

PASSING THE BATON NUMBER 5
Homosexuality - grace before judgement

26th May 2007
“Did God really say...?”

Introduction:

“Has God really said, “you shall not lie with a man as you do with a woman?” Leviticus 18:22.

My purpose in teaching on this subject is not to engage in a debate or make judgements on the subject of homosexuality, but to study the whole issue from a Biblical viewpoint.

It is a complex and divisive issue, but one which must be addressed, in order that the End Time church may know the biblical position, and the stance which they, therefore, must take.

I am aware that in some churches, this would not be a topic for teaching or discussion and may even be avoided. It is important, however, that we do not shrink from addressing issues such as this because they are difficult. Capital punishment and the doctrine of war are two others which can raise the temperature of Christians, so we do need to examine what stance the *scriptures* take on such things. I will endeavour to be as sensitive as I can in my exposition and understanding of the scriptures as I see them.

As I have already said, the purpose of this study is not to judge evil but bear witness to the truth. To do that, we must look to the source of all truth, namely God Himself. It is only by revelation that we can hope to have objectivity and truth when it comes to issues like this.

I am going to attempt to -

1. look at certain universal laws which were in place from the beginning
2. look at homosexuality as it existed in the ancient pagan world and the commandments as given to Moses.
3. examine the cultures of Greece and Rome when Jesus and Paul lived and
4. contrast these cultures with the moral values of the Bible - God’s word revealed to us.

We will need to view some of this from a Jewish standpoint - as it was to them, the commandments were given, which have been passed down to us through the scriptures. Having said this, *prior* to the Jewish nation being elected by God as His chosen representatives. He had put various commandments in place within the heart of man - the conscience.

I will be examining specific texts in both the Old and New Testaments in order to:

- look at principles that can guide our understanding of this issue
- see how grace affects the issue of homosexuality, and what our response should be.

To set the stage, we need to make three statements:

1. We must acknowledge that when we come to this issue ***we are all human beings***. We all bear the image of God who created us, and that image has been distorted and twisted by our fallen, sinful, nature. Strictly speaking it is not accurate or Biblical to speak of people as ‘homosexuals’ or ‘heterosexuals’, or as ‘gays’, because we are talking about *people*, not freaks, some of whom have homosexual tendencies or orientations, just as others have heterosexual ones. We are talking about people created in the image of God, and no matter how strongly we might disapprove of, or be repulsed by, their conduct, we must never dehumanize them. We must always distinguish between the person and the act and ensure we honour all men.
2. ***We are all sexual beings***, and the Bible is very clear that sexuality is designed and blessed by God and proclaimed, good. The explicit teaching of scripture is that God made us male and female, our sexuality is an integral and inseparable part of who we are. Sexual activity according to the scriptures is sanctified when it is expressed within the context of the marriage covenant. From a biological and Biblical perspective, sexuality is important. The Bible alone among religious writings speaks of the resurrection of the body - ***Jesus came to save people***.
3. ***We are all sinners***; sin, from which none of us are exempt, has tainted and twisted our very nature, it has touched every dimension of our lives, including our sexuality. We all, because of the fallen nature, stand in need of redemption of body, soul and spirit. Sexual sins are not the only ones spoken of in the Bible. In fact, if you could compare them on a scale, which you can only do metaphorically because all sin is repugnant to God, sexual sins are not the “worst” sins. The Bible makes it abundantly clear that hypocrisy, pride, and rebellion are an abominable stench to God.

So, as always, we need to go back to the beginning, to the book of Genesis, to see what God said ‘In the beginning...’

1. God declared the sanctity of marriage and universal laws

Genesis 1:28 Adam and Eve are told to “Be fruitful and multiply, replenish, subdue and have dominion over the earth”.

Genesis 2:24 “Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and they shall be one flesh.” So, ***God is pro-marriage*** – Marriage and family is God’s design and it is good.

