

What Does the Bible Say About Homosexuality, Same-Sex Attraction, and Being Transgender?

This collection of scripture was compiled by members of the St. Hugh Episcopal congregation of Elgin, Illinois. Their LGBTQ family members had experienced hurt and rejection from people who told them that God condemned them because of who they were. Their goal in compiling with collection of scripture was to highlight some of the many messages of love and inclusion that are in the Bible, and to help people consider the original meaning of the passages that have been used to condemn LGBTQ people (sometimes called the "clobber verses" or "texts of terror").

God loves LGBTQ people

Nothing can separate us from the love of God (Rom 8:38). This message is for all people, including LGBTQ individuals.

God did not make a mistake in creating LGBTQ people. “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well” (Psalm 139:113–14). Sexual identity and gender identity are components of a person’s personality, and as such are part of who God made each of us to be.

All people are justified through Christ, including LGBTQ people. “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them” (2 Corinthians 3:19), therefore, “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand” (Romans 5:1, 2). This is not to say that being LGBTQ is a sin, but if it were, it would certainly be forgiven.

On Inclusion

God welcomes people of all genders and sexual identities. “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). Also “God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean” (Acts 10:28). Jesus gladly socialized with people that the religious establishment disapproved of (Matt 9:11).

The Church needs its LGBTQ members. “The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been

baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

The early church welcomed non-gender-conforming people. One of the first recorded baptisms by the apostles was of an Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27).

Jesus warned against using anti-gay slurs. The NIV translation of Matthew 5:22 reads “anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court”. The original Greek text does not include “sister”, and the word “raca” is most likely a transliteration of the Aramaic word “rakkah,” which is the feminine form of the adjective that means “to be tender, weak, or soft”, so this would be comparable to calling a man a “sissy” (or worse). [8] [9]

On Relationships

Love is a gift from God: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23).

God made us to be in relationship with Him and with each other: "It is bad for man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). It would be inconsistent with God’s loving nature to create people who were gay and then condemn them to a life of loneliness.

Heterosexual marriage is presented as an example (rather than a definition) of how God puts people in relationships; in Genesis 2:24, “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.” The clause “that is why” points back to 2:18.

God creates community and families, uniting people together: "So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:5). God can and does create unions with all types of people, including LGBTQ individuals.

Celibacy is good if one is called to it, but it is not for everyone (Mt. 19:11-12).

Marriage is good, too ("Better to be married than to burn with passion," 1 Corinthians 7:9).

Examples of love between people of the same gender in the Bible:

David and Jonathan. “After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself” (1 Samuel 18:1). David says of Jonathan, “Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women” (2 Samuel 1:26).

Ruth and Naomi. Ruth expresses her devotion to Naomi with, “Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me” (Ruth 1:16-17).

The Centurion and his servant. (Matt 8:5-10). The word used for “servant” here, “pais,” was commonly used to describe a servant who was a romantic partner of the master. [6]

On Gender

All people, including LGBTQ individuals, were created in God’s image: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27, NSRV). The use of the two primary genders in this passage is likely a “merism,” a figure of speech by which a single thing (in this case, humanity) is referred to by a phrase that lists several of its parts, but does not list all components. (Similarly, in Genesis 1:1, the universe is referred to as “the heavens and the earth.”) This also indicates that God is not limited to a single gender.

There are several characters in the Bible who were non-gender-conforming, meaning that they did not behave according to traditional gender roles, or that they were not physically typical of men or women. [4]

Jacob preferred to be with his mother at home, enjoyed cooking and was smooth-skinned, in contrast to his brother, who was hairy and preferred to hunt and be outdoors. (Genesis 25)

Joseph, Jacob’s son, was given an “ornate robe” by his father (Genesis 37:3); the Hebrew word used here for the robe (ketonet passim) is used elsewhere to mean “the kind of garment the virgin daughters of the king wore” (2 Samuel 13:18).

Deborah (Judges 4-5) was a judge of Israel, acting as a prophet and military leader at a time when women were treated like property and valued by the number of children they could bear.

Hegai, the eunuch in charge of the palace women in the story of Esther, helped Esther to become queen. Ebed-Melech also was a eunuch, who saved the life of the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 38).

