

THE
REFORMATION
PROJECT

A COMPANION GUIDE TO THE VIDEO CURRICULUM

The Biblical Case for LGBTQ Inclusion

From the six biblical passages that refer to same-sex behavior to broader themes in Scripture about marriage, celibacy, sexual ethics, and the roles of men and women, this course carefully lays the groundwork for how Christians can both affirm the authority of the Bible and affirm their LGBTQ friends and loved ones.

STUDY GUIDE · TWENTY MODULES IN SIX SECTIONS

WELCOME

A Letter from the Executive Director

Welcome to the workbook for our video curriculum on the biblical case for LGBTQ inclusion.

My name is Matthew Vines, and I'm the founder and executive director of The Reformation Project. We are a Bible-based, Christian organization that is grounded in our love for God, our love for the Bible, and our love for the church.

It's no secret that debates about sexual orientation and gender identity are one of the most pressing and challenging conversations in the church today. Whereas these discussions used to be confined mainly to our culture at large, they are increasingly taking place in the very heart of our churches and faith organizations. As more Christians come out as gay, bisexual, or transgender, more churches are beginning to recognize that this isn't an abstract issue, but a profoundly important and sensitive conversation about people's lives. And it's a conversation that has sadly produced more heat than light all too often, as it strikes to the heart of many deep-seated values that are often thought to be in conflict with one another. As a result, many Christians, regardless of their theological beliefs about same-sex relationships and transgender people, find it difficult to communicate effectively with those who disagree.

Before we begin, it's important to note that this course is only about the theological aspects of this conversation, not the practical and pastoral side of things. So you will likely have some questions that go beyond the scope of this curriculum. But whoever you are — whether you're a pastor with LGBTQ people in your congregation, a parent wanting to learn more after your child has come out, or an LGBTQ Christian yourself seeking to reconcile your faith and your sexuality or gender identity — my prayer is that this course will be a helpful resource for you. Whether you ultimately agree with my conclusions or not, I hope this course helps you to grow in your faith, to grow in your love for the Bible, and to grow in your understanding of an LGBTQ-affirming theological position.

Overall, my goal in this course isn't just to provide more knowledge about the Bible and LGBTQ inclusion, but specifically to show how Christians can become affirming of same-sex marriage and transgender people in the church in a way that strengthens their commitment to the authority of the Bible and to orthodox Christian theology. Thank you for joining me. And with that, let's dive in!

Matthew Vines

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, THE REFORMATION PROJECT

COURSE OVERVIEW

The Twenty Modules

Six sections trace the full arc of the conversation, from first principles of biblical interpretation to the path forward for the church.

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01 Scripture and Experience

02 Biblical Authority and Christian Orthodoxy

03 Biblical Interpretation and Moral Logic

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SECTION I

The Invitation

01 Scripture and Experience

02 Biblical Authority and Christian Orthodoxy

03 Biblical Interpretation and Moral Logic

Scripture and Experience

Throughout this module, we will be:

- Assessing the appropriate role of experience in shaping our beliefs and interpretation of Scripture
- Responding to non-affirming arguments against taking into account the consequences of interpretations of Scripture on people's lives

PAUSE & REFLECT

When you hear the words Scripture and experience in regard to the LGBTQ community, what comes to your mind?

But for still others, especially those who grow up in a more conservative environment, it can be something that they bury deep down, as far away from conscious recognition as possible. That was the case for me. I assiduously suppressed any acknowledgement of my sexual orientation until I was 19.

MATTHEW VINES

YOUNG PEOPLE WHO EXPERIENCED HIGH DEGREES OF FAMILY REJECTION ARE:

8.4×	5.9×	3.4×
more likely to attempt suicide	more likely to have high levels of depression	more likely to use illegal drugs

KEY POINT

The church's condemnation of same-sex relationships and transgender people causes serious harm to LGBTQ people.

KEY POINT

Our experience shouldn't lead us to *revise* Scripture, but it can lead us to *revisit* our understanding of it.

MATTHEW 7:15–20

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them."

Responding to Critiques of *God and the Gay Christian*

Non-affirming writers have published responses to *God and the Gay Christian*, including *God and the Gay Christian? A Response to Matthew Vines* (edited by R. Albert Mohler Jr.) and Christopher Yuan's *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel*. Matthew responds:

MATTHEW VINES

"But I have never and would never argue that mere bad feelings are the same thing as bad fruit. The problem with condemning same-sex relationships is...that that sort of rejection is tied to much more serious and devastating consequences in LGBTQ people's lives."

MATTHEW VINES

"But both of those arguments are more narrow interpretations than the text itself supports. Jesus's words in Matthew 7 are broader than John the Baptist's in Matthew 3, and while repentance would certainly qualify as good fruit and unrepentance as bad fruit, Jesus doesn't restrict his words to those matters alone."

The Fruits Test in the Christian Tradition

AUGUSTINE

"And what the fruits are by which we may know a good tree, the very same apostle goes on to tell us: But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."

MATTHEW HENRY

"Not that this is the only way, but it is one way, of trying doctrines, whether they be of God or not. What do they tend to do? What affections and practices will they lead those into, that embrace them?"

CHARLES SPURGEON

"If their teaching makes you better, if it makes you love God, if it draws you to holiness, if it inspires you with noble and heroic sentiments, so that you imitate Christ, then listen to them."

JOHN WESLEY

"The goodness or badness here mentioned respects the doctrine, rather than the personal character."

JOHN GILL

"Their doctrines are here meant, and the effects of them."

RICHARD HAYS

"After all the careful exegetical work... the test that finally proves the value of our theological labors is the 'fruits test:' 'A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit... Thus you will know them by their fruits.'"

ACTS 15:8, 10

"God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us... Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear?"

KEY POINT

Good teachings, even when they are difficult, should make us more like God.

Biblical Authority and Christian Orthodoxy

Throughout this module, we will be:

- Reviewing the most important theological beliefs of the Christian faith that Christians should continue to uphold regardless of their views about LGBTQ inclusion
- Addressing common concerns about the proverbial "slippery slope"

PAUSE & REFLECT

What are some of the "slippery slopes" that cause the most concern for non-affirming Christians in your life?

We can and certainly do have differing opinions about how to interpret Scripture on a whole range of issues, but we have to wrestle with the text, not set it aside, if we want to follow what Jesus modeled for us.

MATTHEW VINES

KEY POINT

To honor the authority of Scripture, we need to work through the text, not work around it.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1–5

"Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve."

