

Rod:

Thanks for your comment. Honest and irenic discussion is a good thing. You may want to read the blog I posted following the “T-shirt” post. It is titled “Was Jesus Nice?” And as to who is ignorant of Scripture we will let others judge that after reading the next few paragraphs.

Now to your comments. You are correct: Jesus never mentions homosexuality, the gay lifestyle or same sex attraction. Why?

First, Jesus addressed the issues that were prevalent in his time. Homosexuality was certainly not a front-burner issue in first century Palestine. Even today when I am in the Palestinian areas with people who still live and think much like earlier Palestine, the topic is taboo and they are embarrassed and shocked if you mention such things.

Second, the gospel writers recorded very few of Jesus’ actual words and deeds. Three years of teaching and instruction and only a few short accounts. St. John says that what he wrote is only a minuscule portion of the what he said and did (Jn 20:30-31; 21:25), Jesus addressed and they recorded, the issues that were pressing in their own context and culture. Homosexuality was not such a topic.

Third, we cannot say Jesus did not mention or verbally condemn such behavior since we have so little of what he actually said and did during the three short years of his ministry. We have no recorded mention of abortion (again a non-issue in 1st century Palestine), yet Jesus obviously would have condemned it soundly. Jesus never mentioned riding donkeys slowly through intersections to avoid accidents. We have no record of him reminding people not to “drink and drive” or to eat good to avoid heart attacks.

Now, what we *do* know is the culture, the religion and the ethics of Jesus. He was not a 1st century pagan, nor a San Francisco gay; not an atheist Marxist or a Hindu. Jesus was a Hebrew Jew through and through. He obeyed the Law of Moses completely. The hypocritical leaders knew this because they could never pin anything on him. He was the 2nd Person of the Trinity who made man and women and who gave them the Law at Mount Sinai.

Being the visible image of the invisible God (Col 1:15), Jesus was not likely to negate or reverse the moral law he imposed on the world based on his nature and attributes.

But even if you deny that Jesus was God, he certainly was an observant Jew with a love for and respect for the Law. He said in Matthew 5:17–19, “**Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven;**

but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

Jesus did not negate the Law but upheld it and even upped the ante and made it more stringent. What does the Law say about homosexuality? Leviticus 18:22, “**You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.**” The pagans—who even offered their children as living sacrifices—practiced such sexual deviations. God forbade his people to live and act like the despised pagans around them. They had a Law that ordered their society according to the will of God who had made them.

Interestingly enough, this next passage puts homosexual activity in the same category as incest and bestiality. The punishment was death. We read in Leviticus 20:13–16 “**If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them. If a man takes a wife and her mother also, it is wickedness; they shall be burned with fire, both he and they, that there may be no wickedness among you. If a man lies with a beast, he shall be put to death; and you shall kill the beast. If a woman approaches any beast and lies with it, you shall kill the woman and the beast; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them.**”

I could go on for pages with such passages—demonstrating the Law and the culture of the Jews. Jesus was an obedient Jew. No rational person would suggest that Jesus would condone, much less promote homosexuality, incest or bestiality. (I am not talking about homosexual inclinations but homosexual acts; inclinations are not sin, acting out the impulses is.) The only way to superimpose such “tolerance” on Jesus is to rip him from his own religion and cultural context and anachronistically paint him a different color with a modern brush. This “new Jesus” is a creation of a culture that wishes to create God in their own image.

The book of Revelation is especially applicable in this regard—especially since it is a revelation given to St. John by Jesus himself. It was written by St. John who is presumably the disciple of Jesus and one quite intimate with the teachings and practices of his Rabbi. And John claims that the book is the actual words of Jesus. But even if one refuses to accept the fact that it is written by St. John, it is still a man who understood the culture, law and acceptable conduct that the Jewish culture and the early Christian community expected of people. So the book claims to be words of Jesus in addition to what we find in the Gospels.

Revelation tells who will and will not be in heaven. We read in Revelation 21:27, “**But nothing unclean shall enter it, nor any one who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.**” In the Jewish and biblical context, what is an abomination? We already confronted that word in Leviticus where such abominations were mentioned and condemned. Homosexuality, incest and bestiality were among the abominations which God abhorred. Those who practice such things will not be in heaven according to Jesus.