The man carrying a water jar, whom Jesus indicated would take the disciples to the room for his last supper, was doing work that was normally done by women, and yet was given this part to play in Jesus' ministry.

The Bible contains feminine images of God, in addition to the masculine metaphors of "Father" and "King." [7]

God's wisdom in Proverbs is personified as female (Proverbs 1:20, 8:1, 9:1), and Christ is the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24).

Many references to God describe actions associated with women: nurturing life in the womb (Psalm 139:13), giving birth (John 3:5-6), and protecting children (Matthew 23:37).

Bible verses that have been used to condemn LGBTQ people.

When seeking to understand any Bible verse, it is important to know the context of the verse, as well as how the verse has been translated from the original language. The following are points to consider when thinking about the verses that have been used to justify prohibitions on same-sex marriage and full participation in church community for LGBTQ people. Nowhere in the Bible, taken in its original language and context, is there a prohibition against loving, consensual same-sex relationships, nor against people living as their authentic genders.

Genesis 19:1-13 The Sodom and Gomorrah story is preceded by examples of Abraham and Lot being very welcoming to strangers. The lack of hospitality and the desire to do violence to the visitors were considered grave transgressions, regardless of the gender of the visitors. The reference in Jude 1:7 to "strange flesh" likely refers to the fact that the angels they wanted to assault were not human. "Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy" (Ezekiel 16:49).

Leviticus 18:22 The NIV translation of this verse reads: "Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable." The literal translation of the original Hebrew, however, is "And with male you shall not lie lyings woman." The word translated as "lyings" is found elsewhere only in Genesis 49:4, where it refers to incest. In Leviticus, this verse comes in a list of prohibitions against having sex with family members, so it is reasonable to conclude that it is a prohibition against incest. [2]

Romans 1:26-27 Here, Paul is condemning the sinful and harmful acts he perceives in Roman culture at the time. Since same-gender and non-heterosexual attractions are natural, this condemnation is not directed at LGBTQ people. In Romans 2:1, Paul condemns those who misuse God’s teachings to judge others.

1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:9-11 The NIV translations of these verses read, respectively: “Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men” and “We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality.”

The word translated as “homosexuals” and “men who have sex with men” is the Greek word *arsenokoitai*, which more accurately translates to “men who sleep with male prostitutes.” [3] The word “homosexual” is not found in the Bible in translations written prior to 1948, implying that it was likely added as a result of the translators' own prejudices. [5]

Matthew 19:4 “Haven’t you read,” [Jesus] replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female’?” In the same section, in verse 12, Jesus says, “For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.” It is evident that Jesus was aware that gender variance existed, and he does not condemn it. [1]

Deuteronomy 22:5 “A woman must not wear men’s clothing, nor a man wear women’s clothing, for the Lord your God detests anyone who does this.” The word translated as “clothing” here, *keli*, is translated elsewhere as “armor,” and the word translated as “man,” *geber*, actually means “warrior.” This implies a prohibition against intent to deceive by pretending to be a warrior, or for a warrior to deceive by disguising himself as a woman. [1]

Criteria by which God will evaluate our lives

For those who might feel it is “better to be safe than sorry” in sticking with the “traditional” teaching on LGBTQ issues, consider that the Bible does not tell us to judge or make life difficult for other people. There are seven passages that have been used to justify bias against LGBTQ people, but there are over a hundred about love—so it may be safest to focus on love! Scripture has been used to justify slavery, to exclude divorced people from full participation in the sacraments, to exclude women

from ministry, and to persecute left-handed people; if the church has been wrong in its treatment of LGBTQ issues, this would not be unprecedented.

Jesus says nothing indicating that being gay or trans is a sin.

John 8:7 “Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.” Throughout the Bible, God warns against casting judgments upon others.

Matthew 25: 34-36 “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, **I was a stranger and you invited me in,** I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’”

Mark 12:30-31 “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

Matthew 18:6 "If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.” Consider this in the context of LGBTQ people who lost their faith because their church told them God did not love them.

John 6:39 “And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me. . .” God would not want LGBTQ people to be driven away from the church or lose their faith.

References

All Bible quotations are from the NIV translation.

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