And from Genesis 2:24 we can draw certain conclusions on how God expected human nature to behave itself. We could term these 'God's universal laws' – that is, they apply to all mankind, not just to the Jewish nation. It would be much later that God would give them the commandments by which He expected them to live. So, from **Genesis 2:24** we can conclude that:

- Incest is forbidden
- Adultery is forbidden
- Homosexuality is forbidden
- Bestiality is forbidden.

Breaking this down - the ancient rabbis would say that from this statement in Genesis, the man "shall leave his father and mother", they could reasonably conclude that: sexual activity with a mother or even with a father's wife, a stepmother, is prohibited, so incest is forbidden.

In "cleaving to his wife", this is teaching that sexual activity is to be with your own wife, and not somebody else's, so adultery is prohibited.

"To his wife", means that sexual relations are to be with the opposite sex and not with another male, homosexuality is therefore prohibited,

"one flesh", means that sexual relations with animals are excluded because animals are not of the same flesh as humans, therefore bestiality is prohibited.

One of the most beautiful themes developed throughout the Bible is the bride-bridegroom relationship, especially as it is applied to the relationship between God and His people. Indeed we can see that as Adam's bride came from his riven side, so the Bride of Christ, comes from Jesus' riven side. We would not know any of the beauty or depth of this kind of intimate relationship, if God had not created us to experience it. Marriage is God's best for mankind, and it is good.

This is why, right at the beginning of the Bible, we find God declaring the sacredness and sanctity of the marriage relationship between *one man* and *one woman*. We see the purpose for this coming together is to be fruitful and to multiply. You cannot multiply within the context of a same sex relationship. So right away, we can see that this must be fundamentally wrong.

When a man and a woman are married they become 'one flesh' through the sexual union. This is the closest possible human relationship and, as we know, there is a spiritual element to it. When a man and woman come together within this covenant of marriage, their union is an *act of worship*. To **God**, within that covenant relationship, to Satan when **any other** form of sexual activity takes place.

We will see as we go on that one of Satan's primary tools is the perversion and degrading of human sexuality into something base – which offers worship to him through idols and shrine prostitution, of which the Bible has much to say.

Our bodies were created to house the Holy Spirit and as such, God highly esteems our bodies and indeed plans their resurrection after physical death. Anything which lowers the height of His creation – man was the pinnacle of His creative work **Hebrews 2:7** - is a perversion and an act of outright rebellion to Him.

Moving to after the universal flood and **Genesis 9: 12,13** we see that God made a covenant with Noah, which included all of humanity, *'go and have many children and fill the face of the earth. You are no longer to be vegetarian, now you can eat meat.'* God said He would never again flood the earth and put a rainbow across the sky as a sign to that effect. Have many children – be fruitful and multiply.

To be created in the image of God is to know what is right and wrong, and therefore, even though we are not Jewish and not under the Law we are under the laws of Noah and that includes a universal prohibition of homosexuality. Being fruitful and multiplying presupposes a man/woman relationship for the purpose of procreation. So again, God left Noah, as He left Adam and Eve, to get on with things to be fruitful and to multiply. We can see how Noah interpreted this from -

Genesis 9: 18- 24 *"...and Noah planted a vineyard and drank of the wine and was drunk, and he was **uncovered** within his tent. And Ham the father of Canaan saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without. And Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it upon both their shoulders and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness. And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him".*

Noah couldn't hold his liquor! He got drunk, and it would appear, lost his inhibitions. At the end of verse 21 there is an interesting statement which says *'he was uncovered'*. The word 'uncovered' is the Hebrew word 'hithpael', which means 'imperfect' and this is the **only time** in the Bible that the verb 'uncovered' hithpael, is used, in this tense, in the Hebrew.

It does not just mean he went to his tent and his clothes were in disarray, the meaning in Hebrew is that "he uncovered himself for a distinct purpose". We are talking about the strong possibility of an undisclosed sexual sin, which Noah committed whilst under the influence of alcohol.

