

**THE BIBLE**

**AND  
HOMOSEXUALITY**



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## Inclusive & Affirming Ministries

By the Grace of God I am what I am

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# Foreword

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu



My dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

All churches today are finding themselves grappling with questions and challenges around issues of human sexuality. These are matters which will not go away, and we must respond to them prayerfully and with loving hearts.

There are devout members in all congregations who are gay and lesbian in their orientation, and who belong to the Body of Christ and want to be supported and affirmed in their committed and faithful relationships. This poses a genuine challenge to traditional understandings and assumptions about the true meaning and message of the Scriptures. We are all being required to return afresh to the question: how does God intend us to approach and interpret the Bible in order to discern his will in this matter?

We do not have all the answers to all the questions surrounding right or wrong expressions of God's gift of our sexuality. While there is a considerable literature on the issue of homosexuality and the Bible, there is nevertheless a lack of material which expresses the biblical exegesis and hermeneutics of gay Christians themselves in an easily accessible and readable way.

This booklet fills this gap admirably and offers an opportunity for the rest of the Body of Christ to hear fellow brothers and sisters' journey with the Bible and their witness to what the Holy Spirit is saying.

I trust that you will read this booklet with a mind and heart open to the Holy Spirit, in the knowledge that the issues around sexual orientation and biblical interpretation are not merely academic, but touch us all in a deeply personal way. It is a time for healing. Too many of our people have been hurt and traumatised - treated as outcasts - because of the way the Bible has been interpreted - misinterpreted!

Negative and rejecting attitudes towards gays and lesbians can have no place in our congregations, let alone in the community. Such prejudice is akin to racism, and we need to struggle against this with the same dedication and fervour with which we fought against the injustices of apartheid. In this way we will witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and be a means of healing and reconciliation.

I commend this booklet for your prayerful and thoughtful reflection.



# What Does the Bible Say about Homosexuality?



*IAM (Inclusive and Affirming Ministries) contextually engages with faith communities in Africa in order to transform them to become open and welcoming to all. This booklet critically examines how different approaches to Bible study can influence our understanding of the eight passages that refer in some way to same-sex practices.*

There are eight passages in the Bible which refer directly or indirectly to homosexuality:

- The Creation story as narrated in Genesis 1–3,
  - The Sodom narrative in Genesis 19: 1–26,
  - Judges 19,
  - Leviticus 18:22,
  - Leviticus 20:13,
  - Romans 1:26–27,
  - 1 Corinthians 6:9–10,
  - 1 Timothy 1:10.
- Deuteronomy 22:22: The punishment for adultery was to stone both man and woman to death.
  - Leviticus 18:19, 29: Having intercourse with a woman who is menstruating, could lead to excommunication.
  - Deuteronomy 22:5: Women were explicitly forbidden to wear men’s clothing.
  - Deuteronomy 23:19: It was wrong to lend money at interest to a fellow Israelite.
  - 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 and 1 Timothy 2:11–12 forbade women to speak in the congregation, and yet most denominations nowadays have accepted women in the ministry.

According to some Christians these passages of Scripture are crystal clear and they think the Bible literally condemns homosexuality as a sin.

However, this kind of literal reading of the Bible creates problems. If you read these passages literally, what about the Bible verses that nobody reads literally any longer? For example:

It is very clear that one cannot read the Bible literally. One cannot randomly choose isolated verses as if they represent God’s command to us today. We must interpret and understand the Bible, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, within the Biblical context as well as our own context. The big challenge therefore is: *How do we read the Bible, inspired by the Holy Spirit?*

# Interpretation of the Bible

It is the Holy Spirit that helps us to experience, believe and confess the Bible to be the inspired *Word of God*. But what does this expression mean? Some people understand this *literally* and for them the Bible is ‘God’s Word’ because God personally dictated every letter and word.

