

What does the Bible *Really* Say about Gender, Sex, and Homosexuality?

- **There is *more* than what the Bible has named.** God's creation of humankind is not limited to two genders. The Bible says God made humankind in God's image – and “male” and “female” are offered as examples of the diversity of God's human creation, not the *limits* of God's human creation. Intersex people are *also* part of God's creation.

*When people quote scriptures such as Genesis 1.27 to defend “male” and “female” as the only gender/sex categories of God's human creation, **all** of us should be quick to challenge this as untrue, remembering the scientific and existential fact of intersex people and that there is always more than meets the eye – especially when it comes to God's design.*

- **Rape is the most repugnant form of inhospitality.** Though some have used Genesis 19.1-11 to condemn gay men, this passage is about the terror of rape. What could be more inhospitable and worthy of God's wrath than to threaten strangers, aliens, or angels with rape?

*When people quote Genesis 19.1-11 (or its corollaries like Jude 7) to condemn LGBTQ+ people, **all** of us should be quick to explain that this passage is about rape, not consensual homosexual sex; we reject the proliferation of rape and the cultures that sustain rape.*

- **The Bible distinguishes between customs and morals – and gives believers some degree of choice as it pertains to sex; believers are not bound to custom.** Believers should know, acknowledge, and respect the difference between cultural custom and moral obligation – and the difference between concession and command – especially when it comes to sex. Leviticus 18.22 and 20.13 are not about the morality of sex between two men – and Deuteronomy 22.5 is not about the morality of a particular dress code, but about the contextual, cultural, contemporary need for sex to be healthfully procreative (with strict gender roles) as the Hebrew / Israelite community established their distinctive national identity at a particular historical moment. This is not the only time when such gender, sex, and sexuality questions bump the line between custom and morality – revealing that what is customary is not always the same as what is morally right. Consider the New Testament debates around circumcision (I Corinthians 7.19); consider what the writer says “by concession, . . . not command” in I Corinthians 7.1-7.

*When people quote Leviticus 18.22 and 20.13 to condemn LGBTQ+ people, **all** of us should be ready to name the ways Jesus challenges the customary legal prescriptions in Leviticus and name LGBTQ+ people (such as Nzingha Mbande, King Mwanga II, Area Scatter, Bayard Rustin, Barbara Jordan, Simon Nkoli, Rotimi Fani-Kayode, Audre Lorde, James Baldwin, Angela Davis, Alice Walker, and Binyavanga Wainaina among countless others) who have contributed to our strength as a community.*

- **We are not always certain what the Bible says on matters of sexuality.** The one place in which the Bible *may* address homosexual acts between women, Romans 1.26-27 (and verses 24-32) contains words the meaning of which – especially in context – are unclear. Scholars who have studied this passage in the original language for years disagree about and continue to wrestle with the exact meaning of this text. If these scholars must concede the possibility of mistranslation and misinterpretation, why can't we? Although the translations we read, the interpretations we are fed, and our own untrained analysis can make the text seem like a straightforward rebuke of homosexual acts between men and between women, careful reading of the original language makes the actual meaning *at best* unclear and *at worst* limited to the context the writer was addressing.

*When people quote Romans 1.24-32 to condemn LGBTQ+ people and to suggest they deserve what they suffer, **all** of us should be encouraged to (1) read the text in the original language, (2) study the culture of those at that time, (3) acknowledge our own capacities to err in translation or interpretation, and (4) try reading the text from the vantage point of someone who is part of the LGBTQ+ community today – especially before we jump to condemn others on the strength of the scripture.*

- **The Bible encourages us to use our bodies in ways that are purposeful – and discourages us from using our bodies in ways that are transactional.** The Bible disdains *malakoi* (best translated as “self-indulgent”), *arsenokoitai* (best translated as “male prostitutes”), and *pornos* (i.e., “one who practices sexual immorality, fornicator” or, in a related term, “one engaged in sexual relations for hire, prostitute, whore”). None of these terms has anything to do with consensual, non-transactional sex between two people of the same gender/sex.

*When people quote I Corinthians 6.9-11 or I Timothy 1.9-11, Hebrews 13.4, Revelation 21.8, or Revelation 22.15 (which use these words) to condemn gay men or LGBTQ+ people, **all** of us can readily explain that these texts do not correspond with the contemporary experiences or practices of all LGBTQ+ people.*

The Bible gives us permission to love, celebrate, and fully include the Quare (i.e., Black LGBTQ+) people among us – our grandchildren, our children, our siblings, our parents, our aunts and uncles, our nephews and nieces, our cousins, our neighbors, and some of our community leaders. Will we receive it?