

Discerning Same-Sex Marriage in the PC(USA)

Session 4

Homosexuality and the Bible:

Two Views

Dan O. Via and Robert A.J.
Gagnon

New Testament

What does Jesus or the gospels have to say about homosexuality?

NOTHING

- Some suggest that because Jesus doesn't speak of this, and that he speaks more about what we do with our "stuff," and about loving God and neighbor, that it's not a prevalent issue.
- Others suggest that Jesus doesn't explicitly speak of it because he was Jewish and knew that it wasn't acceptable in the Old Testament teachings of Judaism.

Gospels

Sexuality in the gospel accounts are limited to issues regarding the subject of divorce, lust, and adultery.

Matthew 5:27-30 – Adultery/Lusting as adultery

Matthew 5:31-32 – Divorce, only in adultery

Matthew 19:9

Mark 10:11-12

Luke 16:18

Luke 7:36-50 – Sinful woman

John 4:16-19 – Samaritan woman and husbands

John 8:1-11 – Woman caught in adultery

Letters

So we are left with only the texts from the Letters of the New Testament to draw from. Primarily from the Apostle Paul.

I Corinthians 6:9-10

“Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes (men who have sex with men – NIV), sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers – one of these will inherit the kingdom of God. **And this is what some of you used to be.** 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.”

Dan O. Via –

This classifies homosexuality as a moral sin that keeps someone out of the kingdom of God, along with other wrongdoers – adulterers, thieves, greedy, etc. Paul includes two others that the NRSV translates as *male prostitutes* (malakoi) and *sodomites* (arsenokoitai).

Historical Context – in the ancient Greek world, homosexuality was primarily, if not exclusively, a matter of pederasty – a relationship between an adult male and a boy (male prostitution).

The Pauline texts do not support the limitation of male homosexuality to this. Some Greek sources suggest that a relationship should not be begun until the boy is almost grown and should be lifelong.

Via continued...

- The term malakos means “soft”. Some see it as a reference to the young male partner in the relationship, and more than likely is correct. Others suggest it could mean the softness of expensive clothes, the delicacy of gourmet food, or the gentleness of a light breeze. In a moral context it could mean laziness or cowardice. It can also suggest a man as effeminate. It could mean men who were the passive penetrated partner, or men who enjoyed prettying themselves up to further their exploits
- Being penetrated is understood to be inferior, because women were typically penetrated and women were regarded as inferior in a patriarchal society.
- The term arsenokoites means the active partner in male homosexuality. The term doesn't occur in Greek literature prior to Paul and there are very few uses of it at all. The term is a compound of the words for “male” (arsen) and “bed” (koite) and could naturally mean a man who goes to bed with another man. The Leviticus passages that condemn homosexuality (Lev. 18:22; 20:13) both contain these words.
- **Via concludes that I Corinthians 6:9-10 simply classifies homosexuality as a moral sin that finally keeps one out of the kingdom of God. Via also argues that this is primarily an issue of sexual exploitation of young men and older men (male prostitution).**

Via continued

- Paul is convinced that nothing is unclean in itself (Romans 14:14) He doesn't say that nothing is sinful but that nothing is unclean.
- **Mark 7 – Pharisees accuse Jesus' disciples of eating with defiled hands.** Jesus explains that the physical things do not defile the heart; rather what comes out of the heart is what defiles an individual. **So the Old Testament category of impurity is annulled. It is immoral dispositions and acts that defile – murder, theft, deceit, adultery, and so on.**
- Via notes that when there is a theological or ethical conflict within the Bible, *Christians have to decide which side they will give priority.* **He chooses Paul and the Gospels over Leviticus as having the more profound understanding of the human situation.**

Via continued

- Yet, Paul reinterprets homosexuality as sin rather than as uncleanness. Nothing is unclean for Paul, but homosexuality for him is sinful. It comes from a distorted mind and heart (Romans 1:18-28) that is personal, chosen, and immoral against God. Paul condemns it.
- Via, *“But we still must pursue the question of whether Paul’s ethical rule against homosexual practice is finally justifiable in light of the larger canonical message of redemption.”* P.11

Robert Gagnon

“Jesus’ alleged silence has to be set against the backdrop of unequivocal and univocal opposition throughout early Judaism. In such a setting silence means agreement with the only viewpoint that existed in the public discourse of early Judaism, especially since Jesus was not shy about disagreeing with the conventions of his day. Had he wanted his disciples to take a different viewpoint he would have said so.” p. 68

Gagnon continued...