The Heart of Christian Orthodoxy

Affirming Christians can and should continue to uphold the central convictions of the historic Christian faith:

01 There is one God, the creator of heaven and earth.

02 This same God spoke through the prophets of the Old Testament regarding the coming Messiah.

03 Jesus is the Son of God, born from the seed of David, through the virgin Mary.

04 Jesus is the creator of all things, who came into the world, God in the flesh.

05 Jesus came to bring salvation and redemption for those who believe in him.

06 Jesus physically suffered and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, raised bodily from the dead, and exalted to the right hand of God the Father.

07 Jesus will return again to judge the world.

KEY POINT

Jesus was fully human and fully divine, he died for our sins, and he was raised from the dead.

KEY POINT

We should affirm same-sex relationships and transgender people while continuing to affirm the values of monogamy and covenant.

Biblical Interpretation and Moral Logic

Throughout this module, we will be:

- Understanding and applying the basic elements of biblical interpretation: exegesis and hermeneutics
- Recognizing how Christians have historically considered not just what biblical texts say, but the broader reasons or "moral logic" behind biblical texts

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QUICK GAME · MATCH THE TERM TO ITS DEFINITION

Can you match the correct definition with the correct word? Draw a line connecting each pair.

Exegesis	**Hermeneutics**
Seeking the contemporary relevance of ancient texts.	The careful, systematic study of the Scripture to discover the original, intended meaning.

Exegesis

The careful, systematic study of the Scripture to discover the original, intended meaning.

KEY POINT

Exegesis is what a text *says*.

Hermeneutics

Seeking the contemporary relevance of ancient texts.

KEY POINT

Hermeneutics is what we *do* with what the text says.

Reading for the Reasons Behind the Rules

DEUTERONOMY 22:8

"When you build a new house, make a parapet around your roof so that you may not bring the guilt of bloodshed on your house if someone falls from the roof."

1 CORINTHIANS 11:4–6

"Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved. For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head."

ROMANS 16:16 · 1 CORINTHIANS 16:20 · 2 CORINTHIANS 13:12 · 1 THESSALONIANS 5:26 · 1 PETER 5:14

"Greet each other with a holy kiss."

KEY POINT

We need to understand not just what particular passages say, but *why* they say what they do.

Case Study: John Calvin on Usury

HIS ANALYSIS OF SCRIPTURE

We see that the end for which the law was framed was that men should not cruelly oppress the poor, who ought rather to receive sympathy and compassion. This was, indeed, a part of the judicial law which God appointed for the Jews in particular; but it is a common principle of justice which extends to all nations and to all ages, that we should keep ourselves from plundering and devouring the poor who are in distress and want. Whence it follows, that the gain which he who lends his money upon interest acquires, without doing injury to anyone, is not to be included under the head of unlawful usury.

JOHN CALVIN

HIS RESPONSE TO CRITICS

Those who do not take this view will reply that we simply have to go along with the judgment of God, generally forbidding all forms of usury to his people. … If we have dealings with wealthy people, we may lend to them at interest; for in condemning a vice, the lawmaker clearly appears not to be condemning things about which he says nothing.

JOHN CALVIN

KEY POINT

Christians have historically reinterpreted biblical prohibitions based on their understanding of the moral logic behind them.

SECTION II

History of Sexuality

04 Same-Sex Practices in the Biblical World

05 Did Same-Sex Marriage Exist in the Biblical World?

06 Tradition and Sexual Orientation

07 Did the Concept of Sexual Orientation Exist in the Biblical World?

Same-Sex Practices in the Biblical World

Throughout this module, we will be:

- Surveying historical evidence about same-sex practices in the Ancient Near East, Greece, and Rome
- Assessing the sexual norms and taboos that prevailed in the biblical world and the attitudes that existed about same-sex behavior as a result

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FILL IN THE BLANKS

(Hint: the answer may or may not be one of the key points.)

In ancient _____, sexual relationships were strictly hierarchical, and the most common form of same-sex behavior was _____.

While the spectrum of sexual behavior in general in our society is quite broad, in the Christian conversation about same-sex relationships, we are specifically talking about relationships that are marked by three key features:

LIFELONG | **MONOGAMOUS** | **EQUAL-STATUS**

The Contendings of Horus and Seth

MARTTI NISSINEN

"Seth's purpose is to show his superiority by forcing Horus into the position of a defeated and raped enemy, thus making him unfit for the status of king."

Homoeroticism in the Biblical World

DAVID GREENBERG

"[This boast] equates interpersonal power with sexual role performances: he who can force a god to submit to him sexually has nothing to fear from him."

The Construction of Homosexuality

KEY POINT

In the ancient world, being sexually penetrated was inherently diminishing to a man's social status and power.

Prostitution and Pederasty in Greece

Male prostitution was actually legal, taxed, and socially acceptable in Athens as long as a critical distinction in status was respected. Pederastic relationships were sexual relationships between adult men and adolescent boys.

KEY POINT

In ancient Greece, sexual relationships were strictly hierarchical, and the most common form of same-sex behavior was pederasty.

Hierarchy in Rome

Having sexual intercourse with one's servant, whether male or female, is good; for slaves are possessions of the dreamer, so that they signify, quite naturally, that the dreamer will derive pleasure from his possessions.

ARTEMIDORUS DALDIANUS

KEY POINT

In ancient Rome, sex was also defined by hierarchy, and the most common forms of same-sex behavior were sex with enslaved boys and prostitution.

SENECA

"Women were born to be penetrated."

ARISTOTLE

"As between the sexes, the male is by nature superior and the female inferior, the male ruler and the female subject."

KEY POINT

Ancient sexual norms and practices were profoundly shaped by patriarchal and misogynistic attitudes.

KEY POINT

Female same-sex relations in the ancient world were condemned for subverting patriarchal gender roles.

Among the options officially unavailable to a Roman man was a lasting, reciprocal relationship with another freeborn man.

CRAIG WILLIAMS

Roman Homosexuality

KEY POINT

Lifelong, monogamous, equal-status same-sex relationships were not an option in the ancient world.

Did Same-Sex Marriage Exist in the Biblical World?

Throughout this module, we will be:

- Responding to arguments from non-affirming writers about whether same-sex marriages or marriage-like relationships existed in the biblical world

WORKS ENGAGED IN THIS MODULE

N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Part 1* · Preston Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved*

This could not be further removed from the types of relationships we are talking about today. None of the three relationships Wright cites—that of Pausanias and Agathon, Achilles and Patroclus, or Nero and Sporus—are meaningfully similar to modern-day same-sex marriages.

MATTHEW VINES

"Did Women Marry Other Women in the Roman World?"

I have to live with the uncertainty of my hypotheses, for I can hardly prove anything.

BERNADETTE BROOTEN

2020 lecture at Brown University

Just as with Sprinkle's earlier claims, if you just read that paragraph and didn't investigate any further, you would assume that female same-sex marriages were common and even legally recognized in the time of the Bible. But also as with his earlier claims, when we look into these, the description and the reality are not the same.