But why does Noah curse his grandson, Canaan? The implication clearly is here that whilst Noah was drunk, Canaan went into his grandfather and something grossly immoral took place which caused Noah to issue this curse on him. We can see from verse 22 that someone is watching Noah. Noah is at this time, in his own tent, and one of the things

established in the Word of God is that there is a thing called privacy, Noah had the right to be private within his own tent. But Ham was looking at what Noah was doing, and that was an infringement of his father's rights.

As soon as Ham left his father's tent, he went to tell his two brothers what he had seen, and the word **told** here is the word '**denounce**'. So Ham went to **denounce** his father to his brothers.

The love, honour, and devotion of the other two sons is shown by the fact that as soon as they heard what Ham said, they got a cover, went in backwards and covered the father's naked form. They were not about to dishonour their father.

It is reasonable to assume that this is the first instance in the scripture of homosexuality and it brought forth a curse from Noah, which had the effect of being a shattering prophecy regarding Ham's offspring, Canaan.

Verse 24 is the start of the prophecy, which continues through to verse 27. Noah wakes up, finds himself uncovered with his clothing in disarray, and realises that he has compromised himself whilst under the influence of wine. Interestingly, Noah doesn't curse Ham, but Ham's son. We can infer from this that Canaan *purposely* committed some form of sexual act with his grandfather because as soon as Noah realised this, he cursed Canaan.

Genesis 9:25-27 *“Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said blessed be the Lord God of Shem, and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem and Canaan shall be his servant”.*

In **Genesis 10:15-19** Leaping ahead with Canaan's descendants, we see the distribution of the Canaanites... *“and the Canaanites spread abroad. And the border of the Canaanites was from Sidon as you come to Gerar, and to Gaza as you go to Sodom and Gomorrah...”* This where the descendants of Noah's cursed grandson went. You will know that the land in which the Canaanites dwelt was the promised land that God gave to Israel. You will also remember that they were told to destroy everything they came across because of the idolatry and 'disgusting practices' of the Canaanites. So, here we have – fast forward -

Genesis 18-19 And we find the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, where Lot, nephew of Abraham, has settled. And it is said that *'The men of Sodom are exceedingly wicked'* and therefore it is no great shock, when in **Genesis 19** the angels come to town to see what is going on there, as if they didn't know!

Sodom is part of the inheritance of Canaan, which had been cursed by Noah. So now what do we see? Generational sin. The men of Sodom were almost to a man, **sodomites**. A 'sodomite' is an offensive term for somebody who practices anal intercourse. They even

lusted after the two angels God had sent to check out the wickedness of the place. It was the men of the city who wanted sexual relations with them.

It is here that we see God's heart of grace and compassion as Abraham pleads with God, no doubt prompted by God Himself - *"If there be 50 righteous found, will You spare the city?"* And Abraham, on a roll, keeps bidding, down to *'if ten righteous be found.'* But as we know, not even 10 could be found and judgement had to come.

There is a very important theological distinction between grace, mercy and judgement. Sin necessitates the wrath of God; all sin must be punished, if that were not so, then God would be unfair, that is why He labels some things sin and others righteousness. Anyone who commits sin can expect that in God's just system sin will be fairly paid for, eventually. But God always responds to repentance, a change of mind and heart towards Him. He always gives plenty of time for repentance – the scriptures tell us that it is the *'goodness of God that leads us to repentance'*. He does not, however, respond to remorse, which is emotion that wishes it hadn't been found out, but doesn't actually have a change of mind. Judas was remorseful, but not repentant. Big difference. One calls forth the mercy and grace of God, the other leaves us under judgement.

So, there we see the 'universal law' that was written in the hearts of men before the law given to Moses came into place. We also see the rebellion of mankind towards God's holiness from the beginning.

2. Homosexuality as it existed in the ancient pagan world and the commandments given to Moses:

The pagan societies, which surrounded the Jewish nation, held a view of sexuality that was radically opposed to Biblical revelation and to Jewish custom. Homosexuality infused every aspect of their culture. It was considered normal, desirable and even exalted as the highest form of love. It was far more pervasive than we can possibly imagine today. In pagan cultures homosexuality was not only universally accepted but also valued and practised. It has been said "None of the archaic civilisations prohibited homosexuality per se with one exception. The Jewish culture."

