

# Melbourne Inclusive Church

## Faith and Sexuality



## What Does the Bible Say about Same Sex Attracted and Gender Diverse Persons

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. <sup>2</sup> Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God."

2 Corinthians 4:1-2

# Our Vision

A world where people know and express the all-inclusive love of God demonstrated through the life of Jesus Christ.

# Our Mission

To create community where people feel safe to connect with God and others. We offer Biblical truth and teaching about faith and sexuality and offer life applicable teaching and tools. We encourage authentic worship of God and fellowship with one another.

# Statement of Inclusivity

Melbourne Inclusive Church (MIC) is a contemporary, Spirit-filled Christian church dedicated to sharing the inclusive love of Jesus Christ. We boldly and proudly proclaim Christ's equal love for all people regardless of their ability, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, age, gender, race, ethnicity, or culture.

## Our Values



### **Inclusion**

We believe God made you who are and has a plan for you. Being LGBTIQ or Straight is part of that plan.



### **Living on Purpose**

We are about helping you realize your God-given dreams. The Passion placed in your DNA is God's calling in your life.



### **Bridge Building**

We are an inclusive, bridge building church. We are active in the LGBTIQ affirming spaces and we take our place in the Christian and wider community.

## Table of Contents

<b>SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.1 INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.2 THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.3 A SAFE ENVIRONMENT .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1.4 STUDY AND SHARE .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1.5 METHOD — HOW WE WILL STUDY .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>SECTION 2: HOMOPHOBIA .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2.1 CONTEXTS THAT SHAPE OUR LIVES .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2.2 PERCEPTIONS THAT SHAPE OUR BELIEFS .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2.3 EISEGESIS VS. EXEGESIS.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>2.4 COMMON ATTITUDES AND OPINIONS .....</b>	<b>10</b>
2.4.1 PROMISCUITY .....	10
2.4.2 COMPROMISING FAITH .....	10
2.4.3 DEROGATORY TERMS AND STEREOTYPES .....	11
2.4.4 OTHER EXAMPLES.....	11
<b>2.5 IMPACT ON SAME SEX ATTRACTED AND/OR GENDER DIVERSE PERSONS .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>2.6 DEFINITIONS OF HOMOPHOBIA .....</b>	<b>11</b>
2.6.1 PERSONAL (INTERNALISED) HOMOPHOBIA .....	12
2.6.2 INTERPERSONAL HOMOPHOBIA .....	12
2.6.3 INSTITUTIONAL HOMOPHOBIA .....	12
2.6.4 CULTURAL HOMOPHOBIA .....	12
<b>2.7 DIALOGUE DIGNIFIES — DEBATE DIVIDES.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>SECTION 3: GENESIS — SODOM AND GOMORRAH.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>3.1 THE TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>3.2 OBSERVATIONS: WHAT THE TEXT ACTUALLY SHOWS .....</b>	<b>14</b>
3.2.1 SODOM AND GOMORRAH WERE ALREADY DOOMED .....	14
3.2.2 THE LAW OF HOSPITALITY .....	15
3.2.3 LOT WAS A FOREIGNER IN POST-WAR SODOM.....	15
3.2.5 VIOLENT ACTS — DOMINATION, NOT ORIENTATION .....	15
<b>3.3 READING THE TEXT IN CONTEXT.....</b>	<b>15</b>
3.3.1 'ALL THE MEN OF THE CITY' .....	15
3.3.2 TO 'KNOW' — THE WORD YADA.....	15
3.3.3 LOT OFFERS HIS DAUGHTERS .....	16
3.3.4 DOES NOT AGREE WITH OTHER SCRIPTURES .....	16
<b>3.4 THE WORD 'SODOMY'.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>3.5 THE ACTUAL SIN OF SODOM .....</b>	<b>16</b>
3.5.1 THE WORD 'DETESTABLE'.....	16
<b>SECTION 4: LEVITICUS — THE HOLINESS CODE .....</b>	<b>18</b>

<b>4.1 THE TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>4.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>4.3 UNLAWFUL SEXUAL RELATIONS — IN CONTEXT .....</b>	<b>19</b>
4.3.1 LEVITICUS 18:21–23 .....	19
4.3.2 LEVITICUS 20:13 .....	20
<b>4.4 KEY TERMS TO UNDERSTAND .....</b>	<b>20</b>
4.4.1 ABOMINATION — TOEBAH.....	20
4.4.2 QADASH VS. QADESH — TWO VERY DIFFERENT PRIESTS .....	21
4.4.3 'AS A WOMAN' .....	21
<b>4.5 CONCLUSION — SECTION 4.....</b>	<b>21</b>

**SECTION 5: ROMANS — WHAT DOES 'NATURAL' MEAN?.....** **23**

<b>5.1 THE TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>5.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>5.3 PAUL'S POLEMIC AGAINST IDOLATRY .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>5.4 EXAMINING THE TEXT — KEY WORD DEFINITIONS .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>5.5 UNDERSTANDING THE PASSAGE STRUCTURE .....</b>	<b>25</b>
5.5.1 PARALLELISM.....	25
5.5.2 GRAMMAR.....	26
<b>5.6 CONCLUSION — SECTION 5.....</b>	<b>26</b>