MATTHEW VINES

KEY POINT

There is no solid evidence that relationships equivalent to modern-day same-sex marriages existed in the ancient world.

Tradition and Sexual Orientation

Throughout this module, we will be:

- Recognizing how Christians have historically reconsidered interpretations of Scripture when confronted with new information
- Surveying historical evidence about understandings of same-sex attraction in ancient societies

PAUSE & REFLECT

What is a traditional Christian teaching that the church now believes to be wrong? What is a traditional Christian teaching that the church universally continues to affirm?

When Tradition Met the Telescope

PSALM 93:1

"The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved."

ECCLESIASTES 1:5

"The sun rises and the sun goes down, and hurries to the place where it rises."

JOSHUA 10:13

"The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day."

When Galileo looked through a telescope in 1609, what he saw showed that the traditional geocentric interpretation of the Bible couldn't be true. But his argument for reinterpreting Scripture wasn't initially accepted.

KEY POINT

New information can lead to new understandings of Scripture.

How Ancient Societies Labeled Sexuality

KEY POINT

Ancient societies' sexual labels were never based specifically on the gender of someone's partners or the gender someone was attracted to.

See K.J. Dover, Greek Homosexuality.

XENOPHON

Described how soldiers allowed prisoners of war to be released—"except in cases where a man had smuggled through a handsome boy or woman, for example, that he had set his heart upon."

PLATO

In his dialogue called Laws, a character praises a winning athlete for his remarkable self-control, saying, "Because of his determination to win... it is said, he never touched a woman, nor a boy either, in the whole period when he was at the peak of his training."

THEOPOMPUS

Wrote of the Etruscans that, after a gathering of friends, "the servants bring in sometimes courtesans, sometimes handsome boys, sometimes their own wives. When they have taken their pleasure of the women or the men, they make strapping young fellows lie with the latter."

LUCIAN OF SAMOSATA

In The Ship or the Wishes, a male character says that he wants a magic ring that will "make the pretty boys and women and whole peoples fall in love with me… Many women will hang themselves in despair, boys will be mad for me and think themselves blessed if I but glance at one of them, and pine away for grief if I ignore them."

AN EGYPTIAN MARRIAGE CONTRACT

Included this line: "it shall not be lawful for Philicus [the husband] to bring home another wife in addition to Apollonia or to have a concubine or boy-lover."

KEY POINT

In the ancient world, same-sex attraction wasn't seen as a permanent, exclusive characteristic of a small minority of people.

The noble lover of beauty engages in love wherever he sees excellence and splendid natural endowment without regard for any difference in physiological detail. The lover of human beauty [will] be fairly and equably disposed toward both sexes, instead of supposing that males and females are as different in the matter of love as they are in their clothes.

PLUTARCH

First-century AD Greek writer

KEY POINT

Ancient sexual labels were based on whether someone was seen as deviating from their appropriate gender role.

KEY POINT

In the ancient world, same-sex attraction was widely thought to be a common experience—not as an alternative to heterosexual attraction but in addition to it.

Did the Concept of Sexual Orientation Exist in the Biblical World?

Throughout this module, we will be:

- Responding to arguments from non-affirming writers about whether the concept of sexual orientation existed in the biblical world

PAUSE & REFLECT

Do you believe the concept of sexual orientation existed in the biblical world? If so, how do you think it was received? If not, when do you think the concept took form?

But for more conservative moralists, the grim reality of ancient same-sex practices like pederasty, prostitution, and sex with enslaved men and boys led them to view all same-sex behavior as stemming from excessive, out-of-control desires.

MATTHEW VINES

KEY POINT

Same-sex behavior was understood in the ancient world as a vice of excess that might tempt anyone, not as the expression of a different sexual orientation.

PLATO

"And the boldness of those who first engaged in this practice seems to have arisen out of an inability to control pleasure."

DIO CHRYSOSTOM

"The man whose appetite is insatiate in such things, when he finds there is no scarcity, no resistance, in this field, will have contempt for the easy conquest and scorn for a woman's love, as a thing too readily given...and will turn his assault against the male quarters, eager to befoul the youth who will very soon be magistrates and judges and generals, believing that in them he will find a kind of pleasure difficult and hard to procure."

...they departed from the natural passion and longing of the male for the female, which is implanted into nature by God, and desired what is altogether contrary to nature. Whence comes this perversity? Undoubtedly from Satan, who after people have once turned away from the fear of God, so powerfully suppresses nature that he blots out the natural desire and stirs up a desire that is contrary to nature.

MARTIN LUTHER

Across the theological spectrum, Christians today recognize that a small minority of people experience exclusive same-sex attraction, and even many non-affirming Christians acknowledge that sexual orientation is not a choice, that it is not caused by turning away from God, and that it's not something that people can willfully change.

KEY POINT

The concept of same-sex orientation is new, and there was no Christian tradition about it until the 20th century.

RICHARD HAYS

"Neither Paul nor anyone else in antiquity had a concept of 'sexual orientation.'" Hays explained, "The usual supposition of writers during the Hellenistic period was that homosexual behavior was the result of insatiable lust seeking novel and more challenging forms of self-gratification."

KIRK ORMAND

"None of the so-called orientations described [in this speech] are exactly like ours, and more importantly, none of them would be considered normal by Plato's Athenian audience. Each of them is a type of excess, and the story turns out not to be about how gay or straight men and women came to exist, but how certain kinds of odd and excessive preferences came to be. When describing those preferences, Aristophanes still assumes a pederastic model for the male-male couple. The category of homosexual male, in which two men of the same age would be attracted to each other, and either at any given time could be thought of as lover or beloved, simply seems not to be thinkable."

KEY POINT

No Christians before the 20th century acknowledged that the church's rejection of same-sex relationships required anyone to be single and celibate for life.

SECTION III

Gender Complementarity

08 The Gift of Celibacy

09 Anatomical and Biological Complementarity

10 Procreative Complementarity

11 Gender Hierarchy

The Gift of Celibacy

Throughout this module, we will be:

- Assessing the viability of mixed-orientation marriages, ex-gay ministries, and celibacy mandates
- Reviewing biblical teachings about and traditional Christian understandings of celibacy as a gift and considering their applicability to LGBTQ Christians today

FILL IN THE BLANKS

(Hint: the answers can be found in a key point throughout this module.)

According to the _____ and the _____, celibacy is a gift, not a mandate.

In the LGBTQ conversation in the church, people often assume that there are two options: we can either hold onto traditional Christian beliefs or we can change them. But in a critical respect, that is a false choice. Christians have historically believed both that celibacy is a good and honored calling and that it is a spiritual gift that not everyone has. As a result, the church has taught that forgoing marriage and committing to lifelong singleness and celibacy should be a free choice, not something that's forced on anyone.