Others believe that the Holy Spirit inspired the authors of the Bible to write about God’s great deeds using their *own* language, culture, idiom and experiences. Therefore we can only understand the Bible, not literally, but *within context*.

*How* the Bible is inspired by God (Inspiration theory) is one of the biggest points of contention in debates about homosexuality.

For a responsible interpretation of the Bible, one has to respect the Bible as the inspired Word of God. A very important aspect of this respect is not to force your own preferences or prejudices into your reading of God’s Word, but to take the Bible’s intended nature and purpose very seriously.

*“...the wonderful mystery is that God speaks to us, not in a mysterious oracle-like<sup>1</sup> manner, but through a book that **was written by people in human language** and with the intention that it should be understood by humans according to the normal rules of understanding human language.”* (Prof. W. D. Jonker)

According to Jonker this demands that *we take care and effort* to understand the *true*

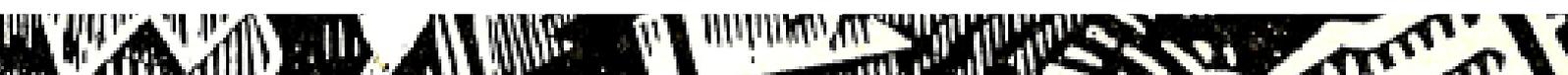
*meaning* when we try to interpret and understand Biblical texts or words. This can only happen if we remember and apply certain important rules of interpretation.

1. Firstly, we need to do everything possible to understand the *original intention* of the author and the meaning of the words that were used. To do this, we need to understand the *cultural context* of the times in which the various authors lived. In this way we will come to understand the unique circumstances in which they lived and wrote, the different literary styles that they used and the people to whom they addressed their writings.

2. Secondly, we have to understand the *context of the text* – where and how the specific verse fits into a bigger passage or chapter, and more specifically into the overall message of the Bible. A vital question is: “What is the function and place in the Bible of the so-called legal chapters (Deuteronomy and Leviticus)?” It is generally accepted that throughout history shifts in culture occurred that caused the validity of certain prescriptions to disappear for later generations. Similarly, the teachings of Christ often challenged his disciples to go deeper, and resulted in a change of understanding of obedience to the Old Testament. One should take this into account when discerning the meaning of the verses that deal with homosexuality, as well as any other important matters.

3. Thirdly, the verses should also be read *within the context of today*, (the *contemporary context* of the reader). This means

<sup>1</sup> “Oracle”: When the Greek God Zeus spoke, he used only the vocal cords of the prophetess – he spoke directly through her voice.



that the Word be understandable, credible, actual, prophetic and bear witness to the current situation. To achieve this the reader should know and understand his/her own context and the issues at hand. With regard to homosexuality, it implies

knowing about recent scientific research, the ongoing debate within the Church and society, and the various viewpoints on the issue; and having the courage to discern what is right in light of the broader teachings of the Gospel.

## Some cautions when reading the Bible

More than ever Christians need to be humble and acknowledge the many potholes they can stumble into when interpreting the Bible to find answers for pressing issues of our times. Especially with regard to the issue of homosexuality, there is a growing consensus that there are *explicit dangers in reading the Bible* which need to be avoided.

1. One of the dangers normally associated with traditionalism or fundamentalism is to isolate specific verses from their broader meaning or context, to read them *literally* (as discrete words) and then to regard them as eternal and unchanging norms for your own life. A good example is the way in which women were forced for centuries to wear hats or other head coverings in Church (1 Cor. 11:5). The same has been happening with the verses that refer to homosexual deeds. (See Lev. 18:22; Rom. 1:26-27 and 1 Cor. 6:9). The churches have taken these verses and interpreted them literally, then taken them

as eternal absolute norms for all time. Today most Biblical scholars agree that these verses were primarily aimed against sexual *perversions* like temple prostitution and pederasty that were practised by the neighbouring heathen cultures. As such, many heterosexual men were guilty of these 'homosexual perverted deeds'.