**SECTION 6: 1 CORINTHIANS 6:9–10 AND 1 TIMOTHY 1:9–11 .....** **27**

<b>6.1 THE TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>6.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND .....</b>	<b>27</b>
1 CORINTHIANS .....	27
1 TIMOTHY .....	28
<b>6.3 THE LANGUAGE — TWO MISUNDERSTOOD WORDS .....</b>	<b>28</b>
6.3.1 MALAKOS .....	29
6.3.2 ARSEKOKOITES .....	29
<b>6.4 CONCLUSION — SECTION 6.....</b>	<b>30</b>

## Section 1: Introduction

This course examines what the Bible actually says — and does not say — about same sex attraction, gender diversity, and marriage. Before we open a single scripture, it is important to understand what we are setting out to do, how we will do it, and why it matters.

### 1.1 Introduction and Objectives

The objectives of this course are:

- To inform and equip the Body of Christ to properly divide and interpret the Word of God related to faith, gender, and sexuality
- To help identify areas of internalised homophobia born out of traditional teachings and societal stereotyping
- To bring practical — not merely academic — understanding of what the Bible is saying (or not saying) about same sex attraction, gender diversity, and marriage

Our goal: to see communities and families set free from the belief that God condemns, does not love, or seeks to change same sex attracted and/or gender diverse persons.

Our deeper desire is to see same sex attracted and gender diverse persons of faith fully reconciled with their faith — fully equipped in the Word of God and fully empowered through the Spirit of God.

**Personal reflection: What do you hope to gain from this course? What questions are you bringing with you?**

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### 1.2 The Truth Shall Set You Free

Jesus told those who believed in him that the truth would set them free — and that whoever the Son sets free is truly free. Knowing the truth about what Scripture does and does not say is significant.

*"It may take some time to 'de-program' yourself from what so many have been taught by well-intentioned, God-fearing people, many of whom we love dearly. It took a long time for many people to de-program from what they had been taught about the Bible supporting slavery, or beliefs about women, or Christ as Saviour versus the Law of Moses — and now beliefs held about same sex attracted and/or gender diverse persons. The problem with the interpretation of these verses is that they weren't considered in light of the culture of the day in which they were written, or with any historical background taken into consideration."*

Change is a process. This course invites you to:

- Start from the perspective that same sex attraction and gender diversity is not wrong — and then read the Scriptures from that vantage point
- After reading widely and prayerfully, make an educated decision having seen both sides — right now, many of us have only ever heard one
- Invite God into this process — ask the Holy Spirit to remove fear and guide you into truth

The Spirit guides us in all truth. Relax, be open, and let the truth set you free.

## 1.3 A Safe Environment

Melbourne Inclusive Church is committed to maintaining a safe space for all who want to learn and explore. Some important foundations:

<b>What this is</b>	A space for genuine learning, honest questioning, and open exploration of Scripture
<b>What this is NOT</b>	An 'ex-gay' ministry. Our objective is not to make people 'straight' but rather to affirm all people regardless of sexual orientation or gender diversity
<b>Our belief</b>	God loves all of us. God created our innermost beings and knew us before our birth. You are no mistake, and God has a great plan for your life
<b>Our stance</b>	MIC is an affirming church — we believe God created same sex attracted and gender diverse persons as they are, and calls them beloved

*"All the days ordained for you were written before one of them came to be."*

**Psalm 139:16**

## 1.4 Study and Share

We can't give away what we do not possess. MIC plays a key role in sharing God's inclusive love — and few others are doing this work in our community.

*"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger who brings good news, the good news of peace and salvation, the news that the God of Israel reigns!"*

**Isaiah 52:7 (NLT)**

- To share our faith with family, friends, and the wider community, we must be sure of what we believe
- The truth of God's inclusive love serves as a sandwich to the hungry and a cool drink to those who thirst
- Learning this truth is a gift — and being faithful to give it away blesses our community and glorifies God

**Reflection: Who in your life might benefit from what you learn in this course?  
How might you share it?**

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## 1.5 Method — How We Will Study

We will use exegesis as our method of interpreting Scripture throughout this course.

<b>Exegesis means</b>	'To lead out of' — we are led by the text itself
<b>How we apply it</b>	Taking into account the time, culture, and historical background of each passage
<b>What we avoid</b>	Eisegesis — reading our own assumptions into the text
<b>Our standard</b>	2 Timothy 2:15 — 'correctly handling the word of truth'

The Scriptures we will examine are known as the 'clobber passages' — the six passages most commonly used to condemn same sex attracted and gender diverse persons. We will examine each one in context and in the original language wherever possible.

## The Clobber Passages — An Overview

Scripture	Topic / Description
<b>Genesis 19:1–25</b>	Sodom and Gomorrah — the sin of inhospitality and violence
<b>Leviticus 18:19–22</b>	The Holiness Code — abomination in the context of idol worship
<b>Leviticus 20:13–18</b>	The Holiness Code — the same prohibition and its context
<b>Romans 1:24–27</b>	What is 'natural'? Idolatry and pagan worship in Rome
<b>1 Corinthians 6:9</b>	Malakos and arsenokoites — two misunderstood Greek words
<b>1 Timothy 1:10</b>	Arsenokoites revisited — exploitation and cultic prostitution

Most people who have actually studied these passages — whether they began affirming or not — have landed on the same conclusion: 'This didn't say what I thought it said.'

