

# **Homosexuality: Not A Sin, Not A Sickness**

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## **“Whosoever”**

The most beautiful word in the Gospel of Jesus Christ is “*whosoever*.” All of God's promises are intended for every human being. This includes gay men and lesbians. How tragic it is that the Christian Church has excluded and persecuted people who are homosexual!

We are all created with powerful needs for personal relationships. Our quality of life depends upon the love we share with others, whether family or friends, partners or peers. Yet, lesbians and gay men facing hostile attitudes in society often are denied access to healthy relationships. Jesus Christ calls us to find ultimate meaning in life through a personal relationship with our Creator. This important spiritual union can bring healing and strength to all of our human relationships.

## **Not a Sin, Not a Sickness**

For many centuries, the Christian Church's attitude toward human sexuality was very negative: sex was for procreation, not for pleasure; women and slaves were considered property to be owned by males; and many expressions of heterosexuality, like homosexuality, were considered sinful. Such tradition often continues to influence churches today. Many churches teach that women should be subordinate to men, continue to permit forms of discrimination against peoples of color, and condemn homosexuals. They say that all homosexual acts are sinful, often referring to their interpretation of scripture.

Other churches today are influenced by a century of psychoanalytic thought promoted through a powerful minority in the field of medicine. They see homosexuality as some kind of sickness. Although this view has now been soundly discredited by the medical profession, some churches and clergy continue to be influenced by the idea. They say that homosexuals are “imperfect” and in need of “healing.”

The Good News is that, since 1968, when Metropolitan Community Church was founded, the emergence of a strong lesbian and gay community, and the conclusions of new scientific studies on homosexuality have forced the Christian Church to reexamine these issues. A growing number of biblical and theological scholars now recognize that Scripture does not condemn loving, responsible homosexual relationships. Therefore, gay men and lesbians should be accepted - just as they are-in Christian churches, and homosexual relationships should be *celebrated and affirmed!*

## **Changing Interpretations...the Impact of Study**

Biblical Interpretation and Theology also change from time to time. Approximately 150 years ago in the United States, some Christian teaching held that there was a two-fold moral order: black and white. Whites were thought to be superior to blacks, therefore blacks were to be subservient and slavery was an institution ordained by God. Clergy

who supported such an abhorrent idea claimed the authority of the Bible. The conflict over slavery led to divisions which gave birth to some major Christian denominations. These same denominations, of course, do not support slavery today. Did the Bible change? No, their *interpretation* of the Bible did!

What influences lead us to new ways of understanding Scripture? New scientific information, social changes, and personal experience are perhaps the greatest forces for change in the way we interpret the Bible and develop our beliefs. Scientific awareness of homosexual orientation did not exist until the nineteenth century.

Most Christian churches, including Metropolitan Community Church, believe the Bible was inspired by God and provides a key source of authority for the Christian faith. Therefore, what the Bible teaches on any subject, including sexuality, is of great significance. The problem, however, is that sometimes the Bible says very little about some subjects; and popular attitudes about those matters are determined much more by other sources, which are then read into the biblical statements. This has been particularly true of homosexuality. But fortunately, recent scholarship refutes many previous assumptions and conclusions.

Also See:

## **What The Bible Does and Does Not Say Homosexuality; Not A Sin, Not A Sickness – Part 2**

### **Insights from Other Bible Scholars**

"The homosexuality the New Testament opposes is the pederasty of the Greco-Roman culture; the attitudes toward pederasty and, in part, the language used to oppose it are informed by the Jewish background."

*Robin Scroggs, Professor of Biblical Theology,  
Union Theological Seminary, New York City.*

"One cannot be absolutely certain that the two key words in I Corinthians 6:9 are meant as references to male homosexual behavior."

*Victor Paul Furnish, Professor of New Testament,  
Perkins School of Theology, Dallas.*

"The strongest New Testament argument against homosexual activity is intrinsically immoral has been derived traditionally from Romans 1:26, where this activity is indicated as *para physin*. The normal English translation for this has been 'against nature.' Two interpretations can be justified concerning what Paul meant by the phrase. It could refer to the individual pagan, who goes beyond his own sexual appetites in order to indulge in new sexual pleasure. The second possibility is that *physis* refers to the 'nature' of the chosen people who were forbidden by Levitical law to have homosexual relations."

*John J. McNeill, Adjunct Professor of Psychology,  
Union Theological Seminary, New York City.*

"A close reading of Paul's discussion of homosexual acts in Romans 1 does not support the common modern interpretation of the passage. Paul did not deny the existence of a

distinction between clean and unclean and even assumed that Jewish Christians would continue to observe the purity code. He refrained. However, from identifying physical impurity with sin or demanding that Gentiles adhere to that code."

*William Countryman, Professor of New Testament,  
Church Divinity School of Pacific, Berkeley.*

"The Hebrew word 'toevah,' here translated 'abomination,' does not usually signify something intrinsically evil, like rape or theft (discussed elsewhere in Leviticus), but something which is ritually unclean for Jews, like eating pork or engaging in intercourse during menstruation, both of which are prohibited in these same chapters."

*John Boswell, Professor of History,  
Yale University, New Haven.*

### **Helpful Reading:**

The following books are highly recommended for those wishing to carefully study issues of homosexuality as related to the Christian Church:

Boswell, John. *Christianity, social tolerance, and homosexuality: gay people in Western Europe from the beginning of the Christian era to the fourteenth century.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Countryman, Louis William. *Gifted by Otherness: Gay and Lesbian Christians in the Church.* Morehouse Publishing, 2001.

Furnish, Victor Paul (1979). *The Moral Teaching of Paul.* Nashville: Abingdon Press

Goss, Robert E and Mona West, ed *Take Back the Word.* Pilgrim Press, 2000

Hanks, Tom. *God So Loved the Third World.* Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2001.

Helminiak, Daniel A. *What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality.* San Francisco: Alamo Square Press, 2000.

Heyward, Carter. *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic As Power and the Love of God.* Harpercollins 1989.

Horner, Tom (1978). *Jonathan Loved David: Homosexuality in Biblical Times.* Philadelphia: Westminster Press.

McNeill, John J. (1988). *The Church and the Homosexual.* Boston: Beacon Press. Orig. pub. 1976

Scroggs, Robin (1983). *The New Testament and Homosexuality.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press.