We have already seen that Ur of the Chaldees - or Babylon - where Abram lived, was a pagan culture where the Moon god Sin and his consort Nana were worshipped. Abram lived in the midst of a pagan environment when the true God called him. Babylon was built by Nimrod, the offspring of another son of Ham named Cush. Babylon was the seat of rebellion against God and the seedbed of false religions.

In the Canaanite religion, which Joshua and the people of Israel encountered as they stepped into the promised land, the god El or Baal was the chief god. He was believed to have had sexual relations with Asherah or Astarte, the Babylonian goddess of fertility. The

majority of the pagan worship was to do with fertility rites or appeasing the 'gods', sometimes even by human sacrifice.

There are four important scriptures on homosexuality in the Bible, two in the Old Testament and two in the New. The first is found in **Leviticus 18:22** "**You shall not lie with a man as with a woman. It is an abomination**" and the second in **Leviticus 20:13** "**If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them**". **Genesis 19**, which we have already looked at, refers to Sodom and Gomorrah, and there is a similar account about Gibeah and the people of the tribe of Benjamin in the book of Judges.

At this time the Israelites had no king and it says at the end of the book, every man did 'what was right in his own eyes' Judges 21:25 – chilling words – complete anarchy. And, in Judges 19:22ff the men call for a Levite, who is travelling with his concubine, to be brought out to them that they might have sexual relations with him. You may recall that the man puts his concubine outside and they 'did with *her* as they wanted' all night long, which resulted in her dying on the threshold of the house. Unregenerate man has an infinite capacity for lascivious and disgusting behaviour. In fact, in David's paper on this subject he says that man will go with anything and do anything, to satisfy his sexual appetites.

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 then, are scriptures that deal with the **principle** of morality and homosexuality in God's eyes. ***God is establishing His right, as the God of Israel, to stipulate how His people should conduct themselves sexually, as distinct from the surrounding pagan cultures.***

He says in **Leviticus 18:3** '*You must not do as they do in Egypt where you used to live, nor as they do in Canaan where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices, you must be careful to obey My laws and follow My decrees, I am the Lord your God*'.

Here, God is giving a list of what He considers to be unacceptable sexual relationships and it is more than a coincidence that He says in verse 2 - "*I am the Lord your God*" and also ends **Leviticus 18:30** saying "*I am the Lord your God*". He is establishing His code of practice for mankind.

In verse 5 you will notice that these things are actually applicable to more than just Israel, the word 'man' in this verse is the word for the universal man, in other words, those who obey God's wisdom and will, find life. This is an issue for **all** to obey, not just Israel and it is an issue of life and death.

The verse that relates to homosexuality in these prohibitions and limitations of sexual activity, is verse 22. God says '**a man shall not lie with another man as he does with a woman, that is an *abomination*.**' In fact, so serious are the consequences to God that in

Leviticus 20:13 if men engage in homosexual acts, both parties have done what is abominable, and must be put to death. *God sees it as a capital offence.*

These scriptures seem pretty clear as to the prohibition of such sexual activity and the reason why - disease and death will follow. God's warning is God's compassion on an ailing and dying human race. This word **abomination** is the Hebrew word 'toeva', transliterated in a general sense it means an irregularity, something that is out of order and because of that, it is offensive. *Toeva is a mistake, a tragic mistake.* Homosexuality is to walk in error; it is a mistake with tragic consequences.

Used in this context it has an even stronger sense of that which is detestable to God and it is a perversion of nature and the Divine order, an abomination. God actually says in **Leviticus 18:25** that the land the pagans were in became defiled because of their deviant sexual behaviour and it vomited them out. What a graphic image, and He warns Israel if you engage in those activities, you shall be vomited out of your land.