2. Another danger is the *inconsistent application of the literal method*. This happens when the reader regards certain verses as eternal, authoritative truths while totally ignoring verses similar in context, style, etc. For example, some Christians read Leviticus 18:22 literally – “You may not lay with another man as with a woman, it is an abomination” – and use it as an argument against all gay people; while on the other hand, verses like those listed at the beginning of this chapter are largely ignored. Such a use of Scripture reflects a double standard.

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*The words ‘gay person’ and ‘homosexuality’ did not exist in the original languages of the Bible.*

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3. A third danger is to use the texts as *proof of your own point of view*. No text 'speaks' on its own. Anytime we read a text of any kind, our own opinions, values, experiences and prejudices influence what we read into it. If we want to apply the texts about homosexuality today, we must honestly ask ourselves:

- Do I have enough knowledge about homosexuality and what it means to be gay?
- What prejudices do I carry with me into the Bible?
- Where and how did I acquire my knowledge about homosexuality: from stereotypes, via the media, or from first-hand knowledge?
- Do I know enough to form an informed and respectful opinion, which I bring into my reading of the Bible?

4. A fourth danger is the temptation of the *translators of the Bible* to let their lack of knowledge, prejudice and misconceptions play a role in new translations of the original Biblical text. For example, *the words 'gay person' and 'homosexuality' did not exist*

*in the original languages of the Bible*. The term '*homosexuality*' originated only late in the nineteenth century. The Old Testament word '*qadesh*', which is translated in the modern Bible as '*homosexual*', did not mean the same as the modern understanding of what being gay or homosexual means. It is generally accepted that it referred to certain homosexual behaviour, associated with the idolatry of heathen temple prostitution as it was practised in Biblical times. So we can see that even the seemingly harmless process of Bible translation is not exempt from human error of prejudice or lack of knowledge.

5. The last danger is that of *moralism and prescriptiveness*, where the reader regresses back to legalism and falls back under the yoke of the law, thereby forgetting the 'Greatest law of all – *love*', and thus rejecting the grace and mercy of God. One also easily falls prey to the temptation to categorise certain sins (usually sexual ones) as worse than others (such as the sin of judgement itself, which Jesus condemns many times in His teachings).

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*It is generally accepted that 'qadesh' referred to certain homosexual behaviour, associated with the idolatry of heathen temple prostitution as it was practised in Biblical times.*

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## The core message of the Bible and the role of the Holy Spirit

The fact that the Bible did not fall from the sky, but that it is a historical book written by people in human language, does not minimise it as a reliable source for our faith. The central message that is woven right through the Scriptures is that *God became human* and lived amongst us – that Jesus is the Saviour of the World and also of me. This we can believe, but in order to believe it, the Holy Spirit must touch and convince us. Not every verse carries the same weight for the Church. The Bible should be read as the Word of God from the *viewpoint of this core message of the grace and love of God towards all of humankind, as we all fall short.*

The authority of the Bible therefore only functions “in relationship between God, a human being and Scripture”. Does this

mean, then, that I cannot claim: “But it is written in the Bible”? Indeed – one can never use the Bible like that and quote verses out of context, especially not as ammunition against one’s neighbour.

All these dangers remind us of the importance of interpreting the Bible responsibly when we discern the will of God regarding homosexuality, as well as other modern issues. What is required is to respect the authentic nature of the Bible and always to keep in mind the golden thread of this unique Book – God’s grace and mercy offered us through Jesus Christ. Individual verses and instructions, including those that refer to homosexuality, can only be understood from the context of this central theme.

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*... gay orientation is much more than just sexual practices, while people with heterosexual orientation, driven by pure lust or other passions [which is what the Bible condemns], can also engage in homosexual practices.*

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## The 8 Bible verses

Most modern theologians agree that there are eight passages in Scripture that refer directly or indirectly to homosexual practices – but not to homosexuality as defined today.