**Before we begin: Write down your current understanding of what the Bible says about same sex attraction. We'll return to this at the end of the course.**

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## Section 2: Homophobia

This section explores how same sex attracted and gender diverse people come to feel ashamed and guilty, and where those feelings originate. We examine the contexts and perceptions that shape our beliefs, look at common homophobic attitudes, explore definitions of homophobia, and consider dialogue as a tool for change.

### 2.1 Contexts That Shape Our Lives

The messages we receive about same sex attracted and gender diverse people come from sources we trust and respect. These shape how we — and others — understand sexuality and identity.

- Key influencers include: parents, pastors, extended family, role models, and peers
- Common language used: 'wrong', 'abnormal', 'perverse'
- Stereotypes and distortions affect everyone — not only people in the rainbow community

**Reflection: What messages did you receive growing up about same sex attracted and/or gender diverse person? Where did those messages come from?**

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### 2.2 Perceptions That Shape Our Beliefs

Before examining Scripture, we must understand how our context influences the conclusions we reach. Homophobia functions like distorted glasses — it alters our view of others and ourselves.

- Homophobia is not limited to heterosexual people — same sex and/or gender diverse persons are also affected, often before they understand their own identity
- Awareness is the first step for allies and for the rainbow community
- When we see ourselves through a distorted lens, we alter the way we believe God views us

## 2.3 Eisegesis vs. Exegesis

Two contrasting approaches to interpreting Scripture underpin how this topic is studied.

Exegesis (our method)	Eisegesis (to avoid)
Led by the text, in context and through original language. Means 'to lead out of'.	Interpreter injects their own ideas. Means 'to lead into'. Lends itself to error and bias.
<i>We agree with the Bible</i>	<i>We force the Bible to agree with us</i>

Key verse: 2 Timothy 2:15 — we are called to correctly handle the word of truth.

A well-known example: Jack Rogers, a Presbyterian minister and PhD scholar, was asked to join a task force investigating ordination for LGBTIQ people. He initially said no. After studying the passages carefully he changed his position entirely, writing:

*"Most Christians have been told at one time or another that the Bible condemns all homosexual relationships. That view is simply incorrect."*

**Jack Rogers — Jesus, the Bible and Homosexuality (2009, p. 66)**

## 2.4 Common Attitudes and Opinions

Many harmful attitudes arise not from careful study but from assumptions, stereotypes, and inherited views. Below are four common examples.

### 2.4.1 Promiscuity

- An exaggerated belief exists that all same sex attracted and/or gender diverse people are sexually promiscuous
- Repeated negative labels become an unquestioned 'standard of truth' even without evidence

### 2.4.2 Compromising Faith

- Some Christians fear that engaging with same sex attracted and/or gender diverse people compromises their faith
- This fear closes the door to understanding and dialogue

### 2.4.3 Derogatory Terms and Stereotypes

- Derogatory terms are often linked to words like 'pervert' or 'sex maniac'
- Some ministers preach negatively, associating same sex attraction and/or gender identity with lust and evil — without proper study
- Media also contributes by labelling crimes by sexual orientation, reinforcing stereotype
- Note: Many in the rainbow community have reclaimed terms like 'queer' in a positive, proud way

### 2.4.4 Other Examples

**'Love the sinner, hate the sin':** This phrase implies orientation is sinful. Our sexual orientation is not sin — Jesus came to save us from sin, not to change who God created us to be.

**'We choose a lifestyle of sin':** Who would choose rejection from family, church, peers, and fewer rights? For most same sex attracted and/or gender diverse persons their orientation is not a choice — God made them who they are.

**Personal reflection: Have you heard or used any of these phrases? What did you mean by them at the time?**

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## 2.5 Impact on Same Sex Attracted and/or Gender Diverse Persons

Repeated negative messages cause lasting harm. When these words come from people we love and respect, the damage runs deep.

- Internalised homophobia: same sex attracted and/or gender diverse people begin to believe the negative things spoken about them
- The longing for acceptance can lead to depression, substance use, and self-harm
- Suicide rates among rainbow youth are significantly elevated — many attempts and completions are linked to rejection and shame

## 2.6 Definitions of Homophobia

There are four interrelated types of homophobia. Understanding them helps us examine our own attitudes — and helps us support others.