MATTHEW VINES

KEY POINT

According to the Bible and the Christian tradition, celibacy is a gift, not a mandate.

Mixed-Orientation Marriages

If any marriage like this were going to be functional, it would have been ours. But it's not. Not because the marriage was bad. But because the foundation we were building it on was a mirage. The most integrated, sound home will fall to shambles if it's built on a sinkhole. Our marriage was built on a sinkhole.

JOSH AND LOLLY WEED

KEY POINT

Mixed-orientation marriages are not a viable option for most gay people.

Orientation, Desire, and "Ex-Gay" Ministries

MATTHEW 5:28

"But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

If the acts are sinful, all the inclinations to such acts are to be understood as manifestations of a sinful nature, and are to be resisted as such.

JIM BROWNSON

Bible, Gender, Sexuality

ROSARIA BUTTERFIELD

"Homosexuality is a sin to be mortified, not a behavior to be modified... homosexuality, even at the level of desire, is sinful and [needs] the grace of repentance."

DENNY BURK

"The Bible teaches us to war against both the root and the fruit of sin. In this case, same-sex attraction is the root, and same-sex sexual behavior is the fruit. The Spirit of God aims to transform both. It will not do simply to avoid same-sex behavior. The ordinary means of grace must be aimed at the heart as well."

A RECKONING

The largest "ex-gay" ministry in the world, Exodus International, shut down in 2013 and apologized for the "shame," "false hope," and "trauma" they had caused.

KEY POINT

Attempts to change gay people's sexual orientation are both ineffective and harmful.

When it comes to same-sex attraction, it's certainly possible to disagree with where Rosaria Butterfield and Denny Burk, for instance, draw the line in defining sin. But if you believe that all same-sex relationships are sinful, then it doesn't make sense to say that the desire for those relationships is completely morally neutral.

KEY POINT

Making a strict moral distinction between sexual orientation and sexual behavior isn't theologically consistent.

Adam, Eve, and the Blessing of Kinship

GENESIS 2:23

"This is the bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman', for she was taken out of man."

KEY POINT

The focus in Genesis 2 is on the similarities between Adam and Eve, not on their differences.

The primary movement in the text is not from unity to differentiation, but from the isolation of an individual to the deep blessing of shared kinship and community.

JIM BROWNSON

Celibacy as Gift in Scripture

MATTHEW 19:10–12

"If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry. Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. 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. The one who can accept this should accept it."

1 CORINTHIANS 7:5–7

"Since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. So that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. I say this as a concession, not as a command. I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that."

KEY POINT

For both Jesus and Paul, celibacy is a gift, and those who don't have it should marry.

Celibacy as Gift in the Christian Tradition

AMBROSE

"Virginity cannot be commanded...[it] is the gift of few only."

JOHN CALVIN

"...plainly shows that [celibacy] was not given to all."

THOMAS AQUINAS

"Not everyone has received from God the gift of continence."

POPE JOHN PAUL II

"The voluntary and supernatural nature clearly indicate the importance of the personal choice together with...the gift that man receives to make such a choice."

Theology of the Body, on Jesus's teaching in Matthew 19

KEY POINT

The reality of same-sex orientation requires the church to change either its traditional opposition to mandatory celibacy or its traditional opposition to same-sex relationships.

Anatomical and Biological Complementarity

Throughout this module, we will be:

- Responding to arguments from non-affirming writers about biological and anatomical interpretations of gender complementarity
- Studying the creation accounts in Genesis 1–2 and Jesus's teaching on marriage in Matthew 19, including his reference to "male and female"

PAUSE & REFLECT

As we're almost halfway through the course, have your views in regards to the LGBTQ community changed? How so?

"Gender complementarity" arguments generally take one of three forms:

01 Anatomical/biological complementarity

02 Procreative complementarity

03 Hierarchical complementarity

KEY POINT

Gender complementarity is a category that can contain various arguments, and each argument must be considered separately to assess its validity.

Key Questions to Ask

01 What exact aspect of "gender complementarity" is violated by same-sex relationships?

02 Where is this particular aspect of gender complementarity taught in Scripture as universally and exclusively normative?

In Genesis 2:18–24, a binary or sexually undifferentiated human (the adam) is split into two sexually differentiated beings. Marriage is treated by the Yahwist as a reunion of two complementary sexual others, a reconstitution of the sexual unity of the original Adam.

ROBERT GAGNON

GENESIS 2:23

"She shall be called 'woman' (ishah), for she was taken out of man (ish)."

The Hebrew words ish and ishah "are specifically gendered terms," which shows that "the first human"—the adam—was "already male (ish) before the woman [was] taken from his side."

JIM BROWNSON

JIM BROWNSON

"Humans are not free to enter marriage without accepting the binding commitments and responsibilities of the kinship bond decreed by God to accompany marriage."

KAREN KEEN

"Jesus reads Genesis 1:27 as God creating human beings as a pair, but his argument does not focus on sexual differentiation. Instead, he stresses the unity of two people."

JESUS (MATTHEW 19:5)

"The two will become one flesh."

GENESIS 2:24 (HEBREW BIBLE)

"They become one flesh."

KEY POINT

Jesus appealed to the language of "male and female" from Genesis to emphasize that marriage was originally a union of only two people.

N.T. WRIGHT

"If you believe in what it says in Genesis 1 about God making heaven and earth—and the binaries in Genesis are so important—that heaven and earth, and sea and dry land, and so on and so on, and you end up with male and female. It's all about God making complementary pairs which are meant to work together."

DR. JIM BROWNSON

"Complementarity is a Rorschach blot that allows people who talk about it to invest into it whatever their own assumptions are about the similarities and differences between male and female, and then to assume uncritically that those similarities and differences that they think are distinctive about male and female are what's intended by God."

KEY POINT

There are no verses in all of Scripture that connect sexual ethics to how body parts fit together.

Procreative Complementarity

Throughout this module, we will be:

- Reviewing the overall role of procreation in the biblical narrative
- Assessing whether Scripture teaches that procreative capacity is required for marriage or that sexual intimacy must be open to procreation in order to be moral

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QUICK QUIZ

"So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them."

This Scripture can be found in what book of the Bible?

- [ ] Proverbs
- [ ] Luke
- [ ] Mark
- [ ] Genesis

GENESIS 1:27–28

"So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"

KEY POINT

Biological procreation was central to how God was building up his chosen people in the Old Testament.