What is the difference between: 'homosexuality as we know it today' and 'homosexual practices'?

As mentioned before, the term 'homosexual' only originated in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The term 'gay orientation' is even more recent. Homosexuality as an orientation determines the essence of someone's emotional, psychological, romantic and physical nature. When the Bible refers to homosexuality it normally describes *sexual practices*, and especially lust between people of the same gender. On the one hand, gay orientation is much

more than just sexual practices, while on the other hand, people with heterosexual orientation, driven by pure lust or other passions, can also engage in homosexual practices.

The Bible also condemns certain heterosexual *practices* (rape, adultery, etc.) without condemning heterosexuality as such. Clearly those verses do not represent 'the Biblical viewpoint about heterosexuality.'

The same applies for the verses about homosexual practices. The eight passages in Scripture do not represent 'the Biblical viewpoint about homosexuality.' The eight passages are not a worked-out homosexual 'theory' or 'viewpoint' and, according to most scholars, these verses have absolutely nothing in common with the experience and nature of a gay Christian.

## What do the 8 passages in Scripture say?

### A. *The Creation narrative of Genesis 1–3*

Although they have no explicit reference to homosexuality, most scholars agree that the creation stories in Genesis 1–3 (specifically Gen 1:26–27 and 2:24) are very important for discussions about homosexuality. The so-called creation order or the 'natural order of things' as God created it, as told in Genesis, has for a long time been one of the important pillars for ethical discernment in the Christian Church.

It is on the basis of this order that for many people homosexuality is totally unacceptable because it is – according to them – 'unnatural': it is against the natural order that God created. We therefore need to discuss some of the questions around this issue.

It is generally accepted in modern theology that there are *two* creation stories in Genesis 1–3. The first (Gen 1:1–2:4) is primarily theological-pastoral in nature. It is addressed to the Jewish exiles of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC and is intended to comfort the people in a situation of great disruption and

despair. The second story (Gen 2:5–3:24) deals with the crisis of humanity and God's gracious redemption of the fall. The general context of both stories refers to communities of people – in this case Israel – who are at a very low point in their history, seeking security and order as they struggle to survive in a hostile world.

Within this context the author praises the greatness of God's good and orderly work of creation and God's trustworthy compassion in relation to humans. Contrary to the gods of Babylon, it is clear that the God of Israel is still the Creator and in control, and that the human race has a place, calling and destiny within this created order. Humans are presented as not only the climax of creation (1:26 and further), but also the centre of everything created (2:15 and further). Humans are presented as having a specific status, as representing God on earth (1:26). Humans are also called to be productive, procreate, inhabit and cultivate the earth (1:27; 2:24–25, 1:28). According



to Choon-Leong Seow, “The intent of the author is to affirm both the equality of men and women, and the goodness of procreation.”

For many years Genesis 1:28 and Genesis 2:21–24 have played a very important role in the debate about homosexuality. Although homosexuality is not directly mentioned or condemned, the argument has been that the norm laid down here for sexual relations is that of heterosexuality. Only within such a relationship can we keep to the God-given command to be fruitful and fill the earth, to procreate. The logical deduction is that gay relationships have no possibility for natural procreation and are therefore clearly not part of the Divine plan for humanity.

At first glance this argument sounds irrefutable, especially in the light of the biological compatibility of male and female – they are equipped by nature to fulfil their procreation function within a sexual relationship. But the question remains,

whether human sexuality has been adequately explained by the purpose to procreate. More important, is this the only morally acceptable expression of human sexuality? Many scholars doubt this in view of the broader picture of Genesis 1–3. In Genesis 2, a different picture of human sexuality emerges, one that is closer to modern society’s experience of sexuality. In this passage we find a greater emphasis on friendship and companionship, where procreation is not all-important. The two can cleave to one another because they are human, not because they are a heterosexual couple. In many relationships loyalty and friendship are more important than procreation. There are many heterosexual couples who are childless and, while some societies do pressurise couples to have children, one can hardly call childless relationships ‘unnatural’. Many people are sterile and unable to produce children, while others remain single. Thus, the procreation model of Genesis 1–3 cannot serve as the final definition of what constitutes ‘natural’ human sexuality.