### 2.6.1 Personal (Internalised) Homophobia

- A personal belief that same sex attracted and/or gender diverse persons are sinful, inferior, sick, or incomplete
- Experienced as fear, discomfort, dislike, or disgust
- When this occurs within us it is called internalised homophobia
- Very common in people who have not come out, and in same sex attracted and/or gender diverse people of faith who feel they are 'less than' in God's eyes

### 2.6.2 Interpersonal Homophobia

- Individual behaviour based on personal homophobia
- Expressed through name-calling, 'jokes', harassment, and in extreme cases, physical violence
- Passive forms: relatives who shun, friends who are cold or disinterested

### 2.6.3 Institutional Homophobia

- How government, businesses, churches, and other institutions discriminate based on sexual orientation/gender identity
- Includes: stated policies excluding same sex attracted and/or gender diverse persons; refusal of ministry roles; denying rights (including marriage)
- Also known as heterosexism

### 2.6.4 Cultural Homophobia

- Social standards that say heterosexuality is the norm or is morally superior
- Reflected in media where virtually all characters, relationships, and assumptions are heterosexual
- Things are improving: more representation of same sex attracted and/or gender diverse people in media and society is shifting norms

**Reflection: Which of these four types of homophobia have you witnessed — or experienced — in your own life?**

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## 2.7 Dialogue Dignifies — Debate Divides

Most progress in acceptance has come through relationship and story-sharing. Dialogue is our primary tool for navigating diversity with dignity.

<b>2.7.1 Dialogue as a Preferred Method</b>	Used as a life-enhancing alternative to debate, argument, apathy, or rejection. An attitude toward life and a life skill.
<b>2.7.2 Dialogue as a Choice</b>	Understanding the difference between dialogue and debate empowers us to recognise which we are in — and to choose dialogue.
<b>2.7.3 Dialogue Needs a Safe Space</b>	A safe space is where we are internally and externally protected to reveal who we are and what we think and feel.
<b>2.7.4 Dialogue Calls for Specific Skills</b>	Active listening and constructive conflict management are essential. Authenticity and compassion are foundational.
<b>2.7.5 Dialogue Needs Stories Not Theology</b>	People sharing their journeys creates real connection and brings relationships to a place of acceptance — or at minimum, respect.
<b>2.7.6 Dialogue Requires Integration and Support</b>	Dialogue must be practised consistently as an alternative to debate, starting with knowledge and a commitment to the process.
<b>2.7.7 The Dialogue Process</b>	Awareness of diversity → safe conversations → understanding → alliances → agents of change for an inclusive life for all.

## Section 3: Genesis — Sodom and Gomorrah

This section examines the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19, traditionally used to condemn homosexuality. Using exegesis, we look at the historical context, the original language, and the broader witness of Scripture to determine what this text is actually about.

### Key Scripture: Genesis 19:1–25

#### Key Words

<b>Abomination</b>	<b>Sodomite</b>
<b>ish (Hebrew: mortals)</b>	<b>Detestable</b>
<b>Prostitute</b>	<b>Yada (to know)</b>
<b>Sodomy</b>	

### 3.1 The Traditional Interpretation

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah has traditionally been interpreted as God's punishment for the sin of homosexuality.

**What have you heard or been taught about this passage? Write your prior understanding here before we examine the text.**

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### 3.2 Observations: What the Text Actually Shows

#### 3.2.1 Sodom and Gomorrah Were Already Doomed

God had already decreed judgement on these cities before the incident in Genesis 19. In Genesis 18, God speaks to Abraham about the 'outcry' against Sodom and Gomorrah — and Abraham intercedes:

##### **Point to Ponder**

*God said that for the sake of ten righteous people he would not destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Does this mean that all but ten people in the city were homosexual?*

### 3.2.2 The Law of Hospitality

In the ancient Near East, hospitality to strangers was a sacred obligation — sometimes a matter of life or death. Once someone entered your home, you were bound to protect them.

- This explains why Lot offered his daughters (v. 8) — an extreme but culturally recognised act to protect his guests under his roof
- Jesus directly referenced this law of hospitality in Matthew 10:5–15, warning that towns that reject God's messengers will be worse off than Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgement

### 3.2.3 Lot Was a Foreigner in Post-War Sodom

- Lot was not originally from Sodom (Genesis 13)
- In Genesis 14, Sodom had gone to war — people and goods were lost, and Lot was taken captive before being rescued by Abram
- After war, there was intense suspicion of outsiders — the crowd's hostility toward Lot inviting strangers reflects this political context (v. 9: 'This fellow came here as a foreigner, and now he wants to play the judge!')

### 3.2.5 Violent Acts — Domination, Not Orientation

- Forced sexual acts against men were used as demonstrations of power and dominance in this era — particularly with prisoners of war
- This is not sexual gratification in many cases, but a display of control
- We see this same pattern in Judges 19 — a nearly identical story involving a man travelling with his concubine, where a mob demands the stranger be brought out for the same purpose

## 3.3 Reading the Text in Context

### 3.3.1 'All the Men of the City'

- Verse 4 says 'all the men from every part of the city' surrounded the house
- The Hebrew word is *ish* (Strong's 376) — it can mean mortals (male or female)
- No city in history has been 100% homosexual — the crowd is more consistent with a mob driven by suspicion and territorial aggression than by sexual desire

### 3.3.2 To 'Know' — The Word *Yada*

- The Hebrew word in verse 5 ('know') is *yada* — meaning 'to have thorough knowledge of'
- Sexual meaning of *yada* is rarely used to describe sexual intercourse — appearing sexually in only 10 out of 943 uses
- Even if sexual here, it would indicate rape, not consensual same-sex relationships.