Later in Revelation 22:15, “**Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and every one who loves and practices falsehood.**” Note, the Greek word used in Scripture for “fornication” is *pornos* which means illicit sexual relations or conduct. In the context, without twisting Scripture to suit one’s own purposes or to justify one’s own conduct, homosexuality, bestiality, incest and other deviant sexual activity are included in the word “fornication.” It would also apply to someone committing adultery, sex outside marriage, and any other sexual activity outside of a monogamous man-woman marriage relationship.

It seems pretty clear that if one reads Scripture in context and one understands the life and moral teaching of Christ in context, there is no possibility of concluding Jesus condoned or approved of homosexual conduct.

Now, having said that, Jesus loved the sinner without condoning the sin. We as Catholics and Christians strive for the same thing. To love and cherish every person no matter what their sexual orientation or conduct. However, we will speak out against deviant behavior, sin and conduct contrary to the laws of nature and of nature’s God.

If someone brings up the adulterous woman in John 8 to demonstrate Jesus’ tolerance and acceptance of sexual sins, we must remember that Jesus did *not* accept the sin of adultery. He accepted the sinner, forgave her, and told her to sin no more. He used the situation to expose the hypocrisy of her accusers who wanted to kill her but failed to condemn the man involved and were full of sin themselves. We who oppose homosexuality are not out to stone homosexuals, nor do we claim we are without our own sins. But we do make a judgment about moral norms and encourage all, including ourselves to come to Jesus for forgiveness and healing—and then to sin no more.

One often hears the mantra “Jesus said not to judge so why are you judging?” This is a misunderstanding of what Jesus is saying. Here is the quote in Matthew 7:1–2, “**Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get.**” He is simply stating that if you don’t want to be judged by others, then don’t start the ball ricocheting off the walls because it will come back to hit you.

This is certainly not a command against making judgments. Obviously we make judgments every day—we discriminate all the time. We marry one person instead of another, we choose some people as friends and avoid others, we judge someone as wrong who punches us in the nose. Urinating on people in a crowded street would bring down judgment by the most tolerant among us.

Jesus told us we *are* to judge. Consider these two examples.

Luke 12:57

“**And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?**”

John 7:24

“Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.”

If someone is determined to promote the gay lifestyle and practicing intolerance toward those who oppose such conduct, what I have said will likely mean nothing. Many want to create God in their own image and will do whatever they want to do even if they have to twist the historical Jewish Jesus into a tolerant modern relativistic caricature.

Mother Theresa, who loved everyone without holding back an ounce of blood, sweat or tears; yet, she would never condone homosexuality. She would tenderly love and care for a dying homosexual with aids without condemning him. But at the same time she would clearly denounce homosexuality was a sin and to be opposed to it. Neither would Mother Theresa condemn a woman who'd had an abortion, but no one was a stronger critic of the abortion than Mother Theresa.

Again, I don't mean to offend or alienate and I do appreciate your candid comment. May God also bless you as you seek to know the God of creation and his Son Jesus Christ.

A Few Questions Arose about the Validity of Using the Old Testament in the Discussion of Jesus and Homosexuality. I Duplicate the Questions Here, and Respond To Them

The Questions:

1. The bible says to kill those who engage in sexual abominations! (obviously a ludicrous thought today). If we no longer consider OT commands against eating shellfish and pork binding on us, why should we consider as relevant the OT laws against homosexuality? Aren't the laws against homosexuality ridiculous today because people aren't as simple-minded anymore?

2. You say Jesus was a faithful Jew. Was He actually faithful to the law if he performed miracles on the Sabbath, didn't follow all the hand-washing rules, etc.? Is the Catholic Church faithful to Scripture if they throw out Jewish laws - i.e. pork, shellfish, circumcision? If Jesus was willing to go against the law in some areas, maybe Jesus wasn't faithful to the portions of the law dealing with homosexuality?

