

Homosexuality and the Bible

Outdated Advice or
Words of Life?



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Jared said he was leaving the church, now that he was able to recognize and give voice to his same-sex attractions.

Tom thought he knew his friend Jared. They had known each other for several years as members of the same church. Both were actively involved in various church ministries. After their meeting, he realized he actually knew very little. Jared argued that God had made him gay, and he needed to be who he was. That meant he could not remain in their church because it was against accepting homosexuality and offered no place for someone like Jared, who wanted to be in a loving, committed relationship like heterosexuals in the church.

Tom attempted to counter Jared's position, but when the discussion centered on the Bible, things got even more confusing. Every Scripture passage Tom raised in an attempt to show Jared that engaging in a homosexual relationship was unbiblical, Jared countered with a different interpretation, insisting that the Scripture passages that touch upon homosexuality are no longer applicable to men and women who are same-sex attracted. It was a different time and a different place back then, he argued. Scripture focuses on love, and that was the central reason Jared was moving in this new direction. He was now free to seek love with a future partner, and be a Christian too.



The world is changing. The speed with which change now occurs is faster than ever. And nothing is changing more rapidly than the way we understand sexuality and relationships. Homosexuality and its increasing acceptance, not just by society at large but also by people within the

Christian church, is challenging the way Christians have historically and doctrinally understood sex and its role in defining relationships. And this is not a mere intellectual debate; it is a battle that is beginning to tear apart even conservative and evangelical churches, denominations, families, and friendships. It is a battle with wide-ranging societal and faith implications.

It is a confusing time. Many Christian people and denominations are reinterpreting the church's long-held stance on Scripture passages—that is, the orthodox position. Some denominations are accepting gay and lesbian relationships as being fully sanctioned by God. And society at large is increasingly pressuring, if not silencing, any voice that does not affirm gay relationships.

Churches that hold to the orthodox position seem increasingly silent on the subject—not wanting the world to interpret their position on the subject as being the church's main message. While it's true that the gospel is about more than sexual ethics, the silence of the evangelical church (particularly at the local level) is contributing to the confusion about the role of Scripture to direct Christians in understanding and living out their lives and their sexuality in accordance with God's design.

People on both sides bring to the table passionate arguments and perspectives, with each side claiming they are being faithful to the biblical text. For those who desire to follow Jesus, it matters whether one obeys his will in this area. While spirituality today is considered to be whatever enriches or affirms one's life, for the Christian, the test of real faith has always been, and continues to be, obeying what God says. What is the truth of this important matter?

Creating a Safe Space for Discussion

It has been a long-held position throughout Christianity that the Scriptures are foundational texts that tell us who we are and how we are to live before God. People on both sides of this issue still believe this, but they differ widely in how they interpret the Bible. Let me suggest four ways to approach this discussion.

1. Don't use the Bible merely to win an argument. This is not a debate about some abstract, theological principle; this is about people. Sexuality touches on the core of who we are and how we relate to others, and conversations surrounding it should be handled with great care. There is a lot of confusion today over what the Bible says about homosexuality and many reasons for that confusion. We need to keep in mind that there are men and women in our churches who live with same-sex attractions—and many of them struggle with this secretly. Many of them are confused when they read these passages about whether or not God truly loves them—and especially when they hear heterosexual Christians discussing the passages. These men and women want to know how to live before God in accordance to his revealed will. Sensitivity, care, and compassion ought to shape the tone of this discussion with everyone.
2. While it's not about winning an argument, it's also not about drawing a line between "them" and "us." When we discuss whether or not homosexuality is acceptable before God, those

who are heterosexual must include themselves in this discussion. When the Scripture discusses homosexuality, it does so in the context of sexuality overall. It doesn't say homosexuality is broken and heterosexuality isn't. Everyone experiences broken sexuality at some level.

In fact, there are far more verses in the Bible about broken heterosexuality. Everything is broken in this world after the Fall. Everything about our sexuality—our attractions, desires, and behaviors—are impacted by the Fall. The sexual boundary laws in the Bible are for everyone. So when you use Scripture to help someone examine this subject, do you shine the light of God's Word into your own heart? Do you acknowledge that everyone, including yourself, needs to obey what it says, and that everyone, on some level, struggles in the area of their own sexuality? No one has been untouched by sin and struggle in this area. In all these discussions, you should always examine your own areas of sexual brokenness and confess ways you, too, have lived outside God's boundaries. Ongoing repentance produces the humility needed to enter into these discussions.

3. Acknowledge that the Bible is, in many places, not the easiest book to understand. It was written thousands of years ago; most of us read a translation from the original languages; there are sixty-six different books in two major sections that make up the Christian Scriptures; and there are places, events, and customs from those times that sometimes strike us as being quite

foreign. Nevertheless, the church throughout its history has submitted to the Bible as being the essential text that guides our faith and life. Scripture attests to itself as such: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

No Christian can, with integrity, affirm any action or behavior without reference to Scripture. While the Bible is a series of texts embedded within a certain time and culture, Christians have always affirmed that it is a “trans-cultural” word, divinely inspired and able to speak to every generation regarding who God is and how his people are to live.

To examine whether or not something is permissible, an honest wrestling with Scripture has to be the starting point. Its message, its point of view, must be first and foremost. “For the word of God is living and active . . . discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:12–13).

Study the Bible, read books and commentaries, and don’t be afraid to read scholars who take differing views on the subject. You learn more by trying to understand both sides. Isn’t that how you love someone you are trying to understand—by listening and asking questions?