## *B. The sinfulness of Sodom in Genesis 19, and gang rape in Judges 19*

What exactly was the sin of Sodom? Although theologians in the last two centuries have named homosexuality as the sin of Sodom, many Biblical scholars today agree that this story does not speak of homosexual deeds by gay people, as we understand ‘gay’ today, but of deviant sexual behaviour, often practised by heterosexuals.

In Genesis 18 God sends two angels to Sodom and Gomorrah to announce God’s judgement over the people. Lot, the cousin

of Abraham, persuades the angels to stay the night with him and his family in his home in Sodom. In Genesis 19 we are told how “all the men from the whole town” circled Lot’s house and demanded that he deliver the angels to them so that they may have (sexual) intercourse with them. In modern language we would call this ‘gang rape.’ Disturbed by this gross defiling of the ancient custom of hospitality, Lot tried to protect his guests by offering his two daughters to the crowd – a deed which is



totally immoral by our standards. The men of Sodom declined his offer and the angels struck the men with blindness. The angels rescued Lot and his family, while the two cities are destroyed.

A few important comments. Firstly, the judgment over the two cities because of their sin was announced *before* the so-called homosexual incident occurred. Secondly, *all the men* of Sodom participated in the attack on Lot's house. Not more than a small percentage (4-8%) in any given culture are gay. Thirdly, it is a fact that Lot also offered his daughters, which means that the men also had heterosexual interests. Fourthly, if the 'great sin' of Sodom was sexual, why does God save Lot, directly afterwards, when he

committed incest with his daughters? And lastly – and probably the most important – why is the issue of homosexuality never mentioned again in all the other Biblical references to Sodom? In Ezekiel 16:48-50 it is clearly stated: the people of Sodom – like so many people today – were materially rich but did not have any compassion with the poor. Furthermore, they worshipped idols. When the New Testament refers to the sin of Sodom it talks of the lack of hospitality.

This situation is repeated in Judges 19, but with dire consequences for a female slave who is sent out to be gang-raped in place of male guests (with no apparent judgement of this kind of behaviour offered).

### C. *The holiness code of Leviticus (Lev 18 and 20)*

The meaning of these purity laws can only fully be understood against the historical and cultural background of the Israelites of Biblical times. Israel occupied a unique position as they saw themselves as the chosen people of God. They also formed a small minority and thus their existence as a separate tribe was at risk. They therefore had to distinguish themselves from other tribes by not submitting to their customs and idolatry.

Leviticus 18 and 19 contain a call to the people to "be Holy", and not to live according to heathen customs like temple prostitution, for instance. The intention of the Old Testament rituals and laws was to protect the specific and distinguishing character of the Jewish faith and culture against what they perceived to be an evil and heathen world.

From recorded stories found during excavations, we have some knowledge about the customs of Israel's neighbouring countries. The Babylonians and the Assyrians, as well as the Canaanites, knew homosexual practices, especially in their temples. Priests, often dressed in female clothing, did erotic dances and sang while they offered and performed their services to men and women. Homosexual prostitution had an acknowledged place in the temples. In the literature of Canaan, the closest neighbours of Israel, eroticism plays a remarkably big role, compared to Israel. (See Deut 23: 17-18.)

Sexuality was therefore one of the more specific characteristics of the culture of Canaan. In Genesis 19 we can read to what excesses this could lead. Not a few, *but all* the men (including mostly heterosexuals)



of the Canaanite city of Sodom were intent on raping the guests of Lot upon hearing of their visit (Gen 19:4). (Judges 19 shows that this was not an isolated incident.)

