

THE BIBLE AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION - Part four

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LOOKING AT THE BIBLICAL TEXTS - SOME BACKGROUND CONSIDERATIONS

In the very first teaching in this series I made the following comments:

"We need to understand where the discussion *is* today. The dominant assumption of our media and culture - and the *increasingly* common view in much of the church, particularly those under 35 - is now such that we will miss the point if we don't see where the debate actually lies. To show statements from the Bible that condemn *homosexual acts* will leave everyone unconvinced simply because those texts address *acts* which the entire gay community will say, if they apply at all, apply to people who commit these acts for reasons *other than* being true to their inward *homosexual nature or orientation*....They usually don't *deny* these texts. They simply accept them as saying something *different* from what we see them saying...."

We need to enter the discussion with our eyes open. When Christians want to discuss homosexuality they will probably, at some point, want to refer to what the Bible says about it. This is the natural response for people who hold the to the view we have at least some kind of absolute revelation from our Creator. So we open our Bibles.

And there - right there - we need to know what kind of *presuppositions* we will encounter in those who know what the Bible says. Most of the crowd accepting same-sex intercourse simply *rejects* any Christian input by simply screaming, "*Homophobic!*" or ranting how religion is the cause of all this world's misery.

But there is a more informed approach to Scripture in the gay community itself. These people are *aware* of the texts forbidding same-sex intercourse but *interpret* those texts in a totally different fashion. And we simply need to understand this to keep from wasting a great deal of time and energy. If we are going to bring any real light at all to the darkness we need to at least try to first address the *false framework* that is often used to silence or even reverse the intended meaning of the words of the Biblical texts.

That's what I want to examine tonight. We'll get into the texts themselves in following weeks. But we need to see if the Bible offers any keys for recognizing correct and incorrect methods for *applying* these texts to our current situation. We all *interpret* the Biblical text. We either do it correctly or incorrectly. Does the Bible help explain the interpretive process to us?

I want to consider two common presuppositions used to cancel out texts forbidding same-sex intercourse:

1) MANY DISCOUNT THE SAME-SEX TEXTS AS PRIMITIVE UNDERSTANDINGS THAT IGNORED GENUINE SAME-SEX ORIENTATION WHEN CONSIDERING SAME-SEX INTERCOURSE

This is not as complicated a point as it first sounds. The primitive Biblical text would certainly condemn same-sex intercourse but only because, in that day, there was no way of knowing that certain people were *oriented* this way, perhaps from birth. The Biblical writers were simply working with the knowledge they had. This would be akin to God telling Joshua to command the *sun* to stand still. Everyone now knows it's the *earth* that actually moves, not the *sun*.

The argument progresses on the assumption that if only the Biblical writers had the understanding *we* now have regarding the natural same-sex orientation toward the acts it condemned the Bible would have a different, more understanding tone. The Bible condemns same-sex *acts* only because it could only see those acts in *isolation* from the inner orientation behind those acts.

Victor Paul Furnish, professor of New Testament at Southern Methodist University, in his essay, "*The Bible and Homosexuality*" sums up this view like this: "*The question, 'What does the Bible say about homosexuality?' is misleading in several ways....It fails to take into account the fact that the ancient world had no word or concept of 'homosexuality'....There is nothing in the Bible about homosexuality understood as a 'condition,' since the ancient world had no conception of anything like sexual orientation.*"

This is a brilliant argument. Immediately our minds should go back to what I said several weeks ago when we examined the change in *terminology* and the way the different *words* have totally changed the nature of the debate. When the discussion shifts from the *act* of same-sex intercourse to the *orientation* defining the entire person many of the Biblical texts are simply discounted.

Look again at an important segment from the quote from professor Furnish: "*....the ancient world had no word or concept of 'homosexuality'....There is nothing in the Bible about homosexuality understood as a 'condition,' since the ancient world had no conception of anything like sexual orientation.*"

Note those words, "**homosexuality as a condition**," and "**sexual orientation**." This needs some explanation. If professor Furnish means there was no **diagnosis** of homosexuality as a result of psychological study, he is quite correct. And if he means the Bible didn't recognize a **moral distinction** between homosexual **actions** and homosexual **orientation**, I believe he is also correct.