Deuteronomy 23:17

The text here is talking about cult or temple priests and priestesses who engaged in sexual acts on behalf of the temple god. "There shall be no ritual harlots or perverted ones". A female prostitute was known as a harlot and a perverted one, the male counterpart was known as a dog.

Sacred or shrine prostitution was universal. In ancient cultures these 'shrine' prostitutes performed homosexual, heterosexual and all kinds of other sexual practices on behalf of their god. These practices were so widespread that reference is made to them repeatedly in the Book of Kings as a threat to the Jewish Culture. Israel was always at risk of being led astray by other gods and never really succeeded in being loyal to the One true God.

The Old Testament is full of warnings against intermarriage with the Canaanites, the Hittites etc. because of their pagan practices, outrageous sexual behaviour, and child sacrifice, which constantly endangered their relationship with the Lord, as they intermarried, and took on the practices of their wives and were led astray. God calls this adultery.

Three thousand years ago, God declared that homosexuality was wrong, and an abomination to Him; but so widespread was the practice in ancient cultures that it was never considered abnormal, it was the Jewish ethic that was considered abnormal. Homosexuality was not thought of as a category or a concept until God declared His abhorrence of it, which set the Jews apart from the cultures around them.

These ancient cultures did not distinguish between heterosexual love and homosexual love. They distinguished between the one who penetrated and the one who was

penetrated, whether male or female was insignificant, and the active partner or penetrator was considered to be socially dominant.

We need to be aware of how widespread the practice of homosexuality was, and its almost universal approval by the nations of the world.

In a study entitled "The Construction of Homosexuality" Professor David Greenburg of New York University records that *"Japanese Buddhism seemed to take no notice of homosexuality. Buddhist monks could not have intercourse with women, but as male partners were not forbidden, many monks took youthful male lovers."* He further records that *"in the Arab and Islamic worlds a de facto acceptance of male homosexuality has prevailed in Arab lands down to the modern era."* In the words of one of the world's greatest scholars of Islam *"the sexual relations of a mature man with a subordinate youth were so readily accepted in upper class circles that there was little or no effort to conceal their existence."* Professor Greenburg says, *"it is a common belief among the Arab-speaking mountaineers of northern Morocco that a boy cannot learn the Koran well unless a scribe commits pederasty with him."*

In other ancient societies such as Carthage, as testified to by the fifth century priest Salveion, the people glorified in pederasty - that is sexual activity between an adult male and a boy - the Carthaginians were Canaanites. The Celts according to Aristotle, esteemed homosexuality and offered themselves to other men without the least compunction and it was not looked down on in any way or regarded as disgraceful. So we see this way of life was commonplace.

Israel set apart:

As a complete contrast to the nations around them, Israel was to be set apart as a Holy nation unto the Lord. God's repugnance of homosexuality was clearly set out in what is known as the 'holiness code' of **Leviticus 18 and 20** where God clearly stipulates what is and is not sexually allowable.

Israel was to be a kingdom of priests serving the King of the Universe.

God's revelation of the 'holiness code' to Israel represented a sexual revolution to the nations around them. He was teaching them that there is a right, appropriate, and godly way to manifest sexual function and other ways are inappropriate and an abomination to Him. He sanctified sexuality within the context of marriage, he esteemed and valued the marriage covenant and extolled marriage as a way of perpetuation of the family. He elevated the status of women and established a sexual ethic that has been the basis of our civilisation until this time. By design, His law puts limits on the sexual impulse. It controls and channels God-given sexuality into life-giving patterns for the well-being of the individual, the family, and society at large. God took what could be common and profane and sanctified it unto Himself.

On the Sabbath night the orthodox Jewish male was encouraged to have sexual intercourse with his wife because it was a holy day of the week and therefore it was appropriate that they should engage in the holiest act of the marriage covenant. The act of sexual intercourse, as we saw when we discussed soul ties, is an act of worship, to God within the marriage bed or to Satan outside it, whichever sex indulge in it.