We must read the holiness code of Leviticus 18 and 20 against this background. The sexual excesses of Canaan had a strong power of attraction for the Israelites (see Num 25). In these chapters of the holiness code it is expressly forbidden for the Israelites to surrender or yield to the sexual practices of

the people of Canaan (Lev 18:3, 21, 24–30; Lev 20:1–5, 23–24).

One must also read the prohibition on the wearing of female clothing by men (Deut 22:5) as a warning not to follow the customs and religious practices of Canaan. In Israel such sexual behaviour was typically associated with idolatry, with the worship of other gods, and therefore, given the holiness of Israel's God, there was no room for eroticism. Israel had to be *different* from the heathen nations!

### *D. Paul and the New Testament (Rom 1:24-27; 1 Cor 6:9)*

The four gospels and most of the books of the New Testament mention nothing about homosexual practices. Paul is the only author who refers to this issue (Rom 1:24-27; 1 Cor 6:9; 1Tim 1:10).

For the Biblical discussion about homosexuality, Romans 1:26–28 is of the utmost importance. Homosexual activity is not only condemned, but for the first time similar deeds amongst women are mentioned. Again, the context and overall intention of the text cannot be ignored when referring to these specific verses.

*The broader context* of Romans 1:18 to 3:20 is to explain why *the gospel of grace* is so important. To motivate this, Paul starts by painting a picture of the extent of the depravity of humanity. Everybody needs the saving grace of God because this depravity occurs amongst the heathen as well as the Jews. The entire opening section of Romans is intended to lead to the conclusion that “there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”

(3:23-24), all persons are in need of God's gracious and unearned justification – not just those who engage in homosexual practices, but also those who envy, who slander and gossip, who are arrogant and refuse to listen to their parents.

*The core message* of both Romans 1 and 1 Corinthians 6:9 is: “... that we must live in the new freedom that we received in Christ.” The Christian must live through the Spirit. Just in case this idea is not clear enough for the Church, Paul gives them the so-called ‘vice-list’ (a common habit of educators of those times). He contrasts these vices with what a Spirit-filled life looks like.

Paul addresses the issue of homosexual behaviour specifically within his description of the depravity of heathens. It is (for him) an aspect of idolatry, where the worship of the only true God has been replaced with the worship of unworthy and corrupt images (1:23, 25). According to Paul, homosexual practices are in a sense the final sign of human rebellion against God and God's wrath



over humanity. (The 'wrath' consists of the fact that God gave them over to the desires of their hearts for impurity (1:24, 26).) The sin of homosexual practices, according to Paul, is that unnatural relationships are replacing those that God intended, and expressly link to the relation between idolatry or rejection of God and immorality.

This is a negative judgment of homosexual practices. Romans 1:26–28 represents most probably the clearest argument against homosexuality in the whole Bible. However, the negative reference to homosexuality is not unambiguous. The question is whether it still carries today the same theological meaning and weight as in Paul's time. It is clear from the context that the people referred to were consciously rebelling against God and rejected all moral law. These weren't people who led lives devoted to God, and were not living in faithful relationships (hetero- or homosexual).

*The cultural and historical situation* in which Paul wrote indicates clearly (as in Leviticus) that his judgment was directed against a certain form of homosexual behaviour, and specifically that which was associated with heathen idolatry. Although some Biblical scholars understand that in Paul's reference

to the 'unnatural' nature of homosexual behaviour (v. 6–7) he sees it as a deviation from the 'order of creation', other scholars regard homosexual behaviour as nothing more than an extreme form of moral bewilderment that is the direct result of idolatry or rejection of God.

It is in connection with this that they believe that Paul is here voicing his disgust against the practice of *pederasty* (or sexual intercourse between older men and younger men or boys, as a kind of social or military initiation common in ancient Greece during the time of Paul). Once he reached a certain age the young adult was then expected to marry and raise a family. The older man was usually a prominent and important political figure. In these relationships there was no caring equality or mutuality.