- A common assumption is that Jesus in his earthly ministry put an end to all laws dealing with food, Sabbath, and purity. Mark 7:15-19 is most often used as a means of Jesus abolishing the food laws. It is more likely that Jesus intended a hyperbolic contrast: ***what counts most is not what goes into a person but what comes out.***
- Jesus intensified the demands of the law in the Sermon on the Mount and insisted that “not one tiny letter stroke of the law” would be done away with, while prioritizing the weightier matters of the law, Jesus still urged the lesser matters were not to be neglected (Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42)
- If Jesus didn’t abrogate such things as food laws and meticulous tithing, **then it’s impossible** that he would have overturned a proscription of sexual immorality such as that of male-male intercourse.

Gagnon continued...

- **Three stories of sexual sinners that Jesus encountered:** Sinful woman in Luke 7:36-50, woman caught in adultery in John 7:53-8:11, the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4.
- These stories no more suggest that Jesus was soft on sexual sin than do the stories of Jesus' dealings with tax collectors insinuate accommodating to economic exploitation.

Gagnon continued...

1 Corinthians 6:9-10:

The list Paul uses matters – he lists the sexually immoral (pornoï), soft men (malakoi – effeminate males who play the sexual role of females), men who lie with males (arsenokoitai).

This list prohibits all male-male intercourse. It names three groups of sexual offenders that fill out the meaning of pornei (sexually immoral). The first is moichoi (adulterers) and the second and third are malakoi and arsenokoitai.

In short, Paul was thinking of the male described in Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 who is lain with though as a woman. The Greek word, arsenokoitai, was concocted from two Greek words in the Septuagint translation of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13: “lying” (koite) and “male” (arsen).

The real issue is that it blurs the God-given, nature imbedded gender differences. Issues of sexual exploitation and orientation are beside the point.

Summary

- Via says that the language suggests in the ancient Greek world, that Paul is speaking about male prostitution (not loving consensual relationships). However, some Greek sources suggest that – at least in principle – a relationship should not begin until the boy is almost grown up and should be lifelong.
- Via also suggests agrees that I Cor. 6:9-10 is connected with the Levitical proscriptions and that Paul categorizes it as a moral sin that keeps one out of the kingdom of God.
- Via also believes that Jesus annuls uncleanness and impurity in Mark 7 and that his focus is on the immoral/sinful acts that defile. It's the lack of love that comes from the heart that undermines the wholeness and order that purity was supposed to maintain.
- He chooses Paul and the Gospels over Leviticus as having the more profound understanding of the human situation.

Summary

- Gagnon refutes the notion that Paul's language can be reduced to male prostitution, but that the intentional connection in the list of vices suggests that homosexual practice is sinful and that one must repent from (all) the vices mentioned.
- Gagnon also chooses Paul and the Gospels because he believes they are affirming of the Old Testament proscriptions. Jesus didn't come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. Jesus makes the law that much harder, which makes us recognize our need for repentance. Leviticus and Paul are speaking the same language and Jesus doesn't have to address homosexuality explicitly because he practices the Jewish faith and knows the laws.
- Jesus' interaction with anyone in sexual sin was not to condemn them but to call them out of their sin and to follow him. This required them to repent. John 8 – *“Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more.”* The context of I Cor. 6 is set in what the Corinthians used to be – they are to no longer live in this manner – they've been baptized, justified and sanctified by Jesus and have the Spirit of God.