

The Bible and an LGBTQ+-Affirming Perspective

Michael Pahl, March 20, 2023

The Bible doesn't speak directly to questions we have today around sexual orientation or same-sex relationships.

The biblical passages that refer to same-sex acts are speaking about same-sex acts in harmful contexts, including lust, infidelity, idolatry, exploitation, and violence. They are not talking about same-sex acts in the context of a loving, committed, covenanted relationship (marriage).

- Genesis 19:1-11 (see also Judges 19): violent sexual act (rape) in the context of xenophobia
- Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13: most likely pedophilia, perhaps incestuous rape
- Romans 1:26-27: in the context of idolatry and excessive desire (lust)
- 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:9-11: most likely prostitution/pedophilia

One of these biblical passages (Romans 1) speaks about the desires associated with same-sex acts. However, this is not speaking about sexual orientation, which is much broader than simply sexual desire. Also, the problem in the passage is not sexual desire in itself but *excessive* desire (lust).

These observations suggest that sexual sin is not about whether sex acts are same-sex or other-sex, but about sexual thoughts or behaviours which cause harm or contribute to harm against another person.

When the Bible speaks about gender, sexuality, and marriage, it does so in the context of strongly patriarchal societies. However, Jesus' life and teaching overturns patriarchal norms.

Having been written in patriarchal contexts, the Bible naturally assumes norms like heterosexual marriage, male authority in marriage, household, and society, and having children as a way of demonstrating one's virility and perpetuating male lineage.

Jesus, however, following egalitarian threads in the Scriptures, overturned these norms in various ways. He himself did not marry or have children. He encouraged women as disciples (Luke 10:38-42). He viewed relationships in God's kingdom as more binding and blessed than family relationships (Matthew 12:46-50; 19:27-30; Luke 11:27-28). And, he anticipated a time when conventionally masculine and feminine roles in marriage and society will be obsolete (Luke 20:27-36). Even when he appears to uphold traditional marriage and gender roles, he does so only to safeguard against the harmful treatment of women (Matthew 19:3-9).

Most significantly, the Bible reveals a movement toward the full inclusion of those who have previously been excluded or marginalized—including sexual minorities.

The most noteworthy example of this is the full inclusion of the Gentiles into the people of God—as Gentiles, not as converted Jews (Acts 10-15; Ephesians 2:11-22). This was not anticipated in the Scriptures; in fact, it was so unexpected that Paul called it a "mystery," something previously hidden but now revealed by the Spirit (Ephesians 3:2-6).

This movement can also be seen related to women. Women are excluded from authority and power in patriarchal societies, and this can be seen in many biblical texts. But in Jesus women are brought into full participation with men among God's people. See above on Jesus' life and teachings overturning patriarchal norms and structures. Paul also speaks of this when he says, "There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

This movement is even directly seen in the Bible related to those who do not fit the conventional binary of "man/woman" or "male/female." Eunuchs (those born with ambiguous or undeveloped genitalia, or castrated males) were often considered to be neither male nor female in ancient societies, neither fully men nor fully women; they were something "in between" or "other." Originally eunuchs were not permitted to worship with God's people in God's temple (Deuteronomy 23:1), but Isaiah foretold a time when eunuchs would be fully included among God's people (Isaiah 56:3-5), and Acts tells the story of this happening with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-39). Jesus affirmed eunuchs of all varieties (Matthew 19:11-12).

Seeking the full inclusion of LGBTQ+ people in the same ways we as Christians have sought the full inclusion of Gentiles, women, slaves, and other marginalized peoples or minorities is one way we can fulfill Jesus' call to love one another and our neighbours as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40; John 13:34-35).