Paul was in Corinth when he wrote to the Romans. Corinth in those days was an international centre for trading. Like so many modern harbour cities, Corinth was known as a nest of immorality where sex was abused and for sale in unthinkable ways. Various heathen gods were worshipped, amongst them Aphrodite, the goddess of love. According to research, more than 1000

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young people, male and female, worked as prostitutes in Corinth.

It is against this background that Paul voiced his *concerns about these forms of moral decay*. Against this background we must also read his warnings against *homosexual practices*. Paul most likely had in mind sexual exploitation as expressed in pederasty, common in his time. Moreover, he more than likely connected it to the idolatrous culture of the Greeks. As a law-abiding Jew he reacted to this phenomenon as something that defiled the holiness code of Leviticus and was therefore something that made the person 'unclean' or 'impure'.

This passage still helps us today to recognise how a life without God can lead to moral decay and sexual perversions. The question is whether this kind of decay includes all kinds of homosexual behaviours, including those of loving Christian gay couples.

As Blount wrote: "The connection between homosexuality and idolatry, taken for granted in Paul's religious and secular environment, is not assumed in modern society... If we no longer perceive that homosexuality is the result of idolatry, however, we may consider the possibility that a person may be at once homosexual and in Christ."

'Idolatry', 'temple prostitution', 'to be driven by your physical desires and lust' – these are words and concepts that play a vital

role in these passages. Furthermore, these verses are concerned with *physical homosexual deeds* practised by hetero- or homosexual men.

Whoever wants to 'read into' the life of a gay Christian the above meaning of homosexuality is doing him or her a great injustice. Science tells us that homosexual people – just like heterosexuals – have a great desire, not simply for sexual gratification, but for companionship, a loving relationship, closeness and the physical tenderness and intimacy that accompanies that.

It is very important to understand the focus and core of Paul's arguments. Idolatry inevitably leads to spiritual and moral decay. In contrast, the homosexual person who follows Christ will not subject his or her body to these acts of idolatry. Homosexual Christians who live in loving and faithful relationships can only agree or endorse everything that Paul said.

To bear the fruits of the Holy Spirit, namely love, trust, self-discipline, friendliness and all those qualities that are associated with being a disciple of Christ, is as important for the gay Christian as it is for the heterosexual Christian. One should therefore not find it strange that most devout gay Christians find the criticism against idolatrous lustful behaviour and 'giving up natural for unnatural deeds' totally irrelevant to their lives and understanding of their sexuality.



## Conclusion

The following should have become clear in the above discussion:

It is irresponsible and unscientific to interpret isolated verses in the Bible literally or in a fundamentalist way.

To fully understand the Bible takes effort, time, study and being humble before God.

In the historical and cultural context of the Bible, the condemnation was of homosexual perverted acts associated with idolatry and immorality.

The Bible says absolutely nothing about, nor does it condemn, a committed, loving and faithful homosexual relationship as we know it today.