Sexuality is good and when controlled leads to a secure and prosperous society. When uncontrolled it leads to a diseased and disintegrating society. God says *“Do this and you shall live, otherwise you shall have distress, disease and ultimately death.*

What does the New Testament teach about homosexuality? Greece and Rome, Jesus and Paul:

What does the New Testament teach about homosexuality? The New Testament is a definitive and an authoritative interpretation of the Law, which Jesus came to fulfil. **Matthew 5:17-19** Jesus is speaking *“Do not think that I came to destroy (the word is misinterpret) the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy (misinterpret) but to fulfil (correctly interpret). For assuredly I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever, therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven”.* Jesus is saying that the Law, the commandments, of God, are eternal.

We must not try to persuade ourselves that because Jesus made no direct reference to homosexuals He agreed with their behaviour, or now somehow overlooks it. God is love, but He is also Holy - one definition of this is that He is totally other than us.

Revelation 21:8 tells us that the sexually immoral and the abominable will have no place in the New Jerusalem.

2 Timothy 3:16,17 clearly states that *‘All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction (training, discipline) in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.’*

We must remember that when Jesus walked the earth, the books He quoted and used were what to us, are the Old Testament writings and as we have already seen, there are clear warnings from God in these. The New Testament wasn't yet written, so everything, as before, needs to be seen from a Jewish perspective - Jesus was a Jew remember. We also need to keep in mind that Jesus *is* God, when God the Father speaks, Jesus speaks and as much as He is our loving Bridegroom, He is also our coming King and He wrote this. His love is not sloppy agape.

What about Paul's writings?

Romans 1:18-32 Paul is speaking about the wrath of God, which is being revealed against the godlessness and wickedness of humanity. He is describing the conditions of ancient Greece and Rome. Remember, our culture has inherited a Greco-Roman culture. Paul says that this is an issue for all humanity and every person is without excuse. He is saying homosexuality is an abomination - a tragic error with horrendous consequences. It flaunts the rights and regulations of the Creator; it dishonours God and leads to the destruction of self. It leads to depraved, inflaming and compulsive passions, to a perversion that causes its own destruction, turning in on itself in an ever-tightening spiral of self-delusion and self-destruction.

But for the pagans, it was the norm. In Greece, not only was homosexuality a conspicuous feature of life, it was exalted. Seduction of young boys by older men was expected and honoured. Graphic pictures of men/boys in sexual positions adorned countless Greek vases.

What was accepted and practiced among leading citizens of Greece was bi-sexuality. A man was expected to sire a large number of offspring and head a family, while engaging a male lover. The inter changeability between boys and women was widely taken for granted, but the culture most appreciated the boys.

Alexander the Great was reported to be indifferent to women, but passionate about men. Sparta institutionalised homosexuality between mature men and adolescent boys, and homosexuality seems to have been universal among male citizens. And in Rome, the culture that Paul addresses in **Romans 1:5-7**, the term 'nation' had become synonymous with pagan, so what Paul is saying is "*I have been called by the Lord Jesus to call people out of paganism.*" **Romans 1:21-28** Paul is saying their sexual immorality is actually the judgement of God upon them. He is saying that in their "sophisticated" thinking and high intelligence, they have considered the issues of God and have made a deliberate choice.

The Greek here suggests that this is not something casual or accidental, but that they have considered the things of God and said "*No thanks, I'll do it my way*" and in so doing, Paul says their wisdom is foolishness and they have incurred God's judgement. God has handed them over. The language here is of a deliberate and measured act by God, who hands them over to their perversion - and their very sin becomes the judgement upon them in their own bodies. Horrendous. **Romans 1:26-32** Paul is describing the gentile or pagan lifestyle of the world around him and the other believers in Rome.

As our society slides further and furthers downhill, we could identify with what Paul is experiencing, here. The pagan view of sexuality was and is radically opposed to the Biblical view of sexuality.

