**Homosexuality Resource Paper**

**Lightbearers resource papers are designed as a resource to Lightbearers staff as they interact with students and partners and are asked to provide wisdom on a variety of topics. These papers should not be considered a doctrinal stance in competition with your local church but an internal resource providing clarity on a sound evangelical stance on particular issues. Please seek out the counsel of the church under whose authority you have placed yourself as needed in responding to specific situations.**

**Foundational to each paper is the perspective that the Gospel is primary. No topic competes with the message of the Gospel for primacy in the church. At the same time, the Gospel impacts every corner of life (1 Corinthians 6:20); therefore, we aim to provide staff with direction that is Biblically sound and points them to view any issue through the lens of the Gospel—the good news that we are far more sinful and God far more holy than we thought but the life and grace that God offers through Christ’s death and resurrection is far greater than we dare to hope.**

We serve a God of purposeful creation and of justice. Scripture teaches marriage is for a man and a woman and that sexual relations should be limited to the confines of marriage. Therefore, it is Biblically irresponsible and advocating of sin to encourage individuals to approve of a homosexual lifestyle or to live in homosexual relationship.

At the same time, we serve a God of love and of reconciliation. Scripture teaches that we are all inherently sinful but that God always grants forgiveness to the repentant sinner.[[1]](#footnote-1) Therefore, while Scripture speaks against homosexuality, it is Biblically irresponsible and sinful to: 1) exalt ourselves over practicing homosexuals as if we are not sinners ourselves and have earned God’s acceptance through our own merit; and 2) treat with revealed or concealed hatred anyone because of their practice of homosexuality or their position regarding the topic.

As this topic is particularly disputed in modern America, it is wise to outline the Biblical precedent for this position:

* **Specific passages**
	+ **Levitical Law:** Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 refer to homosexual intercourse as an “abomination” and a “detestable act.” The objection to reading these texts at face value is discussed below but put simply, the straightforward reading of the texts in context (prohibited sexual acts including adultery, incest and bestiality) indicate God’s view of homosexual intercourse as a perversion of his design for sex.
	+ **New Testament “lists of sins”:** 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 outlines groups of people who “will not inherit the kingdom of God.” The list begins “neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulters, nor effeminate, nor homosexual offenders.”[[2]](#footnote-2) 1 Timothy 1:8-11 has a similar list, identifying it as “whatever else is contrary to sound teaching.”
	+ **Romans 1:** Romans 1:18-27 outlines that God’s wrath has been revealed against man’s sin in not honoring Him as God or giving Him thanks. Paul writes that, in response to this sin, God “gave them over” to “lusts…impurity…degrading passions” expressed in men and women who “exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,” namely men abandoning women and turning to men (and likewise for women). Homosexual relationships are identified as a corruption of what is natural.
* **General principles—what marriage represents**
	+ **Genesis 1-2:** The creation account explains that God created a man (Adam), and then created a woman (Eve), thus providing Adam with a perfectly fitting companion. The inaugural marriage ceremony is summarized with the statement, “A man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.” (2:25) God could have created reproduction in any number of ways, just as he could have created only men (or only women). However, God is depicted in creation as purposeful, so it stands to reason that his man/woman marriage design is a purposeful one. Destroying the distinction of gender attacks the very image of God because it is, in large part, through the distinction between male and female that the image of God is displayed.
	+ **Matthew 19:** When Jesus is questioned about the legality of divorce, Jesus challenges the Pharisees by looking at the ideal marriage. Look past the Law of Moses to God’s intent in marriage, he says, and quotes the Genesis 2 passage. In doing so, he reinforces the picture of marriage as male and female and suggests the Father’s purpose in that design.[[3]](#footnote-3)
	+ **Ephesians 5:** Paul’s instruction to marital couples is rooted in the reality that marriage is designed to depict the truth of the relationship between Christ and the church. Marriage is not simply about the people involved but about the truth about God that it displays. This truth is accurately displayed by the differing roles that husband and wife hold. A heterosexual marriage intrinsically carries with it a complementarism that a homosexual marriage cannot and that complementary structure matters because of what it represents. Attacking Biblical marriage attacks Christ’s headship over his church.
* **The lack of any homosexual relationship in the Bible**: Put simply, every single marriage in Scripture is a heterosexual one. Every single homosexual relationship is depicted negatively.

