

Robert Gagnon on the Hermeneutical Relevance of the Biblical Witness...

Questions to Answer...

- 1. Is the issue a matter of significant concern in the Bible?**
 - a. Is there a consistent perspective in the Bible?
 - i. How often is the issue addressed?
 - ii. If infrequently addressed, does infrequency imply insignificance or universal agreement?
 - iii. Is it likely that any biblical writers might have held a different position?
 - iv. Is there continuity between the Testaments?
 - b. Is it a serious moral issue for biblical writers?
 - i. Does violation lead to exclusion from God's people?
 - ii. Do any biblical writers regard the issue as a matter of indifference?
 - iii. Do biblical writers prioritize it as one of the core values of the faith?

- 2. Does the biblical witness remain valid in a contemporary setting?**
 - a. Is the situation to which the bible responds comparable to the contemporary situation?
 - b. Are the arguments made by biblical writers still convincing?
 - c. Do new socio-scientific insights or cultural changes invalidate the biblical witness?
 - i. Do these new insights directly engage the arguments marshaled by the biblical authors?
 - ii. How certain are these new insights?
 - iii. Are the writers of Scripture limited or blinded by their cultural horizon?
 - iv. Were there other perspectives or options available in the author's own time?
 - d. Has the church adopted a consistent and strong witness on the issue over the centuries?
 - e. Does a new work of the Holy Spirit in the church justify changing the biblical position?
 - i. Does this alleged "new work" promote God's kingdom?
 - ii. Does the change involve a total reversal of the biblical position or only a modification?

Arguments used against the Bible's clear and consistent prohibition against homosexual behavior (*with responses*)...

- I. The Bible condemns only exploitative, pederastic forms of homosexuality.**
 - A. The biblical texts themselves nowhere limit rejection of homosexual conduct to exploitative forms.*
 - B. It is misleading to argue as if Jewish Christian writers had nothing but negative images from which to base their judgment of homosexuality.*

- II. The Bible primarily condemns homosexuality because of its threat to male dominance.**
 - A. The blurring of gender itself and not merely gender stratification is the issue in the Bible.*
 - a. The anatomical clues point to God's intention that human sexuality involves opposite-sex pairing as opposed to same-sex pairing.*
 - b. Paul & Jesus and the rest of the biblical witnesses take a more uncompromising position against homosexual behavior than contemporary Greeks and Romans who allowed such behavior especially when done by social superiors who were using social inferiors. This suggests a more general concern than social hierarchy.*
 - B. Paul calls homosexual behavior "contrary to nature" in Romans 1:26-27 which indicates that his concern is deeper than male dominance in human society.*

- III. The Bible has no category for "homosexuals" with an exclusively same-sex orientation; same-sex passion was thought to originate in over-sexed heterosexuals.**
 - Paul's "contrary to nature" argument undermines this contention.*

- IV. Homosexuality has a genetic component that the writers of the bible did not realize.**
 - A. Modern studies that have found "homosexual brains" (LeVay) or "homosexual genes" (Hamer, 1993) have been greatly exaggerated (LeVay himself said that the enlarged section of the brain might have been the result or the cause of his subjects' behavior).*
 - B. Twin studies and cross-cultural studies have been inconclusive.*
 - C. Urban vs. rural environments along with greater and lesser levels of education have been shown to be far more significant statistical determiners of homosexual behavior than any inherent genetic factors.*

- V. There are only a few biblical texts that speak directly to homosexuality.**
 - A. This argument confuses frequency with degree of importance.*
 - a. Bestiality, incest and prostitution receive little documentation in the bible, but this does not make them insignificant sins.*
 - b. Homosexuality infrequent mention is an accident of history: The biblical writers simply didn't encounter much public display of homosexual conduct.*
 - c. Likely the biblical writers considered the egregious sinfulness of same-*

