

# scripture, the arguments

+ your journey

Responding to Homophobic  
Readings of the Bible  
for lesbians and gay men

## About this leaflet

This leaflet is about the five passages of the Bible (the NIV is used) that are cited as proof that being homosexual runs against the Christian faith. As the arguments often cite passages of scripture in isolation, it's easy to respond to them in isolation too. But it should be noted that God's word should always be studied in full context.

This has been produced by an informal group called



If you need help, or  
want to know more

email: safespace@geocities.com,  
web: www.gaychristians.org.uk/safetynet/

[www.reluctantjourney.co.uk](http://www.reluctantjourney.co.uk) has a book available for free download on the Web written by a straight, retired Methodist local preacher, George Hopper. It includes a Bible study which concludes that there is no condemnation of loving, faithful, committed, same-sex relationships. You may want to pass on this website address if conversation gets too difficult, or you want to stop talking. It is also a far more thorough study than is given below, which we've chosen to base on Hopper's work (with consent).

## Always remember

- you don't have to keep talking, you can stop at any time
- these conversations are often one-way; the other person may not want to listen
- being personally close to the issues can make such conversations painful, and very hard to give responses; they often turn into abstract theology rather than being experience-based
- People talking to you this way may not realize the emotional impact made on you with what they say
- By replying and having some answers, you may well be challenging the other person's whole view of the world. They may feel threatened, afraid of the unknown, and may get confrontational or defensive as a result

- You are beautiful, no matter what they say. You are a child of God, you are loved, you are not alone in this, and nothing anyone says will change that fact

## Acceptance at Church

What is your church's opinion about homosexuality? Your elders may have one view (it is often agreed) but others in your church may have other views. A church will rarely be cohesive on 'hot topics'. If they appear cohesive, incohesion will never be far from the surface (and that's not always a bad asset).

Can you get the support and understanding you need from within your church? As you take the journey of bringing personal integrity and honesty to the private matter of your sexuality, do you feel you will be accepted enough in your church? How much is enough?

## Acceptance on the Gay Scene

If you have been out as gay for a long time, and have recently become a Christian or are considering following Jesus, you may find your mates reject you a little or a lot. Perhaps because they themselves have been hurt by the church or by Christians in the past, or just because Christianity is still generally understood to be hostile to gay people. The church has many faults, but those faults cannot be pinned on God, and your relationship with God, your spiritual journey, is personal to you. What are their reasons? Can they substantiate what they're saying? What is your experience? Whatever you're going through, it's your choice and your journey. Nobody else's.

## Genesis 13:13; 19:1-11

**The scripture(s):** 'Now the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD.'

**The argument:** That the men of Sodom wanted to have sex with the angels (or visitors) because they were homosexual, and wicked. That because of this, God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. Hence 'sodomy'.

**What this omits to say:** In a land where hospitality was of the highest importance, and the host was responsible for the safety and well-

being of his guests, Lot was more willing to offer his daughters to the gods (for which they had to be virgins) than let his guests be abused. The violent wicked men were trying to destroy Lot's reputation as a host by abusing his guests, thus humiliating him and driving him away.

**How did Jesus and the prophets see this story?** The sins of Sodom according to Isaiah [1:10ff], were hypocrisy, idolatrous worship, and injustice. According to Ezekiel [16:48-50], were pride, greed, idolatry, stubbornness and injustice. According to Jesus [Matt 10:11-15; 11:23,24]; [Mark 6:11]; [Luke 10:10-12]; [17:26-30] were inhospitality, unbelief and unpreparedness. Christians and others who translate and/or interpret it according to present tradition are doing so at variance with the Lord Jesus - the Living Word, and in spite of the Biblical evidence.

## So what is meant by 'we might know them' [English Standard Version, and others]?

The Hebrew derivatives of 'yada' (or know) used here is misconstrued as male/male sexual intercourse in the NIV version. But 'yada' (and derivatives) occur nearly 700 times in scripture, meaning 'know' in the sense we mean 'know'. 13 of those times it means sexual intercourse, and in all 13 it is clarified by an accompanying statement eg 'Abraham knew Sarah his wife, and she conceived and had a son'. Such a clarification does not occur in the Hebrew in v.5. We can't assume 'know' means 'have sex with'. Indeed, in Judges 19:22 and 20:5 the man whom the men wanted to 'know' stated that they wanted to kill him, not rape him.

## Leviticus 18: 22, 20:13

**The scripture:** 'If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.'

**The argument:** Whatever you say about the other verses, these verses are crystal clear.

**What this omits to say:** is that this verse is mistranslated - The New American Standard Bible and the 'Interlinear NIV Hebrew-English Old Testament' both translate the Hebrew as 'You shall not lie with a man, as men (lit. those, plural) lie with a woman (singular)', pointing to prostitution. NB Jerome (Latin Vulgate)

translated **arsenokoiti/s** as 'masculorum concubitores' or 'male prostitutes'. Jerome lived close to the time that the New Testament Canon was finally agreed, so his translation is important.