No surviving children in ancient Israel meant the loss of one's inheritance, name, and covenantal blessings. Conversely, marriage and offspring were fundamentally necessary for the reception of the covenantal blessings. … The true offspring of Abraham are no longer defined physically through their ethnic identity but spiritually through their union with Christ.

BARRY DANYLAK

Redeeming Singleness

KEY POINT

Spiritual rebirth through faith, not physical birth through procreation, is now what determines membership in God's kingdom.

KEY POINT

The Bible never teaches that the capacity for procreation is essential to marriage.

MATTHEW 12:48–50

"Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?… [W]hoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

1 CORINTHIANS 4:15

"In Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel."

KEY POINT

There are no texts in Scripture that say that sex must be open to procreation in order to be moral.

Gender Hierarchy

Throughout this module, we will be:

- Considering the role of patriarchy in Scripture and whether marriages must reflect gender hierarchy
- Assessing the relevance of biblical arguments against slavery for the topic of patriarchy

PAUSE & REFLECT

Do you think gender hierarchy played a role in marriages during biblical times? Do you believe gender hierarchy should influence marriages of today?

ROMANS 16:3

"Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus."

PHILIPPIANS 4:3

"Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women [Euodia and Syntyche] since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life."

KEY POINT

God worked within patriarchal structures, not as part of his universal design but as one of many aspects of our fallen world that will ultimately be overcome in Christ.

KEY POINT

In order to apply Scripture faithfully today, we have to follow the redemptive movement of the text.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:4

"The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife."

GALATIANS 3:28

"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

KEY POINT

The logic of a biblical argument against slavery requires us to oppose patriarchy as well.

JOHN PIPER

"There are laws in the Old Testament that are not expressions of God's will for all time, but expressions of how best to manage sin in a particular people at a particular time."

This Momentary Marriage

ESAU MCCAULLEY

"No one in Paul's day or in the centuries that follow ever seemed to envision the end of slavery as an institution...[but] the Old and New Testaments, even the letters of Paul, provide us with the theological resources to dismantle slavery. ... The church should have, much sooner than it did, been able to implement more fully the implications of the gospel."

Reading While Black

Reading Ephesians 5 Closely

Verse 23, which calls the husband the "head," adds that "the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church"—and verse 25 explains that this means that the husband should be completely self-giving, not that he should lord his authority—an authority, to be clear, that all husbands had both legally and culturally in the ancient world—over his wife as her superior.

KEY POINT

The Bible does not teach any particular interpretation of gender complementarity to be universally and exclusively normative.

If wives submit to their husbands as the Church submits to Christ (Ephesians 5:24), and if husbands love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her (Ephesians 5:25), and if both husbands and wives submit one to another (Ephesians 5:21)—who's really 'in charge' here? No one. Such a relationship could only be characterized by humility and respect, with both partners imitating Christ, who time and again voluntarily placed himself in a position of submission.

RACHEL HELD EVANS

SECTION IV

Old Testament Texts

12 The Sin of Sodom and Gomorrah

13 The Prohibitions of Leviticus

The Sin of Sodom and Gomorrah

Throughout this module, we will be:

- Studying the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19 and later biblical references to it
- Reviewing the history of Jewish and Christian interpretations of the Sodom story

PAUSE & REFLECT

Based on your knowledge of Sodom and Gomorrah, what do you believe the writer is trying to communicate to the reader about the city?

A Closer Look at Genesis 19

01 All the men from Sodom surround Lot's house in verses 4 and 5 and demand to "have sex" with his visitors—a threat of gang rape, not a request for consensual sex.

02 Lot tells the men no, and he instead offers his virgin daughters to the mob in verses 6 and 7.

03 The angels then blind the men, thwarting their attack plan, and God destroys the city with fire and brimstone.

KEY POINT

The only form of same-sex behavior described in Genesis 19 is a threatened gang rape.

References to Sodom and Gomorrah After Genesis 19

01 Isaiah 1:21–23 equates the sin of Sodom with oppressing marginalized groups, murder, and theft.

02 Jeremiah 23:14 links it with adultery, idolatry, and power abuses.

03 Amos 4:1–11 and Zephaniah 2:8–11 compare it to the oppression of the poor, as well as prideful and mocking behavior.

KEY POINT

No references to Sodom and Gomorrah in Scripture connect the sin of Sodom to same-sex behavior specifically.

EZEKIEL 16:49–50

"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. They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen."

KEY POINT

The Bible explicitly declares the sin of Sodom to be arrogance, pride, and failure to help the poor and needy—not same-sex relationships.

Sodom in the New Testament

GENESIS 6:4

"The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of humans and had children by them."

In both cases, the issue was not same-sex behavior, but crossing the boundaries of the human and the angelic.

MICHAEL CARDEN

Sodomy

MATTHEW 10:14–15

"If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet. Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town."

Depraved *[aselgeia]*

Carries the connotation of licentiousness, but it is a general term, not a specific reference to same-sex behavior.

2 PETER 2:7

"...distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless."

Other *[sarkos heteras]*

JUDE 6–7

"And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day, just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire."

How the Interpretation Shifted

EARLY CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE SIN OF SODOM FOCUSED ON INHOSPITALITY TO STRANGERS AND PRIDE.

ORIGEN

"Hear these words, you who close your houses to strangers; hear these words, you who avoid a guest as an enemy.... [Lot] escapes the conflagration for this reason alone: because he opened his house to strangers. Angels entered the hospitable house; fire entered the houses closed to strangers."

JEROME

"The Sodomitic sin is pride, bloatedness, the abundance of all things, leisure and delicacies."

LATER INTERPRETATIONS BEGAN TO FOCUS ON THE ISSUE OF LUST IN GENERAL, AND BY THE START OF THE FIFTH CENTURY, THE SIN OF SODOM HAD COME TO BE SEEN AS SAME-SEX BEHAVIOR.

JOHN CASSIAN

"Through fulness of bread they were inflamed with uncontrollable lust of the flesh."

PAULUS OROSIUS

"Out of luxury grew such disgraceful passions that men rushed upon men committing base acts."

AUGUSTINE

"Males burning toward males with hideous lust."

KEY POINT

The idea that Sodom was destroyed for same-sex behavior didn't become the consensus Christian view until the fifth century, and even then, same-sex behavior was understood as lustful excess, not as a sexual orientation.

KEY POINT

As we've seen in this module, the Bible never teaches that same-sex behavior was the sin—or even *a* sin—of Sodom.

The Prohibitions of Leviticus

Throughout this module, we will be:

- Considering the role of the Old Testament law for Christians
- Studying the prohibitions of male same-sex intercourse in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, the moral logic behind them, and their applicability to Christians today

PAUSE & REFLECT

What role do you believe the Old Testament law should play in the lives of Christians today?