Arguments you may hear challenging this traditional evangelical view on homosexuality:

* **“The Bible was for polygamy and slavery, too”:** The patriarchs (and others) practiced polygamy, and slavery was allowed by passages such as Leviticus 25:44-46, Exodus 21:7 and Ephesians 6:5-9. If the Bible was wrong about those topics, then why can’t it be wrong about homosexuality? Two primary answers exist:
	+ We disagree that the Bible “was wrong.” Christians have, of course, made grievous sins in the name of following God, but that does not mean God endorses their act. If we look at these two practices in particular, we see that polygamy is inherently critiqued throughout Scripture (every example of multiple wives shows discord) and is never clearly endorsed. Therefore, when the New Testament requires an elder to be a “husband of one wife,”[[4]](#footnote-4) it is simply clarifying a position of wisdom that has been suggested throughout Scripture. As for slavery, the “slavery” of the Old and New Testament was clearly not the race-based chattle slavery of the American South. Male slaves of the Old Testament were set free every 7 years (Exodus 21:2) and female slaves were not sold to other nations and often became daughters-in-law (Exodus 21:8-9). New Testament slaves and masters attended church together and were reminded that each was accountable to God. (Ephesians 6:5-9)
	+ The argument of “If culture controlled Scripture’s discussion on that issue, isn’t it behind this one?” is a dangerous one that strikes at the hard of the universal truth of Scripture. Could it become cultural to think of Jesus as Savior? To think of God as merciful or powerful?
* **“What about head coverings?”** In other words, “If you’re going to say homosexuality is sin, shouldn’t you also be strong on an issue like head coverings?” The question of head coverings in the church, discussed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11, however, has cultural overtones that we miss in our current reading. Women praying without head coverings in first century Corinth were making a clear statement that they were free of authority and acting like the pagans. Paul does not give the same instruction to other churches, so his foundational point seems to be one of honoring the authority over you (one that he discusses in several letters). In general, it is key in understanding Scripture to look for issues discussed in different contexts (e.g. homosexuality) and look for unity. To be intellectually honest, we should admit that this can be a slippery slope but it seems theologically defensible to draw a distinction between head coverings and homosexuality.
* **“We’re not under the Old Testament law anymore. Aren’t we under the new law, where the only thing that matters is loving God and loving your neighbor.”** This statement belies two separate questions:
	+ The simple form of this argument is that Jesus fulfilled the law (Matthew 5:17), so we can do whatever we want as long it’s loving. This suggestion, however, ignores that loving God and neighbor must begin with an understanding of what God wants and says is best for my neighbor. It also implies that there is a new law that we could use to earn salvation, an assertion that strikes at the heart of the Gospel.
	+ The more complicated question is, “How do we determine with Old Testament laws we follow and which we don’t?” Scholars often break the Old Testament laws into civil law, ceremonial law and moral law. Again, Jesus has fulfilled the entire law so believers are free of its oppression. With that in mind, we recognize that we do not live in a theocracy so we should not try and apply Old Testament civil laws but rather submit to governing authorities.[[5]](#footnote-5) We do not practice the ceremonial laws of cleanliness and sacrifice for Christ has made us clean and given us access to the Holy of Holies.[[6]](#footnote-6) The character of God, however, has not changed and therefore, we still aim to live in obedience to His moral character. Jesus actually intensifies the moral law by applying it to the heart and not just outward appearances.[[7]](#footnote-7)
* **“Those passages in the New Testament are talking about a different kind of homosexuality.”** Some argue that the specific Greek word used in 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1 refers to a specific kind of homosexual behavior, namely men coercing young boys and a monogamous homosexual relationship was not in view. However, there is no conclusive evidence supporting this view and when compared with the rest of the evidence (especially the Romans 1 passage which identifies multiple types of homosexual relationships as “unnatural”), this is clearly jumping through hoops to avoid the straightforward reading of the text.
* **“What about David and Jonathan? The centurion and his servant in Matthew 8?”** Some have argued for that homosexual relationships exist in Scripture and are simply veiled (two sample examples are above). Again, in cases such as these, one has to read alternative meanings into the text rather than the straightforward meaning. Is it possible that David and Jonathan had a homosexual relationship? Sure, it’s possible. But to get there, you’re reading into the text *and even if they did have a homosexual relationship, that would still be sin*. The weight of Biblical conversation on the topic doesn’t change and the fact that a famous Biblical figure did an act certainly doesn’t make it okay (see Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon, Peter, Thomas).