The Hebrew word translated as 'detestable' in the NIV (or 'abominable' in others) is **to'ebah**. It is the same word that is used in connection with cultic prostitution in Deut 23: 18 and 1 Kings 14: 24 (as well as in over 100 other references associated with idolatry). The references here are linked with the hated Canaanite cults in which young men and women were recruited for shrine prostitution. The sexual rites were supposed to 'wake up the gods' and make fertile the herds, the crops, and those who entered the rites. Taken together, the Levitical and Deuteronomical laws rightly banned any kind of involvement in these cultic sexual rites. The passages' context of Egyptian and Canaanite religion (Leviticus 18:3, 24-30; 20:23-24) confirms the connection here with the statutes of the idolatrous cults.

### **Romans 1:18-32**

**The scripture:** ...Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

**The argument:** Homosexuality is a sexual act carried out by people who have turned away from God. It is not for Christians.

**What this omits to say:** The immorality of Rome is the backdrop for this 3-part argument for the failures of humankind. People had become dissatisfied with their natural heterosexuality and its moral expression, and were turning to what were for them unnatural acts. Paul is not addressing the love of homosexual or heterosexual people but the depravity resulting from worship of other than our loving Creator God. You'd be mad to base an argument on this passage of scripture.

### **1 Corinthians 5:9-13; 6:7-11**

**The scripture:** '...Expel the wicked man from among you...'

**The argument:** Homosexuality is a sexual immorality. Therefore people who perform homosexual acts are wicked and must be expelled from Christian fellowship.

**What this omits to say:** Paul uses four Greek words to describe sexual sins in these verses.

**Pornoï** - the sexually immoral (when Paul used this earlier it was about a man sleeping with his stepmother); **Moichoi** - adulterers; **Malakoi** - meaning 'soft' or the passive partner in male prostitution translated in the NIV and NRSV as: 'male prostitutes' [NIV/NRSV] 'homosexual perverts' [GNB] 'sexual perverts' [RSV] 'catamites' (boys kept for same-sex sexual acts) [Jerusalem Bible - JB]; The fourth, **Arsenokoitai** - as with 'malakoi' there is a wide confusing variety in how this word is translated. It derives directly from Leviticus 20:13, where the phrase 'ho an koimethe meta arsenos koiten gunaikos' (translated incorrectly as 'he who lies with a man as with a woman') would have been familiar to Paul from the Septuagint (3rd century BC Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible). When we look at the interpretation of 'arsenokoitai' in modern versions of 1 Corinthians 6:9, we understand the difficulty the translators must have had. As with 'malakoi', there is a wide variety in how 'arsenokoitai' is translated: 'homosexual perverts' [GNB], 'sexual perverts' [RSV], 'sodomites' [NIV/JB/NRSV]. These translations generally seem to indicate that the translators do not sufficiently understand the terms 'malakoi' and 'arsenokoitai', or the issue.

The range of translation shows 'malakoi' and 'arsenokoitai' are both not accurately understood. The translations seem to be reflecting the corrupt morality of Corinth rather than the origin and associated meaning of the Greek term. The word 'perversion' means literally 'wrong or bad use' of something - in this case sexuality. The RSV's 'sexual perverts' probably comes closest to the spirit of the Greek, though the activities described would no doubt have included mostly heterosexual perverts. The GNB's translation 'homosexual perverts' can be misunderstood. Any heterosexual would agree that 'heterosexual perverts' refers to those heterosexuals who pervert their sexuality. The same-sex sexual acts that Paul writes about in Corinth all involve abuse and perversion; acts which undermine the worth and dignity of those involved. There are many responsible homosexual people in loving, faithful,

stable unions blessed by God. Paul said nothing about that.

### **1 Timothy 1:3-11**

Paul lists various profanities. The critical Greek word here is, again, **arsenokoitais** and gets translated as: 'sexual perverts' [GNB], 'perverts' [GNB], 'sodomites' [RSV/NRSV], and 'immoral with boys and men' [JB].

Here again, the translations are varied. Bearing in mind the Levitical origin of 'arsenokoitais', ie temple prostitution, the translators seem to be interpreting in terms of what was known to be going on at Ephesus. 'Arsenokoitai' should not be seen as a word of general condemnation. Otherwise Paul would have undoubtedly used it in his many other letters, in all of which he condemned opposite-sex sexual immorality, rather than just the two of them.

### **Deuteronomy 23:17-18; 1 Kings 14:24, 15:12, 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7**

You will probably not be quoted these. The King James Version of the Bible (so called because it was commissioned by King James in 1611) uses the word 'sodomite' incorrectly. It is corrected to 'male temple prostitute' in modern versions.

### **Finally**

Jesus never said anything about homosexuality. He dealt with sexual sin and mentions adultery and prostitution. Jesus reinforced the Ten Commandments, but interpreted the law on sexual sin in a more spiritual way (see Matthew 5:27ff; 38ff), and showed great compassion for sexual offenders.

In John 8: 31-32 Jesus said "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Be free in the knowledge that you are a child of God who is dearly loved by God. You are not condemned. You are not an abomination. You should not be put to death. Instead, you know about love, and love is the very nature of God. If you follow Jesus' teaching, you'll know truth from lie and walk in shameless liberation. Is the person talking to you following the way of Jesus, or some other way?