Steve answers:

There are several issues here. Let's deal with them one at a time. First, as a civilized society we must make distinctions between moral and immoral conduct. Only anarchist deny this but they have their own set of norms regardless. Just stomp on their toes and find out how quick they have a sense of right and wrong.

Once we've decided on the code of morals and ethics, then we have to decide how to deal respond to acts of immorality (or any other crime or violation of the society's law). When a society decides something is immoral and therefore a crime the society must o

have a means of punishing that action. Homosexual acts (like all illicit sexual acts) are immoral. Various societies regard it with various degrees of egregiousness. Correspondingly, the reactions to and punishments of such conduct within societies varies because societies vary.

When the Jews were a small tribe, surrounded by enemies, with no real self-defense, and a true theocracy where “church and state” were one entity (so that to deny the Faith was an act of treason), homosexuality was a capital offense. Our questioner is correct in this. It would be ludicrous to treat homosexuality today in the same way it was treated millennia ago. But that is not what is important in our discussion right now. The real question is whether homosexual acts are immoral in the Old Testament, in the mind of Jesus, in the New Testament and in the history of the Church Jesus founded.. The answer is unambiguously yes.

The Jews had three different laws or codes: the Moral Law, the Ceremonial law, and the Legislative law. Whereas most or all of the ceremonial and non-moral issues were done away with, the moral laws remain in perpetuity. This is very clear from the words of Jesus alone, but add the continued moral demands imposed by the apostles, the writings of the New Testament and the early Church.

The Moral Law we see in the Old Testament, especially in the Ten Commandments, is basically the law of most societies more or less. With the Jews it was not negated or minimized but remained and is further perfected in Christ. The Ceremonial Law (i.e., eating shellfish and pork, etc.) has been made obsolete by Christ, and the Legislative Law is no longer applicable as law after the theocracy of Israel ceased.

The teaching on homosexual acts is part of the Moral Law (and Natural Law for that matter) which remains. Eating shellfish and pork is part of the Ceremonial Law—now obsolete at the coming of the Messiah. The two are very different in nature. There is nothing immoral about eating shellfish or pork. That was part of the Temporary Law imposed through Moses but not on God’s people before Moses or after Christ. In the book of Revelation we do not find people excluded from heaven for eating lobster but they will be excluded for sexual deviance and immoral conduct.

Again, dietary laws (the ceremonial law) pointed to the Messiah who was to come. Now that the Messiah has come, they are obsolete. Foods don't defile, but the things that come out of the heart. Jesus said, “**What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person**” (Mark 7:20–23).

Notice the word "defile." The dietary stuff made people ceremonially defiled, but immorality is sin and this defiles morally. Circumcision likewise is a sign of a future regeneration. Again, once Christ has come and instituted true spiritual regeneration (i.e., baptism), circumcision (with the ceremony that goes with it) professes a different faith, a

faith in the Messiah Who is yet to come. Christians, therefore, cannot be circumcised because they would be professing the Messiah has not yet come.

None of these things involve the Moral Law and homosexual acts are not part of the ceremonial law. Unlike Marriage, which is raised to a Sacrament imaging Christ (the bridegroom) and His Body, the Church (the Bride), there is no such analog to homosexuality.

There is also something to be said about the Natural Law. In the Declaration of Independence, the Founding Fathers of our country referred to the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God. Things in nature work best (they flourish) when they act in accord with their design (e.g., a car runs great on gas because it is design for gas, but it doesn't run on water. In fact, it breaks down). Nature and Nature's God has designed men and women with complementary parts and when they are used in accord with that design they flourish (they have kids). The same is not true for two males or females. This teaching is true and will remain true as long as human nature remains the same.

Homosexual activity is condemned, not only in the Old Testament, but the New Testament as well. Although Jesus never directly and explicitly speaks to homosexuality, his disciple (in whom He gave the Holy Spirit to guide them in all truth) confirmed the immorality of these acts. Likewise, His Church continued to witness to this constant teaching.

The teaching remains the same throughout Church history as well. For example, in the mid-50's St. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:9, "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality..."

Several decades later St. Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 1:8–11, "Now we know that the law is good, if any one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, immoral persons, sodomites ... and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the glorious gospel of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted."

