

# Same-Sex Sexuality

**Big Idea:** The Bible speaks against same-sex sexual relationships – and yet it offers grace and welcome to anyone who wants it.

Nobody can deny it: we're dealing with a very sensitive topic today. This is a sermon that can go very wrong if we're not careful, not only because it's a heated topic, but because no matter what side you're on, it's very difficult to understand people who think differently. It's also a sensitive topic because it's deeply personal to many of us, and because it hasn't always been carefully handled in the past.

Although it's a topic, it's also very much about people. It's about people like:

- Dan, a non-Christian who hasn't been to church in years, who is a gay man married to another man, and is an outspoken critic of Christianity.
- Or Tom, a pastor for over 30 years who is married to a woman and has several kids, but is exclusively attracted to other men although nobody knows about it. He's faithful to his wife, but he believes he would be run out of church if anyone knew about his attraction.
- It's about Leslie, who from the age of 4 felt like a boy, and who also loved Jesus, and grew to wrestle with what this meant for her and her faith.
- It's about Maddie, a lesbian who isn't into guys at all, and has experienced heartbreaking trauma at the hands of her father, and who has said, "No man who will ever hurt me again."
- Or Matt, a sold-out believer of Jesus, 27 years old, and is exclusively attracted to other men, and who has studied the Bible and come to the conclu-

sion that he must be committed to a life of celibacy, but hasn't had the easiest experience in church because of dehumanizing assumptions within the church.

- Or Eric, who from an early age realized he was attracted to other men. He's been bullied and shamed. When he came out to his parents, he was kicked out by his parents. When he was in his late teens, he ended up taking his life.

It's about stories like this, stories of real people, people who matter. We need these stories, stories of a diverse array of people, because we're not just talking about an issue. We're talking about real people.

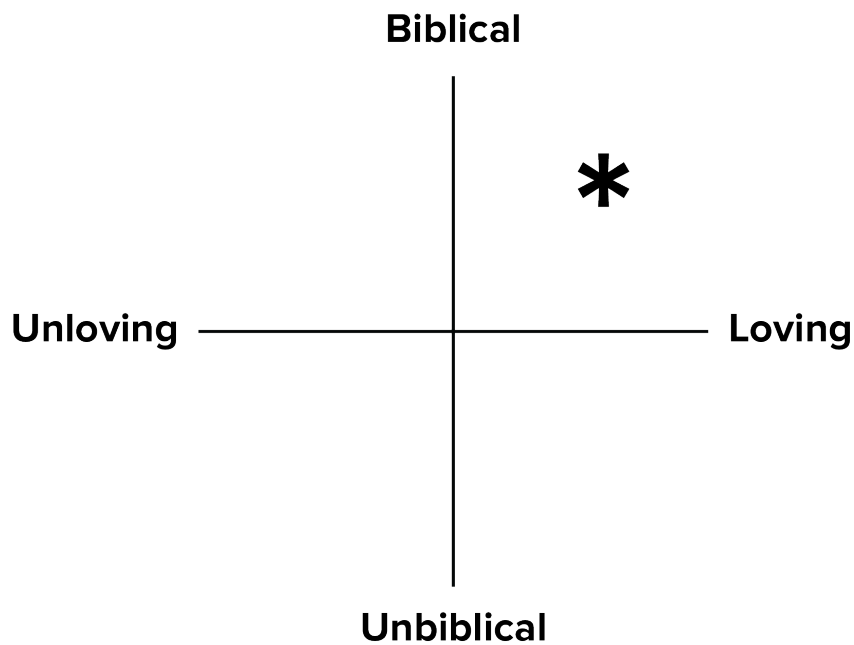
To make it even harder, the church and society have not always handled this topic well. [Lead Them Home](#), a training and consulting resource for church and ministry leaders on LGBT+ inclusion and care, has produced a document ([PDF](#)) outlining a brief history of LGBT+ victimization. It's impossible for me to read it without being devastated for how the LGBT+ community has been treated. It's heartbreaking. My heart broke as I read this statement from a man named Brad:

*As a Christian theologian and former pastor, one of my greatest frustrations is that, at least when it comes to sexuality, it is often safer for a young person to be honest at the public school than it is at church, a place that is meant to be driven by love and grace, a community where people walk with each other. No matter what. (from [Room at the Table](#))*

I also want to acknowledge the obvious: that I address this issue as a white, middle-aged, heterosexual, cisgender male. In many ways I am not the ideal person to address this topic. But as a pastor I have a biblical responsibility to share God's Word on

issues, even though there may be some that I haven't personally struggled with. In order to carry out my responsibility I've read widely and studied both sides of the debate. I've tried to listen carefully to those who identify as LGBT+. I want to approach this as carefully, honestly, and lovingly as we can.

Let me describe how we're going to approach this. Today I want to give you an overview, as best I can, about what the Bible says. Next week I want to deal as honestly as I can with the interpretations that differ from my position. My aim in all of this is to be both biblical and loving.