### 3.3.3 Lot Offers His Daughters

If Lot believed the crowd was seeking homosexual sex, why would he offer his daughters? This detail makes far more sense if he understood the mob's intent as aggression or interrogation, not homosexual desire.

### 3.3.4 Does Not Agree with Other Scriptures

Proper exegesis requires consistency with the rest of Scripture. Jesus' own reference to Sodom (Matthew 10:14–15) links the city's sin to a failure of hospitality — not sexuality.

## 3.4 The Word 'Sodomy'

A sodomite was originally simply a person from Sodom.

- The Hebrew word for male cult prostitute is Qadesh — this word has been mistranslated in some Bible versions as 'sodomite'
- 'Sodomy' is a modern word, and its use as a legal or moral category is not derived from the Genesis narrative in the way commonly assumed
- Qadesh specifically means male cult prostitute — a religious function, not a sexuality category

## 3.5 The Actual Sin of Sodom

What was the sin of Sodom? The Bible itself answers this question clearly.

*Ezekiel 16:49–50 — 'Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore, I did away with them as you have seen.'*

### 3.5.1 The Word 'Detestable'

- 'Detestable' (also translated 'abomination') is the Hebrew word *toebah* (Strong's 8441)
- *toebah* refers to the worship of idols or idolatrous practice
- Sodom's sins were injustice, selfishness, and idolatry — not consensual homosexuality

Traditional View	Exegetical Reading
Sodom destroyed because of homosexuality	Sodom destroyed for injustice, arrogance, inhospitality, and idolatry (Ezekiel 16:49–50)
The crowd sought consensual homosexual sex	The crowd's intent was violent domination, tied to war-context suspicion and mob aggression
'Sodomy' equals homosexual sin	'Sodomite' = person from Sodom; original Hebrew Qadesh = male cult prostitute — a religious role, not a sexuality

**Discussion question: Having examined this passage more closely, how does your understanding of Sodom and Gomorrah compare to what you were taught before? What stands out most?**

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## Section 4: Leviticus — The Holiness Code

The book of Leviticus contains a collection of laws known as the Holiness Code, built around God's command: 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy' (Leviticus 19:2). Two verses in particular — Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 — are frequently used to condemn homosexuality. This section examines them in their historical, cultural, and linguistic context.

### Key Scriptures: Leviticus 18:21–23 and Leviticus 20:13

#### Key Words

Levite	Holy
Apis (Egyptian god)	Molech / Moloch
Abomination	Qadash (holy priest)
Qadesh (cult prostitute)	Ishtar / Asherah
Toebah (idolatry)	Detestable

### 4.1 The Traditional Interpretation

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 are perhaps the most commonly cited verses used to condemn homosexuality, and are among the most misunderstood when read literally and applied to modern culture.

**What have you heard or been taught about these verses? Write your prior understanding here.**

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## 4.2 Historical Background

To understand what God is addressing in these passages, we must understand the world in which they were written.

The Book of Leviticus is the third book of Moses, part of the Pentateuch. It is divided into four parts:

- The Offerings (1:1–7:38)
- The Priesthood (8:1–10:20)
- Cleanness and Uncleanness (11:1–16:34)
- The Holiness Code (17:1–27:34) — our focus

The context of Israel at this time is critical:

- The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt and were preparing to enter the Promised Land
- They needed cohesiveness, cleanliness, and order to survive as a nation
- Their neighbours practiced sacrificial worship involving sexual rituals, fertility rites, and temple prostitution
- God's instruction in Leviticus 18:1–4 is direct: 'Do not do as they do in Egypt... do not do as they do in Canaan'

The Holiness Code was God's means of protecting Israel's identity, worship, and covenant relationship — setting them apart from the idolatrous nations around them.

## 4.3 Unlawful Sexual Relations — In Context

One of the gods of Egypt was Apis — a fertility god represented by a bull. Worship of Apis included sexual acts with priests and priestesses, believed to produce fruitfulness in the land and in childbearing. Exodus 32 shows us how easily the Israelites were drawn into idol worship — even while Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments.

In Leviticus, the focus shifts to Molek (also Moloch) — a god worshipped in Egypt and Canaan whose worship included child sacrifice and sexual prostitution by male priests.

### 4.3.1 Leviticus 18:21–23

“21 “Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molek, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the Lord. 22 “Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable. 23 “Do not have sexual relations with an animal and defile yourself with it. A woman must not present herself to an animal to have sexual relations with it; that is a perversion.”

### Point to Ponder

*Do we believe verse 21 and verse 22 are connected? If so, what is God condemning — a loving same-sex relationship, or sexual acts performed as idol worship?*

- Verse 21 condemns child sacrifice to Molek
- Verse 22 immediately follows — in context, the prohibition relates to the sexual acts performed within Molek worship
- The passage is part of a wider command not to live like the Canaanites

### 4.3.2 Leviticus 20:13

'If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.'