- sex intercourse as axiomatic and thus requiring little if any instruction.*
- B. *The odds of any major positive figure connected with earliest Christianity having either no opinion or a positive opinion about homosexual conduct in any form is extremely remote. (p.437)*
 - C. *On a descriptive level, throughout the bible there is not a single hero of the faith that engages in homosexual conduct: no patriarch, no matriarch, no prophet, no priest, no king (certainly not King David), no apostle, no disciple.*
 - D. *On a prescriptive level, every regulation that affirms the sexual bond affirms it between a man and a woman—without exception.*
 - a. *The Song of Solomon is devoted to singing the praises of committed heterosexual love.*
 - b. *Every proverb or wisdom saying refers to heterosexual—not homosexual—relationships as fitting for the lives of the faithful.*
 - c. *There is an abundance of Old Testament laws and proverbs regulating and establishing proper boundaries for sexual intercourse between male and female (e.g. regarding virginity, mate selection, engagement, marital fidelity). By way of contrast, there are no laws distinguishing proper homosexual conduct from improper homosexual conduct, because in every law code homosexual conduct is presumed to be forbidden in toto.*
 - d. *This includes the Ten Commandments. The fifth commandment stipulates “honor your father and your mother.” The seventh commandment says “you shall not commit adultery.” The tenth commandment requires that “you shall not covet... your neighbor’s wife.” These only make sense where heterosexual couplings alone are sanctioned.*
 - E. *The universal silence in the bible regarding an acceptable same-sex union, when combined with the explicit prohibitions, speaks volumes for a consensus disapproval of homosexual conduct. To say that there are only a few texts in the Bible that do not condone homosexual conduct is a monumental understatement of the facts. The reverse is a more accurate statement: there is not a single shred of evidence anywhere in the bible that would even remotely suggest that same-sex unions are any more acceptable than extramarital or premarital intercourse, incest or bestiality.*

VI. We do not follow all the injunctions in the bible now, so why should those against homosexual conduct be binding?

- A. *In cases where the church deviates in its moral practices from portions of the bible, one can usually find a trajectory within the bible itself that justifies a critique or moderation of such texts.*
 - a. *Divorce...*
 - i. *New Testament authors moderate Jesus’ stance (Matthew – exception for “sexual immorality” Mt. 5:32 & 19:9... Paul – permitted for believers married to unbelievers who wanted to leave – 1 Cor. 7:12ff)*
 - ii. *It has never, and is not today, celebrated as a positive good.*
 - iii. *It is not normally a recurring or repetitive action.*
 - iv. *It happens against people’s wills or for justifiable cause.*
 - b. *Sabbath observance - Paul (Rm. 14) says no one day is more sacred than another.*

- c. *Women's roles*
 - i. *Many positive examples of women in leadership roles in the Old Testament (Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Esther), in the ministry of Jesus, and in Paul's ministry (see Romans 16).*
 - ii. *The seeds for liberating women from oppressive male structures can be found within the Bible itself which "is often its own critic and inspiration for change." (p.443)*
 - d. *Slavery*
 - i. *This is not a good parallel for the homosexuality debate because the New Testament nowhere affirms slavery as an institution.*
 - ii. *The most that can be said is that the Bible tolerates slavery and regulates it even in Christian households.*
- B. Analogy of inclusion of Gentiles in the Early Church**
- a. *Being a gentile is not like being a homosexual (complex factors vs. determined/racial/genetic identity)*
 - b. *The Bible, regarding same-sex intercourse, is condemning an activity or form of behavior, not a state of being.*
 - c. *Unlike the Bible's stance on same-sex intercourse, the Hebrew Bible or Greek Septuagint is not unequivocally and univocally opposed to gentiles. Christians could find legitimization for the inclusion of gentiles in Scripture itself (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; Isa. 2:2-4; 19:18-25; 25:6-7; 45:22-23; 29:6; 56:7 66:19; Mic.4:1-4; Zech. 8:22-23; 14:16-19), whereas no such legitimization could be given for same-sex intercourse.*
 - d. *In complete contrast to the issue of same-sex intercourse, the attitude toward gentiles taken by all the authors of texts that subsequently made it into the New Testament canon was on of affirmation of gentile entry into the people of God without requiring circumcision.*

VII. Since we are all sinners anyway, why single out the sin of same-sex intercourse?

- A. *Follow this argument out, and we have a church that never takes a stand against sin and evil... Should we say "Hey, we're all sinners; who am I to judge you?" as we offer no word of rebuke or correction in issues of adultery, pedophilia, incest, polygamy, sexual harassment, spousal abuse, discrimination against women, racism, economic oppression, etc.?*
 - B. *The church must always approach the rebuking of sin among its members with humility and sensitivity, repenting of its own faults, and providing offending members with support for change. We all sin but not all sin is equally offensive to God and not all sin is to be treated in the same way. (p.47)*
 - C. *Homosexual behavior has real and negative effects on the church and on society and on people. [The church, called to tell the truth and love people, must speak out!]*
- *Jeffrey Satinover's questions regarding problematic behaviors (Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth)... What should society think if a relative, friend, or colleague had a condition that is routinely, even if not always, associated with the following problems? ...*

