


Was Jesus Okay With Homosexuality? (1 of 6)

 dwrightgingrich.com/was-jesus-okay-with-homosexuality-1-of-5

Dwight Gingrich

September 3,
2019

I have never discussed homosexuality on this blog.¹ **I've decided it's time to change this.** So, after some reading and conversations to prepare, **I've drafted a six-part blog series on Jesus and homosexuality:**

1. Introduction, Explanations, and a Summary of this Series
2. [How Should We Interpret Jesus' Silence About Homosexuality?](#)
3. [Does "Love Your Neighbor" Mean Jesus Affirmed "Gay Love"?](#)
4. [Why It's Wrong to Say Jesus Said Nothing About Homosexuality](#)
5. [Historical Conclusions: Was Jesus Okay With Homosexuality?](#)
6. [Conclusions for Today: Is Jesus Okay With Homosexuality Now?](#)

*Since this is a difficult topic, please bear with me as I share a long preamble in this post. It doesn't really matter what I believe; what matters is what Jesus believes. Yet perhaps if I explain myself a little first, I can clear the ground for discussing what really matters. However, **if you want to jump ahead to my condensed answer to the blog title, go here.***

There are many reasons not to write about homosexuality. The topic is a linguistic and political minefield, full of labels and terminology that are constantly evolving in meaning and "correctness." It's intrinsically complex, involving questions such as causation (nature vs. nurture, etc.), public policy, and church discipleship. And it's a sure way to win some enemies—while also winning friends whose responses you can't always fully endorse.

I've also heard it suggested that this is a topic best left for private conversations—face-to-face interactions with people whose trust you have already earned through friendship. I agree that those kinds of interactions offer possibilities that mere blogging does not.

My greatest fear in sharing this series is that my "medicine," though urgently needed by some readers, will prove to be a painful "overdose" for others—readers who are already convinced of the truth of what I share, and who need help knowing how to live with these truths. If that describes you, please forgive me for not being able to give personalized "medical care" according to each reader's need. I hope you can still sense love in my words.

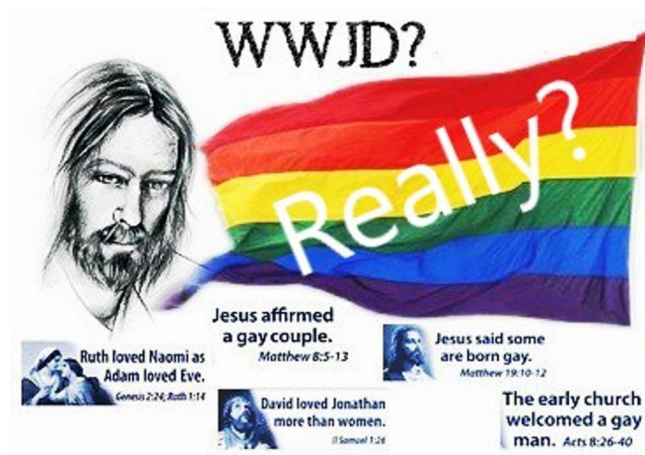
Why I Am Writing

Despite these reservations, **I've noticed something that has convinced me it is time to write.** I've noticed that many who are promoting homosexual behaviors do not have a similar reluctance about expressing their views in public. I'm noticing that both social media and traditional media are filled with statements justifying and celebrating homosexuality. The closet has long been abandoned for the megaphone. In fact, most North Americans probably hear far more public comments promoting homosexual behaviors than questioning them. I know I do.

When one hears a new idea often enough, it often becomes easy to believe, especially if it is simply and winsomely defended while opposing views are ignored or caricatured. As the years pass, I'm seeing more and more friends and acquaintances abandon what they once believed about homosexuality. Some are now practicing homosexuals. Others are celebrating their choices.

For many people today, contrary to the experience of most people throughout most of history, it now appears much more logical and loving to approve of homosexual relationships than to disapprove of them. In our culture, at least temporarily, the arguments in favor of homosexuality appear to be winning the day.

I know a few blog posts are unlikely to make much difference, and I feel poorly equipped for the task. But “somebody needs to do it,” so I’ll try.



An image I found online. I added the “Really?” What would Jesus do? The original image implied Jesus would affirm homosexuality. My addition calls that into question.