The central question for Christians is not what Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 say, but how we should apply these texts today in light of their placement within the biblical canon as part of the Old Testament law.

MATTHEW VINES

LEVITICUS 18:22

"Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable."

LEVITICUS 20:13

"If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads."

KEY POINT

The Old Testament law no longer applies to Christians.

THE COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM · C. 49 AD

At the Council of Jerusalem around the year 49 AD, early Christian leaders made the critical decision that Gentile believers did not have to conform to the law's requirements.

Sexual Laws Christians Read Differently Today

01 Deuteronomy 24:1 allows a man to divorce his wife if he "finds something indecent" about her, but Jesus said in Matthew 19 and Mark 10 that this law was merely a concession to the Israelites' hardness of heart, not something that his followers should continue to practice.

02 Deuteronomy 22:28–29 requires a rapist to marry his victim, which Christians would never apply today.

03 Deuteronomy 21:15–17 simply assumes polygamy as a standard and uncontroversial practice, opening with the words, "If a man has two wives, and he loves one but not the other…"

04 Ephesians 5 also assumes that marriages should be monogamous, and 1 Timothy 3:2 specifies that men who are church leaders should be "the husband of but one wife."

05 Leviticus 18:19 prohibits sex during a woman's menstrual cycle, and Leviticus 20:18 says that anyone who engages in that practice must be "cut off from their people."

KEY POINT

Not all Old Testament laws related to sex apply to Christians.

Toevah: "Abomination" in the Bible

It is not an ethical term, but a term of boundary marking, with a basic sense of taboo.

PHYLLIS BIRD

GENESIS 43:32

"...the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians."

GENESIS 46:34

"...every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians."

EXODUS 8:26

"...the offerings we shall sacrifice to the Lord our God are an abomination to the Egyptians."

KEY POINT

The term "abomination" doesn't always correspond to Christian beliefs about what is right and wrong.

KEY POINT

The application of the death penalty in the Old Testament also doesn't always align with Christian views of what is sinful.

EXODUS 35:2

"Whoever does any work on it [the Sabbath] is to be put to death."

EZEKIEL 18:13

"He lends at interest and takes a profit. Will such a man live? He will not! Because he has done all these detestable things, he is to be put to death; his blood will be on his own head."

KEY POINT

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 specifically prohibit penetrative sex between men, not all same-sex sexual acts.

KEY POINT

Male same-sex intercourse was prohibited in Leviticus because it was regarded as uniquely degrading for a man to be treated like a woman in a deeply patriarchal society.

SECTION V

New Testament Texts

14 Romans 1:26–27: Lust and Desire

15 Romans 1:26–27: Honor, Shame, and Nature

16 1 Corinthians 6:9: Is “Homosexual” an Accurate Translation?

Romans 1:26–27: Lust and Desire

Throughout this module, we will be:

- Reviewing in detail Romans 1:26–27, focusing on Paul's discussion of lust and desire and the broader cultural context of this passage

PAUSE & REFLECT

Based on your knowledge of the writings of Paul, what do you believe he is speaking to when he writes about sexuality in Romans?

ROMANS 1:26–27

"Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error."

KEY POINT

The question is not *whether* Paul took a negative view of same-sex relations, but rather *why* he took this negative view.

Key Words Used by Paul

"exchanged" · "abandoned" · "inflamed with lust"

ROMANS 1:31

"...no fidelity...no love."

KEY POINT

Paul's description of same-sex behavior differs significantly from our contemporary conversation about sexual orientation and gay Christians.

Ancient Understandings of Same-Sex Behavior

Not the least significant part of the life of luxury and self-indulgence lies also in sexual excess; for example, those who lead such a life crave a variety of loves, not only lawful but unlawful ones as well, not women alone but also men; sometimes they pursue one love and sometimes another, and not being satisfied with those which are available, pursue those which are rare and inaccessible.

MUSONIUS RUFUS

If each man were established on the rules which Providence ordained for us, we would be satisfied with intercourse with women and life would be free from every reproach.

PSEUDO-LUCIAN

John Chrysostom on Romans 1

JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

"He deprives them of excuse, by saying of the women, that they changed the natural use. For no one, he means, can say that it was by being hindered of legitimate intercourse that they came to this pass, or that it was from having no means to fulfill their desire that they were driven into this monstrous insanity. For the changing implies possession."

JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

"Notice how deliberately Paul measures his words. For he does not say that they were enamored of one another but that they were consumed by lust for one another! You see that the whole of desire comes from an excess which cannot contain itself within its proper limits."

KEY POINT

Paul wasn't condemning being gay as opposed to being straight. He was condemning excess as opposed to moderation.

Self-seeking desire, unrestrained by obedience to God…becomes distorted and excessive desire, which runs out of control and is destructive.

DR. JIM BROWNSON

KEY POINT

Our conversation about sexual orientation and same-sex marriage today is fundamentally different from what Paul had in view in Romans 1.

Romans 1:26–27: Honor, Shame, and Nature

Throughout this module, we will be:

- Analyzing the terms "natural," "unnatural," and "shameful" in both 1 Corinthians 11:14 and Romans 1:26–27
- Considering the role of texts like Genesis 3 and Wisdom of Solomon in shaping the backdrop of Romans 1

PAUSE & REFLECT

When you hear the words honor, shame, and nature in the Bible, what comes to mind?

1 CORINTHIANS 11:13–16

"Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not the very nature [physis] of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace [atimia] to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God."

Nature *[physis]*

"The regular or established order of things."

Most Christians interpret Paul's use of the words "nature" and "shame" in 1 Corinthians 11:14 as references to cultural conventions, not divine design.

PLUTARCH

"Weakness and effeminacy on the part of those who, contrary to nature, allow themselves in Plato's words 'to be covered and mounted like cattle.'"

PSEUDO-LUCIAN

"Neither should the female be masculinized contrary to nature nor should the male be softened in an improper manner."

In Romans 1, Paul did not coin the terms natural and unnatural for opposite-sex and same-sex behavior. These terms dated back to Plato in the 4th century BC and were connected to patriarchal norms around gender.

MATTHEW VINES

ZENO

Called desire "an irrational and unnatural movement in the soul," an "impulse in excess."

PHILO

Said that sex during a woman's menstrual period was para physin —unnatural—and he called men who had sex with infertile women "enemies of nature."

KEY POINT

The ancient categories of "natural" and "unnatural" are not synonymous with the modern categories of "gay" and "straight."

THEOLOGICAL DICTIONARY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Greek phrases translated as "natural" and "unnatural" can be understood as synonyms for "normal" and "abnormal."

KEY POINT

Paul's use of the term *nature* in Romans 1 should be understood as culturally limited in a similar way as his use of the term *nature* in 1 Corinthians 11.