But that may prove the exact **opposite** of what Furnish wishes. It may merely mean the Bible doesn't remove moral responsibility and condemnation for same-sex intercourse regardless of the orientation of the persons committing those acts. In other words, this lack of distinction between **act** and **orientation** in Scripture may mean nothing in terms of removing the sinfulness of same-sex intercourse. It may mean the orientation doesn't **excuse** the sinfulness of the act.

But there is more that needs to be said. Much more. In actual fact, the Bible **does** speak to the issue of **both** outward acts and the inward inclination or orientation toward those acts. The Bible is not as silent as professor Furnish would have us believe.

We can turn to the Sermon on the Mount for an example of this. This is a particularly important example because it addresses professor Furnish's issue of the separation of outward act and inward inclination very specifically. In fact, it addresses the very issue of how **Jesus interpreted Old Testament texts** dealing with **outward acts of sin** and their relationship to the **inward desire behind those acts**.

Consider Jesus' teaching on the issue of the outward act of **murder** - **Matthew 5:21-22** - "**You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.'** [22] **But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.**"

Jesus isn't saying, as many Christians falsely deduce, that hatred is the **same thing** as murder. It's clearly not. But what Jesus **is** doing is applying the sinful indictment not **only** to the outward act, but to the **inward motivation** - the **inclination** - leading to the act.

I'm not saying anger is the same interior sin as same-sex orientation. I'm only saying the **act** of murder can't be **justified** because of the inward motivation that made the act feel inwardly connected - **natural** and **reflexive** - to the killer. And the **act** of same-sex intercourse can't be justified because it is committed by a person for whom the inward inclination made it feel natural - almost reflexive - to do so.

Jesus does the very same thing in **Matthew 5:27-28** - "**You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'** [28] **But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.**"

Here again Jesus doesn't **separate** outward act and inward inclination. Rather he **increases the guilt** of sin by tracing it to its roots. Adultery isn't **less** sinful because it comes from a heart full of passionate desire. The desires only reveal the depth of **original sin** and the contamination of every human heart with different sinful disorientations.

Jesus is not the only one to recognize the link between outward sinful acts and fallen inward inclinations. Perhaps the clearest examination of this important issue is found in the apostle Paul's profound analysis in **Romans chapter one**:

Romans 1:21-28 - "**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 foolish hearts were darkened.** [22] **Claiming to be wise, they became fools,** [23] **and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.** [24] **Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,** [25] **because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.** [26] **For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions.** For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; [27] **and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.** [28] **And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.**

Here's the assignment. Go through this text and underline everything that describes these people **apart** from any mention of outward actions: "**futile in their thinking**"(21), "**foolish hearts were darkened**"(21), "**lusts of their hearts to impurity**"(24),

“dishonorable passions”(26), “consumed with passion”(27), “debased mind”(28).

There is a reason for going to all that work. The growing trend in justifying same-sex intercourse is to trace the homosexual orientation back to the *good creative work of God*. Take, just as one example, the statement of professor *Dan O. Via* in his work, *“The Bible, The Church, and Homosexuality”* - *“This person [the homosexual] cannot not be homosexual....but being gay offers various concrete possibilities to choose among in freedom for actualizing this destiny. Since the homosexual is for Christian faith as much a part of God’s creation as the heterosexual, how can the homosexual destiny, which is as inalienable as the heterosexual destiny, not be regarded as a part of God’s creative intent, just as the heterosexual destiny is so regarded? The orientation in both cases is inalienable. And why should the homosexual, in contrast to the heterosexual, be singled out as not having the moral freedom to actualize the only orientation he/she has?”*

That quote is increasingly typical of the way homosexual orientation is linked immediately to God’s initial creation rather than pinned, along with a host of other distorted passions, to the earthquake of *the Fall* and the ongoing corruption in all of creation of *original sin*.

While a detailed study of Romans 1 will have to wait for future weeks, this is why Paul’s explanation of the present state of sexual *disorientation* is so vitally important. That is why we listed those 6 references to the corruption of our *passions*, our *fallen thinking* and the *judgment of God* on the diverse orientations those inward corruptions bring.

Like Jesus, Paul doesn’t once hint the outward acts of *any* sinner can be justified because there are inward orientations prompting and making them feel natural and even necessary. Rather, the inward inclinations only point out how deeply the *disorientation* of sin goes.