- Like 18:22, the word 'detestable' (abomination) is the Hebrew word *toebah* — which most always refers to idolatry
- The death penalty reflects the severity of idolatry and pagan worship — not a condemnation of same-sex orientation
- For 21st century readers, talking about people worshipping false gods sexually seems foreign — but this was the lived reality of Israel's neighbours

## 4.4 Key Terms to Understand

### 4.4.1 Abomination — *Toebah*

The word 'abomination' in both passages is the Hebrew word *toebah* (Strong's 8441): meaning 'something disgusting; an abhorrence; especially idolatry or an idol'.

Scripture	Usage of <i>Toebah</i>	What It Refers To
<b>Deuteronomy 7:25–26</b>	'Graven images of their gods... it is an abomination to the LORD'	Idol worship
<b>Jeremiah 2:7, 11</b>	'You defiled my land and made mine heritage an abomination'	Turning from God to idols
<b>Malachi 2:11</b>	'An abomination is committed in Israel... married the daughter of a strange god'	Idolatry / false worship
<b>Leviticus 18:22 &amp; 20:13</b>	Sexual acts 'as detestable/abomination'	Cultic idol worship practices

## 4.4.2 Qadash vs. Qadesh — Two Very Different Priests

Qadash (Strong's 6942)	Qadesh (Strong's 6945)
God's holy priest — set apart for Yahweh	A 'sacred' person — a male devotee by prostitution to licentious idolatry
Meaning: to be clean, consecrated, holy	Meaning: a male cult prostitute
Called to holiness and service to God	Served pagan deities through sexual rituals
Deuteronomy 23:17–18 forbids the Qadesh from Israel	Called 'sodomite' in some translations — but the original word is Qadesh

## 4.4.3 'As a Woman'

Why is only this particular relationship — lying with a man 'as with a woman' — singled out as idolatrous?

- Male priests (qadeshim) in Babylonian and Assyrian cults associated with the goddess Ishtar (also Asherah among Canaanites) would adopt female attire and in some cases become eunuchs as part of their service
- 'As a woman' was not a matter of personal preference or orientation — it was a cultural and religious signifier: uniting oneself with a pagan deity
- Other scholars note that women held lower status and were sexually dominated — lying with a man 'as with a woman' may also refer to the abusive, controlling manner in which men treated male temple prostitutes.

## 4.5 Conclusion — Section 4

Galatians 3:23–25 reminds us that the law was our guardian until Christ came, and we are no longer under it. However, understanding these passages matters — because they are still being used to condemn same sex attracted and gender diverse people.

Traditional Interpretation	Exegetical Reading
Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 condemn all same-sex relationships	These verses prohibit participation in pagan idol worship — specifically the sexual acts performed as part of Molek and Canaanite cult rituals
'Abomination' indicates moral sin	'Abomination' (toebah) always refers to idolatry in the OT — not sexual orientation
'As a woman' describes any male same-sex act	'As a woman' refers to cultic priests who adopted female roles as a form of pagan worship

These laws apply universally across time

These laws addressed a specific threat to Israel's survival and covenant identity — they are not condemnations of loving same-sex relationships

**Discussion question: How does understanding the context of idol worship in the ancient Near East change your reading of these passages?**

*Notes:*

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## Section 5: Romans — What Does 'Natural' Mean?

Romans is Paul's theological masterpiece on the grace of God. But he begins by describing those who have rejected God and turned to idolatry. Romans 1:26–27 is frequently cited as a condemnation of homosexuality. Examined carefully, it tells a very different story.

### Key Scripture: Romans 1:18–31

#### Key Words and Phrases

<b>Natural (phusikos)</b>	<b>Lust (atimia — dishonour)</b>
<b>Shameful (pathos — passion)</b>	<b>Within themselves</b>
<b>Allasso (they exchanged)</b>	<b>Metallasso (they exchanged — variant)</b>
<b>Paradidomi (God gave them over)</b>	<b>Sebazomai (cultic worship)</b>

### 5.1 The Traditional Interpretation

**What have you heard or been taught about this passage? Why do you feel it speaks about homosexuality?**

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The traditional interpretation holds that Paul's mention of women having sex with women, and men with men, refers to same-sex attracted people in loving relationships — and that this 'goes against nature'. This reading typically comes from those who have not encountered a loving Christian same-sex couple, or who have not studied the passage in depth.

### 5.2 Historical Background

- Paul's letter to Rome was written from Corinth, approximately 54–59 AD
- Rome had officially adopted the eastern cult of Cybele — a Syrian goddess known as Aphrodite in much of the Greco-Roman world, associated with idolatry, sexual rituals, fertility rites, and temple prostitution
- Jewish and Gentile Christians were in tension over the observance of Jewish law
- Many Christians had returned to paganism, making images of gods for religious rituals

## 5.3 Paul's Polemic Against Idolatry

The verses immediately before the key passage (Romans 1:22–25) make Paul's subject clear — he is writing about idolatry, not about sexual orientation.