Romans 1 and the Wisdom of Solomon

ROMANS 1:21

"For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened."

WISDOM 13:1

"For all people who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature; and they were unable from the good things that are seen to know the one who exists, nor did they recognize the artisan while paying heed to his works."

ROMANS 1:20

"For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse."

WISDOM 13

"For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator.... Yet again, not even they are to be excused; for if they had the power to know so much that they could investigate the world, how did they fail to find sooner the Lord of these things?"

ROMANS 1:23

"...exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles."

WISDOM 13:10–14

"Miserable...are those who give the name 'gods' to the works of human hands, gold and silver fashioned with skill, and likenesses of animals.... [A woodcutter] forms it in the likeness of a human being, or makes it like some worthless animal..."

RICHARD HAYS ARGUED

"Romans is Paul's real story of the universal fall and it indicts fallen humanity as a whole."

DALE MARTIN'S RESPONSE

"Paul condemns first the Gentiles, and then turns his attention to the Jews. If Romans 1:18–32 is taken as a depiction of the fallenness of human nature in general, the structure and power of Paul's argument collapse. As it is, Paul entices his 'Jewish' hearer to nod in agreement with this traditional Jewish indictment of Gentile corruption."

KEY POINT

The focus in Romans 1 is not on the fall of Genesis 3 but on the origin of idolatry.

KEY POINT

Beliefs about honor and shame were equally culturally specific as beliefs about natural and unnatural conduct.

What is degrading and shameless about the behavior described in Romans 1:24–27 is that it is driven by excessive, self-seeking lust, that it knows no boundaries or restraints, and that it violates established gender roles of that time and culture, understood in terms of masculine rationality and honor.

DR. JIM BROWNSON

KEY POINT

Male passivity, female dominance, and a lack of self-control made same-sex behavior emblematic of excess and dishonor in the ancient world.

1 Corinthians 6:9: Is "Homosexual" an Accurate Translation?

Throughout this module, we will be:

- Studying in depth the Greek words *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi* in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10
- Reviewing the history of these terms' translation into English and when the word "homosexual" was first used in any Bible translation

PAUSE & REFLECT

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the words homosexuality and the Bible?

1 CORINTHIANS 6:9–11 (KJV)

"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate [malakoi], nor abusers of themselves with mankind [arsenokoitai], nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

Malakoi

Rendered "effeminate" in the KJV.

Arsenokoitai

Rendered "abusers of themselves with mankind" in the KJV.

1 TIMOTHY 1:8–11 (KJV)

"But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully. Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind [arsenokoitais], for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust."

MODERN TRANSLATIONS

The New American Standard Bible combines the two terms and translates them simply as "homosexuals." The English Standard Version says "men who practice homosexuality," and the New International Version says "men who have sex with men," a change from its 1984 version, which said "male prostitutes" and "homosexual offenders."

Malakoi in English Translation Over 500 Years

Throughout ancient literature, malakoi are men who live lives of decadence and luxury. They drink too much wine, have too much sex, love gourmet food, and hire professional cooks.

DALE MARTIN

1525	**WEAKLINGS**	*Tyndale New Testament*
1587	**WANTONS**	*Geneva Bible*
1852	**DEBAUCHERS**	*James Murdock translation*

1904	LICENTIOUS	*Ernest Malan translation*
1923	SENSUAL	*Edgar Goodspeed translation*

KEY POINT

The term *malakos* referred to general excess and self-indulgence, not same-sex behavior specifically.

What About *Arsenokoitai*?

Unlike the word *malakoi*, the word *arsenokoitai* was used very rarely in ancient literature. But also unlike *malakoi*, *arsenokoitai* has historically been understood as connected to same-sex behavior primarily because of its component parts. *Arsen* means "male," and *koites* means "bed," so it's commonly argued today that it should be understood as a reference to males who sleep with, or "bed," other males.

KEY POINT

While *arsenokoites* may have referred to male same-sex behavior, it likely would've been exploitative forms of it.

The only reliable way to define a word is to analyze its use in as many different contexts as possible.

DALE MARTIN

Do not steal seeds. Whoever takes for himself is accursed to generations of generations, to the scattering of life. Do not arsenokoitein, do not betray information, do not murder. Give one who has labored his wage. Do not oppress a poor man.

SIBYLLINE ORACLES

KEY POINT

Lifelong, monogamous, equal-status same-sex unions could not have been what Paul had in view because no ancient author had them in view.

KEY POINT

The word "homosexual" wasn't used in any translation of the Bible until 1946.

KEY POINT

The Bible doesn't address either same-sex orientation or lifelong, monogamous, equal-status same-sex relationships.

SECTION VI

The Path Forward

17 Marriage and Sexual Ethics

18 Gender and Sexual Minorities and the Arc of Scripture

19 Affirming Arguments to Avoid

20 Tips for Having the Conversation

Marriage and Sexual Ethics

Throughout this module, we will be:

- Considering biblical teachings about marriage and sexuality in order to determine if same-sex unions are consistent with the Bible's deepest principles about marriage
- Assessing the ongoing importance of values like monogamy and covenant for Christian sexual ethics

PAUSE & REFLECT

Growing up in church, what were you taught was the core meaning of marriage?

EPHESIANS 5:21–24

"Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything."

HOSEA 2:16–18

"'In that day,' declares the Lord, 'you will call me "my husband"; you will no longer call me "my master."' I will remove the names of the Baals from her lips; no longer will their names be invoked. In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky and the creatures that move along the ground. Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety."

KEY POINT

According to the Bible, marriage is a self-giving, covenantal union designed to reflect God's own love for us in Christ.

EPHESIANS 5:28–29

"In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church."

KEY POINT

The Bible gives us no concrete reasons why gender difference is essential to marriage or for marriages to reflect Christ's love for the church.

Sexual union is conceived in the Bible as profoundly metaphorical—it points beyond the physical act to the relational connections and intimacy that undergird and surround it. This is why the Bible requires that sexual expression find its meaning against this larger and more comprehensive backdrop emphasizing shared life and kinship.

DR. JIM BROWNSON

1 CORINTHIANS 6:12–20

"'I have the right to do anything,' you say—but not everything is beneficial. 'I have the right to do anything'—but I will not be mastered by anything. You say, 'Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.' The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! ... Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies."

KEY POINT

As Christians, we are called to say with our bodies what we are able and willing to say with the rest of our lives.

TIM KELLER

"Sex is God's appointed way for two people to reciprocally say to one another, 'I belong completely, permanently, and exclusively to you.'"