I said there were *two* primary ways in which the texts forbidding same-sex intercourse are side-lined. The first we have just studied. These texts are said to come from a time when there was no understanding of a homosexual orientation that made those same-sex acts natural and necessary. We’ve looked at how Jesus and Paul demonstrated a profound awareness of the link between outward act and inward inclination but didn’t use this to excuse or legitimize sinful acts.

Now to the *second* approach to silencing texts forbidding same-sex intercourse:

2) **MANY DISCOUNT TEXTS FORBIDDING SAME-SEX INTERCOURSE ON THE ASSUMPTION THE BIBLE IS AN EVOLVING COLLECTION OF RELIGIOUS PERCEPTIONS AND UNDERSTANDINGS THAT MUST BE RE-INTERPRETED FOR OUR MODERN TIMES**

As is usually the case, this is finally where all religious and moral debates come home for dinner. Virtually all religious issues are *Bible interpretation* (hermeneutical) issues in the end.

Again I cite professor *Dan O. Via* in *“The Bible, The Church, And Homosexuality”* - *“I take the Bible to be the highest authority for Christians in theological and ethical matters, although I recognize also the legitimacy of tradition, reason, and experience. Authority does not mean perfection or inerrancy or complete consistency. The authoritative norm is the one that you finally listen to in a situation of competing norms....The experiential or existential view says that the Bible is authoritative only in those parts that are existentially engaging and compelling....”*

“Since texts mean different things in different contexts, texts do not necessarily mean what they say....We will also want to consider our own cultural context. How does the unambiguous condemnation of homosexual acts in certain biblical texts accord with what recent social science has taught us and with the contemporary experience of gay and lesbian Christians?”

This argument only *appears* different from the first one we considered - *that the Bible only condemns homosexual acts because there was no knowledge of homosexual orientation*. You *think* you’re dealing with a separate argument here but you’re not. This is why professor *Via* can speak quite openly about the *“unambiguous condemnation of homosexual acts in certain biblical texts”* without being overly concerned about those texts. Notice, the careful wording - *“unambiguous condemnation of homosexual acts in certain biblical texts....”*

These unambiguously condemning texts are no threat to *Via* and others because of the last part of that quote. These unambiguously condemning texts are neutered by *“what recent social science has taught us,”* along with *“the contemporary experience of gay and lesbian Christians.”* And what both of these have taught us is there is a *same-sex orientation* that *overrides* the condemnation of any *homosexual acts* in these unambiguous texts.

The two pro-gay presuppositions we have considered tonight are really only two *apparently* different paths to the same

destination. And here's my closing, very unpopular conviction. The thing you will not be allowed to say much longer in the church/homosexual debate is this: ***whenever you tamper with the clear teaching of Scripture on any subject you will always be less loving to any sinner in the long run.***

I'm just laying that principle out right now. We will take full teaching sessions unpacking it in future weeks. But the reason I'm closing with it now is this is the ***trump card*** played by the religious gay community. In a thousand different ways, from citing verses out of context about not judging, to telling us Jesus just accepted people the way He found them (sort of true, but not quite), to the most common false assumption that if someone is ***same sex oriented*** you can't say their ***same-sex acts*** are sinful. The assumption behind all of these is Christian love means never expressing anything that may cause homosexual ***people*** to feel guilt for homosexual ***acts***.

In other words, homosexual sins must be treated ***differently*** from all the ***other*** sins God's Word lovingly exposes. Paul considered it a ***loving act*** to tell the church to deal with the person inclined toward ***incest*** so the sinner could be won over to repentance. Jesus considered it a ***loving act*** to tell heterosexual men it was a sin to ***indulge mental inclinations*** toward other women. Paul considered it a ***loving act*** to tell people who were strongly oriented toward loving wealth that they would pierce themselves through with many sorrows if they acted on those desires.

Anything God's Word truly reveals regarding ***any aspect*** of our fallen human condition is ***always loving*** in the long run. And any time anyone ***changes or silences*** God's revelation to our fallen human condition it is ***always cruel and hurtful*** in the long run.

That is the conviction of my life. Letting God speak to our fallen selves is ***always*** the ***eternally loving*** thing to do. May God help us not to care ***more*** about being socially acceptable than drawing all sinners into the great, eternally rewarding, costly in this present life, following of Jesus Christ, the way, the truth, and the life.