians 5. Jesus honored marriage by performing one of his first miracles at the wedding feast (John 2). The state of holy matrimony is not only sacred because through it God joins (*God joins!*) and man and woman together. It is also sacred because it embodies for us the sacred relationship between each one of us and God. The Church — you and I — are the bride of Christ. Who does our body belong to? How would he have us use it?

Some today would have us believe that because Jesus “tolerates” every kind of sexual behavior because “he loves us.” They have not read the same Bible I own. Jesus came, he said, not to set us at peace and at ease, but to bring the fire of judgment, and the sword of division, to separate the sheep from the goats. Contrary to what some would have us believe, Jesus didn’t die on the cross to make us more cozy with our sins.

In one of the most famous passages of scripture regarding Jesus’ attitude toward sin, some self-righteous Jews brought a woman caught in the very act of adultery to Jesus. We must note that in doing so, his fellow Jews were looking for a way to trick him, to bring *him* to judgment. Isn’t that classic humanity, always wanting to put *God* on trial, and make up our own new rules — as if we knew better?

Early in the morning he [Jesus] came again to the temple; all the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such. What do you say about her?" This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." And once more he bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the eldest, and Jesus was left

alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus looked up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again" (John 8:2-11).

They wanted her stoned to death, as the law proscribed. Jesus didn’t agree with them, but notice *he didn’t agree with her behavior either*. On both sides of the issue, Jesus confronts those involved *with the reality of their own sins*. To the scribes and Pharisees, he says “Let the one among you who is without sin cast the first stone.” In other words, *don’t judge this woman by a standard you are not willing to apply to yourself*. And to the woman he says, quite bluntly, “Go, and do not sin again.” His refusal to condemn her was conditioned: stop committing this sin.

So, is it *true* to say Jesus said nothing about homosexual conduct? Clearly, the contrary is true: he said a great many things that — unless we harden our hearts and stop our ears — we cannot possibly misconstrue. He calls each of us to holiness and to purity of life, a purity that conforms to God’s *revealed* will for each of us. Remember, it is God who “made them male and female.” And when confronted with sexual immorality, Jesus was blunt in saying “Go, and do not sin again.”

The reason is simple, you see. Jesus applied to us the same standard to which he held himself. We should be obedient to that standard of purity if we are going to presume to call ourselves his disciples.

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