TIM KELLER

Referring to Genesis 2:24: "The word 'united,' in older translations, to cleave, means to make a binding covenant or contract. This covenant brings every aspect of two persons' lives together.... To call the marriage 'one flesh,' then, means that sex is understood as both a sign of that personal, legal union and a means to accomplish it."

MARK ACHTEMEIER

"[Polygamist unions] involve a division of the self that results in a portion of the self being withheld from each of the marital partners." By definition, in multiple-spouse relationships, he writes, "the complete gift of self to another person is undermined."

KEY POINT

A Christian vision for sexuality should be rooted in the core values of monogamy and covenant, regardless of a person's sexual orientation.

KEY POINT

Lifelong, monogamous same-sex unions should be blessed because they are in keeping with the self-giving, covenantal nature of God as revealed in Scripture.

Gender and Sexual Minorities and the Arc of Scripture

Throughout this module, we will be:

- Considering specific theological questions related to transgender and intersex people
- Discerning the overall arc of Scripture when it comes to gender and sexual minorities

PAUSE & REFLECT

What, if anything, were you taught in church about transgender and/or intersex people?

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."

DEUTERONOMY 22:9

"Do not plant two kinds of seed in your vineyard; if you do, not only the crops you plant but also the fruit of the vineyard will be defiled."

Strictly forbids a man to assume a woman's garb, in order that no trace, no merest shadow of the female, should attach to him to spoil his masculinity.

JOSEPHUS

KEY POINT

The prohibition of cross-dressing in Deuteronomy 22:5 does not apply to Christians—and it has nothing to do with gender identity as we understand it today.

The tides make it difficult to see where the division of land ends and sea begins, because the earth continues on under the sea and the sea rises up to cover the shore.... In the story of Genesis, even while God was creating apparent opposites, God also created liminal spaces in which the elements of creation overlap and merge.

JUSTIN TANIS

KEY POINT

God's creation includes many things that don't fit neatly into the binary categories described in Genesis.

MEGAN DEFRANZA

"Few would argue that these 'others' or 'hybrids' are a result of the Fall, or that they stray from God's creational intent. Genesis simply does not give us a comprehensive list of all the good things God has made. It is the beginning of the story, painting in broad brush strokes, with so much more to come."

N.T. WRIGHT

"Not as a return to Eden but as a going on to the new creation in which the old will be, not given back as it was, but transformed and fulfilled."

MATTHEW 22:30

"At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven."

REVELATION 7:9

A multitude from "every nation, tribe, people and language" will stand before the throne and before the Lamb.

KEY POINT

The Bible teaches that we are moving forward into the new creation, which has room for things that were not a part of the original creation as described in Genesis 1 and 2.

KEY POINT

The countercultural principles that the early Christians embraced when it came to sexuality are consistent with same-sex marriage today: mutuality, monogamy, and covenantal love.

KEY POINT

The arc of Scripture points toward greater inclusion for gender and sexual minorities.

ISAIAH 54

"'Sing, barren woman, you who never bore a child; burst into song, shout for joy, you who were never in labor; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband,' says the Lord."

ISAIAH 56

And to eunuchs, God said, "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant—to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever."

KEY POINT

LGBTQ people can be drawn into the Bible's vision of redeemed humanity that's revealed in Jesus.

Affirming Arguments to Avoid

Throughout this module, we will be:

- Considering common but misguided biblical arguments sometimes made in defense of same-sex relationships
- Assessing common affirming mantras and ideas that require revision and refinement from a Christian standpoint

PAUSE & REFLECT

Have you ever heard an affirming argument that you weren't sure you agreed with? If so, what was that argument and why did you find it unpersuasive?

David and Jonathan

Given the vast cultural differences between forms of same-sex behavior in the biblical world and those today, none of the examples that are sometimes cited are truly analogous to what we're talking about today.

Although the Bible does describe physical intimacy between David and Jonathan in the form of their farewell kisses, the language is most likely not romantic or sexual. Even David's stirring lament for Jonathan in 2 Samuel 1 cannot be properly understood without a recognition of the political dynamics at play. Saul and Jonathan's deaths paved the way for David to become king, so the biblical authors wanted to make clear that David was completely innocent of their deaths. The intensity of David's language in his lament served not only to express his deep personal grief, but also his fundamental loyalty to Saul and Israel.

Biblical scholars have long recognized that the language of love in the story of David and Jonathan has clear political dimensions and is similar to the covenant language used in ancient west Asian political treaties.

SAUL OLYAN

Surpassing the Love of Women

Ruth and Naomi

The other story of same-sex love in the Bible that is sometimes argued to be sexual is the relationship between Ruth and Naomi. Again, this relationship is certainly characterized by profound love and affection. The love portrayed between Ruth and Naomi is a beautiful example of covenant loyalty and faithfulness, but nothing in the text suggests that the relationship was sexual in nature. Ruth 2:23 uses the term *clung* to say that "Ruth stayed close to the women of Boaz to glean until the barley and wheat harvests were finished."

KEY POINT

There is not a strong basis to interpret either David and Jonathan or Ruth and Naomi as being equivalent to modern-day same-sex couples.

The Myth of Temple Prostitution

This myth, as Budin calls it, of temple prostitution—of people purportedly engaging in sexual acts for money as part of the worship of various gods—has been kept alive in part due to historic translations of several Hebrew terms in the Old Testament.

DEUTERONOMY 23:17

"None of the daughters of Israel shall be a qedeshah; none of the sons of Israel shall be a qadesh."

DEUTERONOMY 23:18

"You shall not bring the earnings of a prostitute or the money for a dog into the house of the Lord your God as payment for any vowed offering, because both of these are an abomination to the Lord your God."

KEY POINT

While prostitution generally was a common form of same-sex behavior in the ancient world, temple prostitution specifically was not.

Phrases to Be Careful of Using

"Live your truth."

"Love is love."

"Be on the right side of history."

KEY POINT

LGBTQ Christians should be fully included in the church, not for inclusion's sake but to participate in the church's mission.

Tips for Having the Conversation

Throughout this module, we will be:

- Closing guidance for how to most effectively engage across disagreement in conversations about LGBTQ inclusion in the church

PAUSE & REFLECT

How do you currently engage with individuals who may disagree with LGBTQ inclusion?

Seven principles for engaging across disagreement:

01 **First, share your story.**

02 **We encourage you to listen to others' concerns.**

03 **It's important to understand how people prioritize their values.**

04 **It's helpful to identify shared beliefs and values.**

05 **It's helpful to honor good motives.**

06 **As Christians, we are called to treat everyone with love and respect.**

07 **Finally, it's important to remember that change takes time.**

CLOSING REFLECTION

As you finish the course: how have your views changed, and what is one conversation you feel newly equipped to have?



“A global church that honors Scripture and fully affirms LGBTQ people.”

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