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## Questions for Discussion

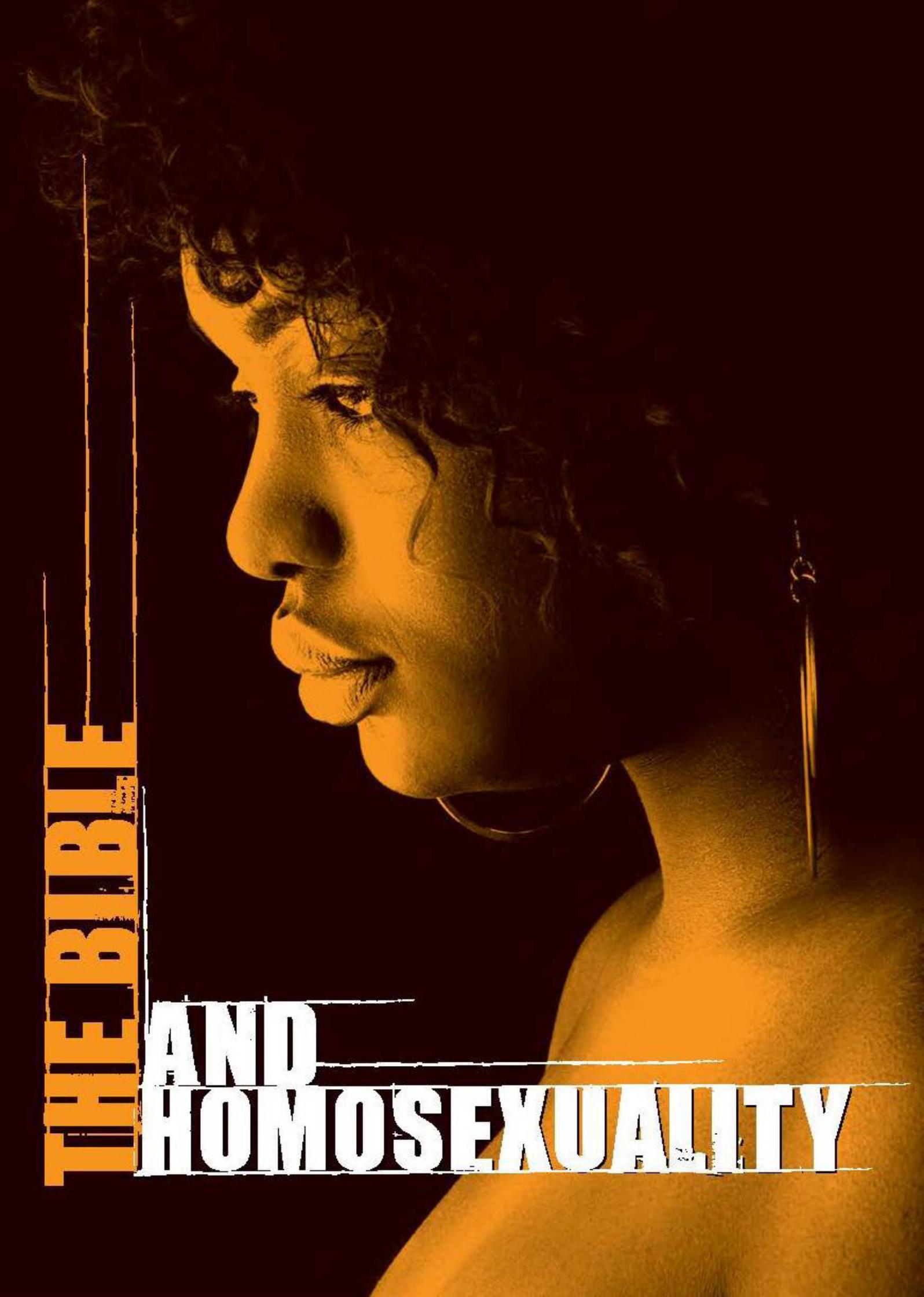
*These questions are intended for study groups or individual readers who want to engage more deeply with the content, where questions will stimulate thought and help them relate what they have read to their own situations. Thus, there are no single 'right' answers in most cases.*

1. The writers claim that there are ways of reading the Bible that are dangerous. Do you agree? Have you had experience of any of the ways mentioned? What was the result of this?  
*(These ways include: Taking every word literally and assuming the words mean the same now as they did in the time the Bible was written; taking a verse on its own without seeing the rest of the text, and even choosing only the verses that agree with one's point of view or that push one's point of view forward; and using the Bible as a list of rules to be applied in each and every situation in exactly the same way).*
  
2. The authors claim that the word 'homosexuality' as we use it today does not mean the same as what was referred to in the Bible. What did the original biblical term mean? Does this in any way influence your understanding of the eight scriptures that refer to homosexuality in the Bible?









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