This was the unchallenged position of the early Church following the faith of Jesus Christ and built on the Jewish foundation. Interestingly, there are two words in the list of sins in 1 Corinthians above that relate to homosexuals, one the passive or receiving partner and the other the active or penetrating partner. One translation even says, "neither boy prostitutes nor practicing homosexuals" (NAB).

According to *A Handbook on Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians*, a language manual to assist biblical translators, "Many languages can use roundabout ways of speaking about homosexual relations. Paul thought of the practice of homosexuality as a form of perversion. If the people for whom this passage is translated do not normally share

Paul's attitude, it may be important to use a word meaning 'pervert,' to make Paul's meaning explicit."¹

A note about the rescinding of the death penalty for many of the abominations in Israel. During the days of Christ, Israel was no longer a theocracy and able to exercise its own laws. They were under Roman rule. The Jews in Jesus' time had to reluctantly comply with the new rules and limitations on exercising their own laws. For an example we read in John 18:31, "Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.' The Jews said to him, 'It is not lawful for us to put any man to death.'"

Most Western countries had strict rules against such behavior until recently. We have overturned 3,000 years of precedent as though we are now so much smarter than the people of the past. I think we do it to our own peril. But at the same time we are not advocating stoning homosexuals. Times and punishments and cultures change; morals do not change.

A few people may say that we should turn the other cheek, never judge, not punish anyone, allow people to be people. But even though individuals have limitations related to punishment or retaliation, governments cannot turn the other cheek. Paul said in "Romans 13:4, "For he governmental authority] is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain; he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer." Governments by their very nature are instituted by God to both protect the people under their auspices and to reward good and punish evil and immoral acts without their country.

Another question was whether Jesus was really faithful to the Law or whether he abandoned it and did things contrary to the Law. The answer is he was a Jew faithful and 100% obedient to the Law. He fulfilled the Law completely though he opposed the Pharisees and their manipulation by inflating the Law with their innumerable traditions and regulations. He obeyed the Law but did not comply with all the pharisaical accretions. He never even hinted at resisting the Moral Law—quite the opposite.

Some may claim the Jesus was more hip, so to speak, and would not have held to the "archaic" laws of the past. However, we don't see Jesus denounce or rescind the Law of Moses. To the contrary, he modifies it and ups the ante but does not remove or even imply the moral demands are less. He did not come to abolish the Moral Law but to fulfill it.

Jesus was a faithful Jew and Jesus, God made flesh, didn't just follow the Law, he perfected it. So yes he was a faithful Jew, but He took the Law and raised it to a new level. I would take your example and give you one that is even stronger. Forget working on the Sabbath and hand-washing, Jesus actually changed the Law. In Matthew 5,

¹ Ellingworth, P., Hatton, H., & Ellingworth, P. (1995). *A handbook on Paul's first letter to the Corinthians*. UBS handbook series; Helps for translators (131). New York: United Bible Societies.

Jesus quotes several items from the Law and then proposes His New Law. For example, Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28).

He is taking one of the commandments and giving a new commandment. Jesus isn't contradicting the commandment, but raising it to a new and higher level made possible by God's grace. If Jesus didn't contradict or abrogate the command not to commit adultery but raised it to a higher level, why would He abrogate homosexual acts? Christ is a New Moses giving the New Law and making a New Covenant. He followed the Law and reconstituted it on a new supernatural level. It seems to me very unlikely that Jesus would have said, "You have heard where it is said, 'Thou shall not commit homosexual acts' and 'those who commit them deserve death, but I say to you 'When you stop being stupid primitives (say around the 2012) then go ahead and indulge. And practice bestiality, incest, adultery and murder too while you're at it.'" Somehow that just doesn't seem to ring true.

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* rightly says,

Chastity and homosexuality

2357 Homosexuality refers to relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex. It has taken a great variety of forms through the centuries and in different cultures. Its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained. Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that "homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered." They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved.

2358 The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition.

2359 Homosexual persons are called to chastity. By the virtues of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom, at times by the support of disinterested friendship, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection.²

² Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed.) (566). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.