- Verse 22–23: people 'exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles'
- Verse 25: 'They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator'
- The Greek word for worship in verse 25 — sebazomai (Strong's G4573) — is used only once in the New Testament and specifically refers to cultic or pagan worship

### Point to Ponder

*Verses 24 and 26 both begin with 'therefore' and 'because of this' — meaning Paul is drawing a conclusion from what he has already described. What has he been describing? Idolatry.*

## 5.4 Examining the Text — Key Word Definitions

The words Paul uses tell us specifically who he is describing and why.

Greek Word	Traditional Translation	Actual Meaning
<b>Atimia (G819)</b>	Lust	Dishonour, disrespect, common use
<b>Pathos (G3806)</b>	Shameful	Passion; lustful passion or desire; sexual passion
<b>Phusikos (G5446)</b>	Natural	According to nature; governed by mere natural instincts — i.e. what is common or characteristic for a person

The word 'natural' (phusikos) does not mean a universal law. It refers to what is characteristic or innate for a given person or group. This is crucial:

- Paul is describing heterosexual women and men who 'exchanged' or 'turned against' their natural (innate heterosexual) orientation to engage in same-sex acts as part of pagan worship
- He is not describing people with a same-sex orientation living according to their nature
- For heterosexual people, same-sex acts would be 'unnatural' — going against their innate disposition. The reverse is equally true

**Paul's own use of 'against nature' elsewhere:** In Romans 11 Paul uses 'against nature' to describe God grafting Gentile believers into the Jewish olive tree. This is not morally evil — it is simply unusual or uncommon.

**1 Corinthians 11:14:** Paul says 'nature teaches us that long hair dishonours a man' — yet Samson had long hair as a Nazarite. 'Nature' here means social norm, not divine law.

'Within themselves the penalty they deserved' (v. 27) most likely refers to the physical consequence of castration and emasculation, which male priests of Cybele performed as part of their pagan rites — not a general condemnation.

**Discussion questions: What is your natural disposition? What does it mean to 'go against nature'? Are we talking about innate inclinations, or anatomy?**

*Notes:*

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## 5.5 Understanding the Passage Structure

### 5.5.1 Parallelism

Parallelism — repeating a thought in different ways for emphasis — is extremely common in Hebraic and Greek literature. Paul structures Romans 1:23–31 in three parallel units, each using the same pattern:

Passage	They Exchanged (metallasso)	This Led To	God Gave Them Over To (paradidomi)
v. 23–24	God's glory	Idolatrous worship. Images of animals and men to worship	Sinful desires / sexual impurity / degrading their bodies
v. 25–26a	God's truth for a lie	Worshipping created things	Shameful lusts
v. 26b–31	Natural relations for unnatural	Stop believing in God (v. 28a)	A depraved mind / doing evil things (v. 28b–31)

- In the first two parallels, the exchange is clearly idolatrous — worshipping images and created things

- Following the parallelism, the third parallel similarly describes cultic idolatry — not consensual same-sex relationships
- The primary focus is Gentiles who stop worshipping God and substitute idol worship

### 5.5.2 Grammar

Within each parallel, it is not the exchange itself that causes God to give them over — it is the action that results from the exchange. In the third parallel (v. 26b–31):

- The exchange: natural relations for unnatural
- The resulting action: they did not think it worthwhile to retain knowledge of God (v. 28)
- The consequence: God gave them over to a depraved mind

The cultic sexual behaviour was part of the process of rejecting God through idol worship — not a standalone condemnation of same-sex intimacy.

## 5.6 Conclusion — Section 5

Proper hermeneutics requires us to ask: Is there any reasonable similarity between the context Paul describes and the world today?

Traditional Interpretation	Exegetical Reading
Refers to all same-sex relationships	Refers to all people engaging in same-sex acts as pagan religious ritual
'Natural' means biologically male-female	'Natural' (phusikos) means what is innate and characteristic for a given person
Condemnation of same-sex attraction	Condemnation of idolatry — specifically Roman cult worship associated with Cybele
'Within themselves' = general moral punishment	'Within themselves' likely refers to castration practiced in Cybele cult worship

**Final reflection: How does your sexuality affect your relationship with God? Does your sexuality bring you closer to God, or does it lead you away from belief?**

*Notes:*

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## Section 6: 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 and 1 Timothy 1:9–11

Two Greek words — malakos and arsenokoites — have been translated in modern Bibles as 'homosexual', leading to the conclusion that Paul condemns all same-sex relationships. A closer look at the original language, the cities Paul was writing to, and the context of his ministry reveals something very different.

### Key Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 and 1 Timothy 1:9–11

#### Key Words

<b>Malakos (soft / effeminate)</b>	<b>Arsenkoites (coined by Paul)</b>
<b>Pornos (male prostitute)</b>	<b>Andrapodistes (slave trader)</b>
<b>Catamite (boy kept for prostitution)</b>	

### 6.1 The Traditional Interpretation

Modern translations have taken significant license in these passages, translating two distinct Greek words carelessly into a single word — 'homosexual' — and thereby condemning loving same sex relationships. This has been done without full knowledge of what these words meant in the original Greek.