In **1 Corinthians 6:9-11** Paul talks about two different types of homosexual activity. "*Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be*

*deceived. Neither fornicators (sexual activity outside of marriage), nor idolaters, (worshippers of idols) nor **homosexuals**, (literally catamites which is a young partner of a homosexual man), nor **sodomites** (an offensive term for someone who practices anal intercourse), nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God."*

We shall be looking at what inheritance and the Kingdom of God means during our summer school. For the moment, this is clear, anyone who is practicing these things will not come into any inheritance. They are precluded by their behaviour. Remember, Paul is talking to Christians now, not non-Christians. The whole Bible is addressed to believers, not non-believers. This is not affecting salvation, but inheritance.

The city of Corinth:

Corinth was a busy commercial city in ancient Greece, strategically located on the narrow strip of land connecting the peninsula to the mainland. It was a cosmopolitan centre of about 500,000 people. It was a centre of idolatry with numerous pagan temples dedicated to worship of the Greek and Roman gods.

The infamous temple of Aphrodite, a fertility goddess, had a poisonous effect on the city's culture and morals. Temple prostitution was normal and the term to be 'Corinthianised', meant to be sexually debauched (immoral: and unrestrainedly and immorally self-indulgent). Paul addresses these young Christians who have just come out of such an environment and are trying to live in a different way. The sins listed in **1 Corinthians 6:9-11** were well known in the ancient world, and he warns them strongly that if they continue living in the way they had been before they became Christians, they will **forfeit their inheritance**. He is **not** saying they will lose their salvation, he is saying, no share in the Kingdom inheritance which God the Father promises: **Matthew 25:34** '*Come thou blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*'

Paul cites two activities that need further comment: **homosexual offenders** (some versions say 'effeminate') and **sodomites**. As we have seen this first word is catamites and indicates a young man who is *offering* himself to men for the purpose of indecent sexual acts - prostitution in other words.

Male prostitution is the Greek word 'malakos' which means, soft or effeminate and it was a term in Greek culture that meant an effeminate male, effeminate in the sense that it spoke of the male who was the *passive partner* in a homosexual relationship. Often the passive partner of the homosexual act was a paid male prostitute.

We know from Greek literature that these young men, often teenagers, would frequently dress up as females and sell their services to older men. So, Paul is distinctly referring to male prostitution. We also know that one of the highly esteemed relationships in Greco-Roman culture was that of an older man with a young male as his companion. The older

would lead the younger into philosophy, wisdom, sophisticated living and also engage in a homosexual relationship with him.

The second term, homosexual offenders in the NIV, sodomites in the New King James, is the same term used in a parallel list of sinners that Paul gives in **1 Timothy 1:10**. The term in the NIV is 'perverts' and in the Greek it is a - arsenkoitus - this is a compound of two words: male and intercourse and in the Greek of Paul's day, it was a vulgar term for sexual intercourse, it was not used in Greek literature because it was a street term. Paul uses this vulgarity to drive home his point.

Paul is saying, what you are doing is crude and out of order. The term used refers to the active partner in the homosexual partnership.

As we have already seen in ancient society gender was not an issue in sexual relations; who was going to be active and who was going to be passive, was defined because the act was seen as what you did 'to' someone, not what you did 'with' someone.

The Bible and Judaism in contrast, defined the act as what you do 'with' someone and that gender and covenant are morally significant.

Incidentally, female homosexuality was not unknown to the Greeks, the city of Lesbos, from where we get our word lesbian, was known in the ancient world for its female homosexuality.

It is clear that Paul, like Jesus shared in the ancient and ongoing Jewish abhorrence of homosexuality.

"What are we to say to all these things?"

What *are* we to say to all these things?

We have talked about how the Law and the commandments were an exception to the philosophies and practices of the ancient world. Because what we call homosexuality, sexual acts between men, were not only universally practiced, but were socially acceptable. In the ancient world the concept of homosexuality did not exist. They simply understood the concept of an active or passive partner whether it be male, female, or whatever.

We have discovered that what we call homosexuality was not only widespread in its practice, but also idealised in their philosophies, this is probably still quite widely the case.