If we lose either of those, we've lost. If we're not biblical, then we lose. I love the Scriptures and believe that the Bible is authoritative, and I'm committed to go where the text leads, even if that changes my position. If we're not loving, we lose. So my aim is to look as well as I can at what the Bible says in a way that honors every individual as

valuable and made in the image of God. This needs to be a conversation with both grace and truth.

Let me speak honestly to you. I hope you know that I'm committed to be biblical. But I want you to know that I am equally committed to being loving. If you are LGBT+, I want to speak to you from my heart. I am deeply honored that you are here. We will receive you! You matter to God, and you have been made in the image of God. We welcome you.

I want to do two things, today. They may be hard, but let's try. First: I want to look at what the Bible says. Second: I want to draw some applications for us and what this means for us as we move forward.

## **What the Bible Says**

When we consider what the Bible says, there are three important points we need to consider.

**Marriage is defined throughout Scripture, and confirmed by Jesus, to be the union between two sexually different persons.**

In Genesis 2:18, we read, "Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.'" Though only a short verse, it gives us an important insight into our sexual differences.

- The word "helper" is not a putdown to women. It's a word that's almost always used for military help, and is most often applied to God's help of Israel. It does not imply inferiority or weakness.
- The word "fit" or "suitable" is only used in this chapter in the Old Testament. It is the Hebrew word *kenegdo*. It's hard to translate, but it means both "like" and "opposite." You could translate it something like, "I will make a helper who is like him and yet different from him."

A few verses later, Genesis uses this relationship of sameness and yet difference as the foundation for marriage. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).

What's fascinating is that when Jesus was asked about marriage, he quoted this verse. And instead of just talking about marriage, he started with sexual difference. To be clear, Jesus isn't answering a question about same-sex marriage. He's answering a question about divorce. We need to honor the context. But he doesn't just answer the question by talking about the permanence of marriage. He answers the question by beginning with sexual difference.

*And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away." And Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two*

*but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” (Mark 10:2-9)*

To quote [Preston Sprinkle](#):

*If Jesus didn’t think that sexual difference is essential for marriage, then his quotation of Genesis 1: 27, which talks about sexual difference, is unnecessary and superfluous. But Jesus does quote it, so it would seem that male-female pairing is part of what marriage is according to Jesus.*

He concludes:

*Three things seem to be necessary for marriage according to Genesis 2: (1) both partners need to be human, (2) both partners come from different families (2: 24), and—if I’m right about kenegdo—( 3) both partners display sexual difference.*

This doesn’t settle the issue for us, but it’s still significant. According to Scripture and the teaching of Jesus, marriage is defined as the lifelong union between two sexually different persons, not the lifelong union between two humans who fall in love. Marriage is defined throughout Scripture, and confirmed by Jesus, to be the union between two sexually different persons.

## **Whenever the Bible mentions same-sex sexual relationships and practice, it always prohibits them.**

Notice that I did not say same-sex relationships. The Bible is not against same-sex relationships. I said same-sex *sexual* relationships.

There are five passages in the Bible that talk about homosexual practices: Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; and 1 Timothy 1:9-10. We need to be careful not to misuse them. Someone has called these the “clobber passages,” since Christians throughout history have ripped them out of their life-giving context and used them to club gay people”(Sprinkle).

But it’s still important to consider them as carefully as we can. And here’s the reality about them: whenever the Bib them. I want to acknowledge that there is some debate about whether or not these verses apply to modern-day consensual relationships, and we will look at this more next week. But whenever Scripture mentions same-sex sexual practices, it’s always in the negative.

Take Leviticus. The book of Leviticus is often dismissed today because people often debate how the Hebrew law applies to us today. But Leviticus 18 to 20 is part of one literary unit. This passage covers incest, adultery, child sacrifice, bestiality, slander, and making your child a prostitute. This is not a section of Leviticus that is full of arcane laws that seem irrelevant to today. Most people would agree that the sexual laws outlined in this section are still binding on us today.

Because of time, let’s look at just one other of these passages: Romans 1:26-27:

*For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.*

This is probably the most important passage in the debate. It’s also the only passage in the Bible where female homoeroticism is mentioned. The overall context is impor-

tant. The main point of this passage is not to condemn gay people but to show that all of us – religious or not – are lost without Jesus.

- Romans 1 makes the argument that non-religious people deserve God's judgment.
- Romans 2 makes the same argument about religious people

Paul is not singling out gay people. He's actually saying that all of us, no matter who we are, need Jesus, because all of us are equally guilty before God. Nobody can walk away from Romans 1 to 3 patting themselves on the back.

Paul indicates in this passage that consensual, homoerotic behavior, whether male or female, is a departure from God's intention in creation. Paul speaks against same-sex sexual practice *and* implicates us all – religious and non-religious – at the same time.

Regardless of whether these verses apply to modern day, consensual relations, the point still stands: Whenever Scripture mentions same-sex sexual relations, it always prohibits them. There is no diversity in Scripture about whether same-sex sexual behavior is aligned with God's design.