What I Am Writing About

To keep my job easier, I’ll narrow my focus. Narrowing my focus is essential unless I want to write a book, but it also brings dangers. Having a narrow focus means I’ll pass over many crucial pastoral questions that deserve clear and compassionate thought:

- “I think I’m gay. What should I do about it?”
- “My friend is LGBTQ+. How should I relate to them?”
- Is “gay Christian” a helpful label? What about the terms “homosexual” and “heterosexual”? (I am using the former in this blog series as a catch-all term to describe all forms of LGBTQ+ behavior, not because I unquestioningly accept the paradigm, but in order to avoid verbal mouthfuls.)
- How can we support those who experience persistent desires they did not choose, and which they have repeatedly and unsuccessfully asked God to remove?
- Is it possible to change one’s sexual orientation, or good to try?
- How, if at all, should Christians try to shape social policy about sexuality and gender identity?
- How can we love someone well while disagreeing with them about something as fundamental as sexual morality?
- And many more...

I will also fail to meaningfully discuss several crucial questions of Bible interpretation, such as:

- How should Christians interpret and apply the Old Testament, including its commands against homosexuality?
- What did Paul mean by the specific words he used in the passages where he mentions same-sex behavior?

Please hear me: By skipping such questions, I do not at all mean to imply that they are unimportant. Rather, I mean to focus my energy where I feel best equipped to contribute. (For one helpful post addressing some pastoral questions, with links to more resources, read [“The Powerful Witness of Same-Sex Attracted Christians”](#) by Emily

Hallock.)

My goal in these blog posts is to examine a single question, one that is more foundational than most listed above: Was Jesus okay with homosexuality?

I am intentionally phrasing the question in past tense, because I intend to focus on historical evidence considering what Jesus of Nazareth—the person who lived in the first century, rather than the Jesus of today—actually believed. I am not making this distinction because I believe that those are two different Jesuses. However, I want us to push past our fuzzy feelings about Jesus today to consider actual historical evidence.

It is easy to say “I think Jesus believes X” if we pull him and one or two of his sayings (or his silence) out of his first century context into our own. But if we consider his actual historical context our possibilities are more constrained.

In considering Jesus’ historical context, I will use both the Bible and other ancient writings, treating them essentially alike as historical documents. (The Bible is more than a collection of historical documents, but it is certainly not less.) I will address some theological questions along the way and especially in my final post, “Conclusions for Today: Is Jesus Okay With Homosexuality Now?” But my goal is to focus on historical evidence and, where I make theological deductions and pastoral applications, to keep them tied closely to that historical evidence.

Who I Am Writing for and What I Hope to Accomplish

I am aiming for a specific audience as I write. As my blog purpose statement says, *“This website exists to build up the Church of Jesus Christ by helping her listen carefully to the Scriptures.”* This means I am writing primarily to people who identify as Christians. For such readers, I am aiming to shore up your biblical beliefs about homosexuality or, if you have already lost them, to invite you to reconsider the evidence. I also have my children in mind, hoping they will read this or similar material someday. Other readers are welcome to listen in, but please realize I will not be trying to answer your questions.

Please hear me: I am certainly not writing to attack my homosexual friends. You probably did not choose your desires any more than I chose mine. I’ve heard too many stories of people becoming aware of homosexual desires from childhood to believe that all such desire can be explained by personal choice or by external factors such as abuse. I ache for the many who desperately long to escape homosexual desires, but with no success. I ache for those who turn to the church for compassion and support but find only rejection and ridicule.

Please hear me also in this: I do not believe that the mere experience of homosexual desire makes us guilty before God. I say that even though I believe that such desires are disordered or, to use a more ancient term, “contrary to nature” and God’s initial good creation design. I believe we all live in a broken world and that we experience its brokenness in unpredictable and seemingly unfair ways. Some of us are disordered in other ways, leaving us more prone to things such as anger, anxiety, depression, or experiencing deception. I do not believe we are guilty merely for possessing such tendencies any more than I am guilty for having been born with a susceptibility to the shoulder injury I experienced. Rather, we are accountable for whether we feed and act on our disordered desires, or whether we submit them to God.

And even then, whatever your own life choices, one of my life mantras applies to you as surely as to me: “We all need more love than we deserve.” I desire to offer you dignity and love, even (especially) when we disagree. After all, disagreement, too, is a form of love, for “only what is true can ultimately be pastoral.”²

When my title asks “Was Jesus okay with homosexuality?” I am primarily asking about behaviors, not desires. I do believe Jesus held beliefs about homosexual desire similar to what I sketched above—that the experience of mere desire (weakness/hunger/temptation)³ is neither intrinsically sinful nor something to be

celebrated as being in line with God's original good creation design. Yet I also believe that God places people with many varied weaknesses in Christ's church and intends to use such realities for good. My title, therefore, refers primarily to the question of whether Jesus affirmed homosexual *behaviors*.

My main goal in writing these posts is to convince readers that agreeing with the historical Jesus and affirming homosexual behavior are not compatible.