We have seen that the ancient religions with their gods and goddesses were totally sexual in orientation.

The Bible, however, does not present our God as sexual. He has no consort; He creates, orders, and sustains the world by His word. The bible sanctifies sexuality by putting limits and controls on it, particularly by prohibiting all non-marital sexual acts, and declaring the union to be between one man and one woman, which by definition excludes homosexuality, incest, bestiality and any other permutation.

The heterosexual marital union was not only the basis of personal fulfillment, but for the furtherance of society itself. In the process of channeling the sex drive the Bible elevates both the status and significance of sexuality, love, women, marriage and the family.

One of the most beautiful themes as I have said, which is developed throughout the Bible is the bride-bridegroom relationship, especially as it relates to God and His people. We would not know any of the beauty or depth of this kind of closeness if God had not created us to experience it. God Himself teaches that the marriage relationship between one man and one woman is sacred because it mirrors our relationship with Him. He desires an intimate relationship with us and in using the word 'know' – 'that they might know Me' He is using the term of intimacy describing the sexual union between a man and his wife. He desires that we be open and honest with Him and invites us to come close to Him in an intimate relationship.

Paul, in both Romans and Timothy, concludes that homosexual acts are abominations - a tragic error with tremendous consequences, both in this life and the next. He tells us this behaviour ends in self-destruction, a depraved mind with inflamed and compulsive passions, and a perversion that is its own penalty.

How then should we respond? What about those who have a heart for God but have this insistent inclination to engage in homosexual activity? We surely need to bring them to the knowledge that this behaviour must be repented of - they must turn - by God's grace, from this course of action.

It is not a sin, Biblically, to have a homosexual inclination any more than it is a sin to have a heterosexual one. It is the **act** that is the sin. We must never lose respect for the person. We are called to demonstrate both in word and deed, God's love for the sinner, not the sin. We are to speak the truth, but always in love. We are to reject all acts of violence towards homosexuals, both verbal and physical. We are to give up homosexual jokes and all other names that we are prone to use, and not insult them. The church should be a place where we speak the truth in love, we must confront, but we need to be loving in our opposition to their lifestyle.

The church should be a place of security and safety for those who are struggling with homosexual tendencies, a place where they can receive prayerful support and acceptance. We are all sinners working out our salvation. Sometimes love has to be tough; it has to move beyond sympathy, we must move in Christ-like opposition to the diseased mindset that subjects people to this deviant behaviour. All healing and salvation begin at

the cross and proceed from it. Homosexuality is not an identity. It is an inclination. We are not determined by our biology. We are created in the image of God and He is calling us to be re-created and conformed to the image of His Son.

What about the person who says *'I was born like this'*? The evidence for a genetic predisposition to homosexuality is tenuous at best and far from an established fact. The truth of the matter is, we have all been given, in our very essence as human beings, an inclination to do evil, we have got it, but it does not mean that we have to give in to it. We are shaped by our past, problems with mothering and fathering, or lack of it, can also be a contributing factor to the turn which causes a desire for a 'same sex' relationship. This is not a simple problem, but the solution is simple, Jesus is the answer to every human need. Someone once said, *'He is bearing this dying world in His arms as a mother her sick child'*.

Grace from first to last.

Repentance will always bring forgiveness.

God is not a spoilsport. He is a loving, caring Father, who desires that all men shall be saved. No-one goes to the lake of fire for eternity but by their own choice. It is not their sin that puts them there, the penalty for sin has been paid, it is their refusal to accept God's free gift of pardon through His only Son Jesus Christ, which commits them to separation from Him for eternity.

We are the product of the fall, but Jesus came to transform us. He did not come to confirm what the first Adam did, but to undo what he did and to make a new person in Jesus. He can and He will if we will allow Him. It is our responsibility to live up to the high calling in Christ to bear witness to a different reality, a different set of standards to the world in which we live.

Finally, **Philippians 2:12-16** *'...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling...that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain or laboured in vain'*

Amen.