Compare this with other debatable ethical issues in Scripture. On issues like divorce, women teaching in a local church context, how to treat our enemies, age of people to be baptized, election (whether God chose us or we chose God), there is some diversity and tension in the passages. But when it comes to same-sex sexual practice in the Bible, it always prohibits them.



## **The historic, multi-denominational, global church has agreed with this for the last 2,000 years.**

This one will be quick. One person writes about [mere sexuality](#):

*...what most Christians at most times in most places have believed about human sexuality—in other words, the historic consensus.*

*Does such a consensus exist? Yes, there is a historic consensus about human sexuality that has been part of the church in each of its major expressions—Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant. It has been around for centuries, from roughly the fourth to the middle of the twentieth century. And it has only seriously been called into question within the last forty to fifty years with the liberalization of Christian sexual ethics in the foment of the 1960s sexual revolution...*

*Christians' views on sexuality go back nearly two millennia and have been embodied in the lives of ordinary believers the world over. This is itself a strong, albeit not a decisive, argument in support of mere sexuality—and, incidentally, a strong word of caution to those who depart from it. The problem is that this living tradition is now on life support as it drifts inexorably toward death, at least in the minds of many Christians. The church has forgotten what it has always believed.*

To be sure, the church sometimes gets it wrong. We should always submit to Scripture over tradition. At the same time, it's significant that the global, historic, multi-denominational church, has agreed for the last 2,000 years that same-sex sexual relationships are sin. This doesn't prove that they're sin. Only the Bible can do that. But this "histori-

cal” argument does show that we are not just reading into the text what we want to see. It’s been the historic, multi-denominational, and global position.

As best as I can tell, that’s what the Bible says. Marriage is by definition the union between two sexually different persons, and whenever the Bible mentions same-sex sexual relationships, it always prohibits them. The historic, multi-denominational, global church has agreed with these points for the last 2,000 years.

## **What This Means for Us**

So what does this mean for us? Two quick points and then we’re done.

### **We are not just dealing with an issue, we’re dealing with people – people made in the image of God.**

If you are gay, I want to tell you that I love you and I am genuinely glad you are here. If you've been hurt by the church, been treated with contempt, I'm sorry that that's happened. I hope that if you're gay, that just like everybody else who is wrestling with their sexuality, that you will find this a place where you can bring what you're wrestling with into the light with everybody else. We welcome sinners, skeptics, and saints here. You will not be shunned. You can disagree with me and you’re welcome here. You can struggle and you’re welcome here.

The truth is that we all need God’s grace. All of us. And God’s grace is more plentiful than anything we bring to the table. If I want you to hear anything today, it’s this: Jesus always welcomes sexual sinners – actually, all kinds of sinners. He will not turn you away. You matter to him. He will not turn you away.

Final point – actually a question.

## **What kind of church can extend a welcome to LGBT+ people?**

You would think that it would have to be an affirming church, that a church that holds to the historic, non-affirming position could not be welcoming. It turns out that there are a variety of reasons LGBT people have left the church. Of those who left the church, only 3% said they left because of the church's *position*. Here are the reasons they left:

- did not feel safe (18%)
- relational disconnect with leaders (14%)
- incongruence between teaching and practice (13%)
- unwillingness to dialogue (12%)
- kicked out (9%)

76% of LGBT people who left said they would consider coming back to the church if the church made some changes. Only 8% said the church would have to change its theology to return. So if the church doesn't have to change its position, what does it need to change? Here's what they said:

- feel loved (12%)
- given time (9%)
- no attempts to change their sexual orientation (6%)
- authenticity (5%)
- support of family and friends (4%)

(Study cited in [Us Versus Us: The Untold Story of Religion and the LGBT People](#))

As one author notes:

*With the exception of the 8 percent of participants wanting to see a change in their faith community's theology, most are not asking for dramatic ecclesial overhauls. Based on these responses, the LGBT community is asking that faith communities be what they say they are:*

- *loving (# 1)*
- *patient (# 2)*
- *realistic (# 4)*
- *authentic (# 5)*
- *supportive (# 6) (from Us Versus Us)*

In the words of Tasha, a 21-year-old lesbian raised in the church:

*All I wanted was to feel loved by those in the church I grew up with ... Love is giving me time to be with you and to figure this out together. If you let any church people read this, tell them that **I don't have to be right to feel loved.** I have to be dignified in our disagreement.*

Friends, you are welcome here. Regardless of who you are, regardless of where you stand: "This church opens wide her doors with a welcome from Jesus, the mighty

friend of sinners, the ally of his enemies, the defender of the indefensible, the justifier of those who have no excuses left.”

Father, we may not always agree. We may struggle sometimes. But we pray that we would be a church that follows your Word and that loves people. Make us a church that loves people. Make us a church where we have room to struggle, no matter what that struggle may be. Make us a church of grace. In Jesus’ name. Amen.