I believe it is intellectually inconsistent and also disastrous to the church of Jesus to try to combine the two. If you want to affirm homosexual behavior and yet remain "Christian," then the onus is on you to do some theological footwork to explain why you can believe differently than the historical Jesus and still remain "Christian." Most Christians by far disagree with you, and so do most secular gay scholars. ***I think you need to choose between the two, and I sincerely hope you choose Jesus.***

Enough about me. Now that I've told you where I'm going, let's jump right in.

A Summary of What I Plan to Say

Here is the sort of argument we sometimes hear from those seeking to undermine Christian opposition to homosexual behavior. It is simple, and it is attractive:

1. Jesus never mentioned homosexuality, much less spoke against it.
2. He said love is the greatest commandment.
3. He befriended social outcasts, including those who were called "sinners" by the religious elites.
4. Therefore, he was (and is) okay with loving homosexual relationships.

The first three points are, on face value, all true. But what do they mean? Does 4 logically flow from 1, 2, and 3?

These three points need to be read in light of their historical and literary contexts or else they will be misunderstood. All three, or at least the first two, are true only with asterisks. And even if we accept them at face value, point 4 is not proven by points 1, 2, and 3.

Here is a summary of my response to such thinking:

1. All known Jewish teachers for about 2000 years who addressed homosexual behavior agreed that it is very sinful, so Jesus had no more reason to address the topic than to address a topic like bestiality. If he, as a Jewish rabbi, had disagreed with this consensus, he would have been immediately rejected. His silence on the topic would have been assumed to be agreement—and should be assumed so by us, unless there is very strong evidence to the contrary.
2. Jesus' command to "love your neighbor as yourself" was a quote from the Old Testament book that also contains its strongest teachings against homosexual activity. Ancient Jews and Christians saw no conflict between promoting love and opposing homosexual behavior. Jesus taught that loving God is the "most important" commandment and that loving your neighbor is "second" to loving God. Thus loving your neighbor, according to Jesus, involves treating your neighbor in a way that pleases God. Jesus' teachings on love do not indicate he was okay with homosexual activity.
3. Though Jesus was a friend of sinners, he called them to repent. He also affirmed and even strengthened core Jewish sexual ethics. He spoke against sexual immorality using language that was normally understood by ancient Jews to include homosexual behavior, and his followers spoke explicitly against homosexual activity.
4. Therefore, no churches anywhere until a few in the past few decades have ever taught that Jesus was (and is) okay with homosexual relationships.

My responses are not as pithy and memorable as the arguments they oppose. Truth involves complexity. But I have tried to summarize these key points briefly, since short arguments are more easily remembered and remembered arguments are more convincing.

Really, it is startling to even have to make these arguments. The historical evidence about what Jesus believed about homosexuality is so overwhelming that it wasn't seriously questioned by any church denomination until the early 1970s—about the time I was born.

But if my responses here are too brief for you, fear not. I plan to discuss these points and more in the next blog posts, providing historical evidence for my claims.

Meanwhile, thanks for reading. Please comment if you wish, but thank you for understanding that I have limited time for follow-up discussions. I am already investing most of the time I have available in writing these blog posts. **Have a blessed week!**

1. I mentioned the topic briefly twice in book reviews. ↵
2. Roman Catholic Church, "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons" accessed August 4, 2019, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19861001_homosexual-persons_en.html. Here is the context for that statement: "We wish to make it clear that departure from the Church's teaching, or silence about it, in an effort to provide pastoral care is neither caring nor pastoral. Only what is true can ultimately be pastoral. The neglect of the Church's position prevents homosexual men and women from receiving the care they need and deserve." I am not Roman Catholic, so would want to replace the allusions to the Roman Catholic Church with references to Jesus' church and the Scriptures. Apart from this, I agree with this statements. ↵
3. I realize I am lumping together here some dynamics that some prefer to distinguish for theological or psychological reasons. Such distinctions may be valid, but here I am simply trying to reflect the thought of [James 1:14-15](#): "Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death." I am in general agreement with Moo's commentary on this passage, though he did not write with homosexual desires explicitly in mind and though his commentary does not answer all my questions: "Temptation, James has said, involves the innate desire toward evil as it is enticed by the superficial attractiveness of sin. If a person should welcome rather than resist that temptation, desire conceives; and if not turned away immediately, it produces sin. James implies that temptation, in and of itself, is not sinful. Only when desire 'conceives'—is allowed to produce offspring—does sin come into being. The point is an important one, for some extremely sensitive Christians may feel that the fact of their continuing to experience temptation demonstrates that they are out of fellowship with the Lord. To be sure, as one develops more and more of a Christian 'mind,' the frequency and power of temptation should grow less. But temptation will be a part of our experience, as it was the experience of the Lord himself ([Heb. 2:18](#)), throughout our time on earth. Christian maturity is not indicated by the infrequency of temptation but by the infrequency of succumbing to temptation." Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 76. ↵