### 6.2 Historical Background

#### 1 Corinthians

<b>Author</b>	Paul
<b>Written to</b>	The church in Corinth
<b>Purpose</b>	To address problems in the church and teach believers how to live for Christ in a corrupt, pagan society — many new believers were blending in with pagan worship practices
<b>Date</b>	About AD 55, near the end of Paul's three-year ministry in Ephesus
<b>Setting</b>	Corinth was a major cosmopolitan city, a seaport and trade centre — filled with idolatry. The church was largely Gentile. Two main gods worshipped: Poseidon and Aphrodite (also known as Cybele, Astarte, Ishtar). The temple of Aphrodite had 1,000 female slave prostitutes.

## 1 Timothy

<b>Author</b>	Paul
<b>Written to</b>	Timothy — one of Paul's closest companions
<b>Purpose</b>	To give encouragement and instruction to Timothy, a young leader facing false teaching at Ephesus
<b>Date</b>	About AD 64, from Rome
<b>Setting</b>	Timothy was pastor of the church at Ephesus. The main goddess worshipped in Ephesus was Artemis / Diana — worshipped in 33 known locations, with her chief temple in Ephesus. Her priests were castrated and/or transvestite male priests serving the pagan goddess.

### 6.3 The Language — Two Misunderstood Words

English Translation	Greek Word	Actual Meaning in Greek
<b>Male prostitutes / Effeminate</b>	Malakos (G3120)	Soft; soft to the touch. Used of clothing. Metaphorically: effeminate; a catamite (boy kept for prostitution); a male who submits his body to unnatural lewdness; male prostitute
<b>Homosexual offenders / Perverts</b>	Arsenokoites (G733) Coined by Paul from arsen (male) + koite (bed).	Refers to men who lay with cultic male priests as part of idol worship. Not found in Greek literature before Paul.
<b>Sexually immoral</b>	Pornos (G4205)	A man who prostitutes his body; a male prostitute; a man who indulges in unlawful sexual intercourse for hire
<b>Slave traders</b>	Andrapodistes (G405)	A person who enslaves others — procurers of people for sexual exploitation

### 6.3.1 Malakos

- The NIV translates malakos as 'male prostitute'; the KJV uses 'effeminate'
- Malakos can simply mean effeminate — it was used of heterosexual men as well as homosexual men by ancient writers
- It includes the meaning of catamite — boys or young men kept as slaves for sexual purposes, common in the Greco-Roman world
- Jesus himself used malakos in Matthew 11:7–9, contrasting those wearing 'fine clothes' in kings' palaces with John the Baptist as a true prophet of God

Jesus' use of malakos most likely refers to man-made eunuchs — a known role in both pagan cult religion and royal courts. Jesus explicitly distinguished natural-born eunuchs from those 'made eunuchs by others' in Matthew 19:12, and would have been aware of Herod's high-ranking eunuchs.

#### Point to Ponder

*If malakos referred primarily to male cult prostitutes and eunuchs associated with pagan worship — not to gay men in loving relationships — how does that change your reading of 1 Corinthians 6:9?*

### 6.3.2 Arsenokoites

- Paul coined this word — it does not appear in any Greek literature prior to Paul's writings
- It is formed from arsen (male) + koite (bed) — taken directly from the Septuagint's Greek translation of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

Comparison of the Septuagint translations:

- Leviticus 18:22: 'kai meta arsenos ou koimethese koiten gynaikos'
- Leviticus 20:13: 'kai hos an koimethe meta arsenos koiten gynaikos'

Paul coined arsenokoites to tell Greek-speaking Gentiles that the same pagan sexual worship practices condemned in Leviticus were still not acceptable. He was addressing men who paid for sex with male cult priests in temples — not people in loving same-sex relationships.

In 1 Timothy, arsenokoites appears alongside pornos (male prostitutes) and andrapodistes (slave traders who procured people for sex). This context strongly suggests a cluster of exploitation-related behaviours:

### Point to Ponder

*A suggested reading of 1 Timothy 1:10: 'It is as if Paul were saying: male prostitutes, men who sleep with them, and slave dealers who procure them.'*

Over time, the meaning of arsenokoites evolved — by 200–300 years after Paul, it had come to describe those who paid for sex outside the cultic context. But Paul's original usage was clearly tied to pagan idol worship, consistent with his use of Leviticus.

## 6.4 Conclusion — Section 6

Both malakos and arsenokoites — in their original context — relate to cultic worship practices, prostitution, and the exploitation of people, not to consensual loving relationships between same-sex couples.

Traditional Interpretation	Exegetical Reading
Malakos and arsenokoites = homosexuality condemned universally	Both words relate to male cult prostitution, sexual exploitation, and pagan idol worship — not sexual orientation
Paul condemns same-sex relationships in principle	Paul condemns the same idolatrous sexual practices addressed in Leviticus — now appearing in Corinth and Ephesus
'Homosexual offender' is a valid translation of arsenokoites	Arsenokoites was coined by Paul from Leviticus and had no prior usage — modern translations imposing 'homosexual' read a concept that did not exist in Paul's day
These passages apply to all same-sex relationships	These passages address exploitation, coercion, and idol worship — not loving, committed same-sex partnerships

**Final reflection: Having studied all six passages in their original context, what has changed in your understanding? What questions remain?**

*Notes:*

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