- *A significantly decreased likelihood of establishing or preserving a successful marriage*
- *A five to ten year decrease in life expectancy*
- *Chronic, potentially fatal, liver disease—hepatitis*
- *Inevitably fatal esophageal cancer*
- *Pneumonia*
- *Internal bleeding*
- *Serious mental disabilities, many of which are irreversible*
- *A much higher than usual incidence of suicide*
- *A very low likelihood that its adverse effects can be eliminated unless the condition itself is eliminated*
- *An only 30% likelihood of being eliminated through lengthy, often costly, and very time-consuming treatment in an otherwise unselected population of sufferers (although a very high success rate among highly motivated, carefully selected sufferers)*
- *Though its origins are influenced by genetics, the condition is, strictly speaking, rooted in behavior.*
- *Individuals who have this condition continue the behavior in spite of the destructive consequences of doing so.*
- *Many with this condition deny they have nay problem at all and violently resist all attempts to “help” them*
- *These people who resist help tend to socialize with one another, sometimes exclusively, and form a kind of “subculture.”*
- *Society would consider this condition worth treating and worth persuading other members of society to avoid the behavior that brings on such terrible risks. (We know this because the condition referred to above is not homosexuality but alcoholism!)*
- *The medical downside of homosexuality, Satinover says, is worse...*
 - *A significantly decreased likelihood of establishing or preserving a successful marriage*
 - *A 25 to 30 year decrease in life expectancy.*
 - *Chronic, potentially fatal, liver disease—infectious hepatitis, which increases the risk of live cancer*
 - *Inevitably fatal immune disease, including associated cancers*
 - *Frequently fatal rectal cancer*
 - *Multiple bowel and other infectious diseases*
 - *A much higher than usual incidence of suicide*
 - *A very low likelihood that its adverse effects can be eliminated unless the condition itself is*
 - *A 30% (some studies claim 50%) likelihood of being eliminated through lengthy, often costly, and very time-consuming treatment.*

Seven considerations that make the biblical mandate concerning homosexuality so hard for Christians to ignore or downplay...

- 1. It is proscribed behavior.**
 - This is less demanding than a positive prescription and therefore more doable (or better, “non-doable”) and fundamental – a sin of commission rather than omission.
- 2. It is proscribed behavior.**
 - Not proscribed thoughts, theories, or worldviews. It is more basic for human social interaction.
- 3. It is behavior proscribed by both Testaments.**
- 4. It is behavior proscribed pervasively within each Testament.**
 - There are no dissenting voices anywhere in either Testament.
 - Appeals to the “big picture” of the Bible – affirming “love” and “tolerance” etc. – which none of the biblical writers, or Jesus, found to be in conflict with opposition to homosexual conduct.
 - The “big picture” consists not of this misunderstood application of love but rather of the heterosexual model for sexual intercourse provided in Gen. 1-2, consistently affirmed throughout the history of Israel and the church.
- 5. It is severely proscribed behavior.**
 - The revulsion expressed of homosexual intercourse, across both Testaments, is as strong as it could possibly be... In Romans 1:24-27 it epitomizes the height of gentile depravity and folly in the ethical sphere.
- 6. The proscribed behavior is proscribed absolutely.**
 - It encompasses every and any form of homosexual behavior.
- 7. It is proscribed behavior that makes sense.**
 - The complementarity of male and female is a clear indication in the natural order of God’s will for sexuality—much clearer than the urges homosexuals experience.
 - Such urges, or “orientation” can never be *natural* in the sense Paul uses the term since they (a) manifestly contradict God’s creation design of male and female; (b) arise at best from only a partial and indirect genetic influence; and (c) have no more validity than orientations toward bestiality, incest, multiple partners, sadomasochism, or any of the sinful orientations cited in the vice lists of Rom. 1:29-31.
 - Human passions are notoriously unreliable indicators of God’s will.