June 2015

Given the above, four general ruling practices seem in order for believers regarding homosexuality. Further conversation, Biblical study, and the leading of the Holy Spirit will provide wisdom on responding to particular situations. That said, these four practices seem an appropriate starting point for these conversations:

* We should uphold the goodness, justice, love and immutability of God and the truth of Scripture, which consistently (across both testaments and multiple cultures) teaches homosexual practice as sin and justly deserving of God’s wrath.
* We should not elevate homosexual practice to the level of “unpardonable sin.” All are sinners and all are offered grace. The cultural shouting match around the issue of homosexuality and Paul’s reminder that sexual sin is particularly grievous[[8]](#footnote-8) advises us to take this issue particularly seriously. That said, sexual sins including adultery and divorce exist in the church as well and Paul’s lists of sins also includes items such as “unloving, ungrateful, disobedient to parents.” Therefore, we should follow Scripture’s admonition to examine ourselves first and foremost[[9]](#footnote-9) even if you believe homosexual offense is a more serious sin than others. The nature of this fallen world is that we all want things that God prohibits. The presence of homosexuality is evidence of that reality just as is the presence of greed and pride. We all must deny ourselves, trusting God knows what is best. The specific sins most challenging to deny will vary from person to person[[10]](#footnote-10), but the call to lay our bodies on the altar is universal.
* We should remember that the Gospel is good news for all. Receiving the kingdom of God indeed costs everything you have *but it is worth far more*. Anything God asks you to give up pales in comparison with what He offers in return. This is true for those with same sex attraction just as it is true for those attracted to heterosexual sin, the love of wealth, bitterness, the praise of men and every other sin.
* We should be instruments of God’s grace to individuals who identify as gay or as struggling with same sex attraction. To those in the church, we should help and challenge to a life of struggle against temptation, displayed outwardly either in God-glorifying celibacy or God-glorifying heterosexual marriage. To those outside the church, we should respond by praying for them and holding out the message of the Gospel, not expecting them to live like Christians as they are not followers of Jesus. To anyone in sin, we should offer the hope of repentance while knowing that the flesh always wars against repentance.

Resources for further reading:

<http://www.thevillagechurch.net/the-village-blog/honesty-truth-and-homosexuality/>

http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/bethlehems-position-on-homosexuality

http://www.redeemer.com/redeemer-report/article/the\_bible\_and\_same\_sex\_relationships\_a\_review\_article

Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?*

Mark Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian*

1. Romans 5:12; Acts 2:38-39 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 1 Corinthians 6:11 points out “Such *were* some of you, but you were washed…sanctified…justified.” This verse indicates both that former sexual offenders can be a proud part of the church and that Paul expects repentance from those who would currently fall into categories such as “homosexual offenders.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Shortly after, Jesus speaks of celibacy, thus presenting in one chapter the two viable options—heterosexual marriage and singleness. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 1 Timothy 3:2 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Romans 13:1 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Hebrews 9:19-22 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Matthew 5-6 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 1 Corinthians 6:18 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Matthew 7:3-5 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. James 3:2 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)