

## God, Gays, Serpents and Doves

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There is an increasing acceptance of homosexuality and gay marriage in our country and throughout the world. Along with this increase there has also been an increase in the effort to shame, marginalize and even punish Christians and others who speak out in opposition to homosexuality. Some are facing fines and jail time for their so-called “discriminatory” stance against homosexuality. It is obvious that many in the gay and lesbian community are not really interested in fairness and freedom (particularly, freedom of speech), but rather in silencing their opposition. They want the freedom to advance their pro-gay agenda, but they refuse to allow others the freedom to oppose that agenda.

Sadly, our government is now making the problem worse. The gay community has obviously been emboldened by recent pro-gay court rulings and by the passage of easily manipulated anti-discrimination legislation. No one favors discrimination, but this legislation is so ambiguous that it can easily be used to label most criticisms of homosexuality as “hate crimes.” Christians are used to being called “bigots” and “homophobes,” but they can now be criminally prosecuted for their opposition to a behavior that they consider to be sinful. The New Mexico Supreme Court recently upheld a discrimination suit against a photography business (*Elane Photography*) for refusing to photograph a lesbian couple’s marriage commitment ceremony. The owner of the photography business disapproves of gay marriage, and believed that photographing the event would constitute tacit approval of gay marriage. (*Note: While I believe the owner’s reasoning was faulty in this matter, I do defend her Constitutional right to express her views and to act according to her conscience.*) We will no doubt see more of this type of assault upon religious liberty and free speech.

The shift towards public support for homosexuality and gay marriage has created a new paradigm in our country, and one that is potentially dangerous for Christians. I recall a time in the US when the vast majority of the people rejected homosexuality. One could denounce homosexuality (and other sexual sins) and have the general support of other people. This situation has now changed. We no longer have a universally “friendly” crowd on the subject of homosexuality. The alliance of atheists, secularists

and religious compromisers has tipped the scales against Bible believers, and in favor of the homosexual movement.

### **God Versus Culture**

Cultural acceptance of a thing does not make it right. In 1973, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that abortion was “legal,” but their ruling did not make abortion *right*. Neither is it made right merely because 51 or more percent of a given population support it. The divine standard of morality does not change merely because it is rejected by the people of a particular place or time. What was/is true of abortion is equally true of homosexuality —God has not changed His mind about homosexuality. It was sinful under Patriarchal and Mosaical law (Genesis 19:5; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13), and it continues to be sinful today under the law of Christ (Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10). (*For my examination of Bible passages relating to homosexuality, see my article on, [“Gay Marriage and Homosexuality”](http://www.biblebanner.com/articles/general/gaymarriage.pdf) at: <http://www.biblebanner.com/articles/general/gaymarriage.pdf>.)*

Right and wrong are not determined by culture and majority opinion. Moses warned against following “a multitude to do evil” (Exodus 23:2). It was obviously possible for the “multitude” to be wrong, for Moses said they could “do evil.” Jesus taught that “many” will go through the “wide gate” and down the “broad way” that leads to destruction, and that “few” will find the strait and narrow way that leads to life (Matthew 7:13-14).

### **Some Thoughts On Persecution**

Christians must not compromise God’s law in order to avoid persecution (or for *any other reason*). However, some people do compromise, and the threshold varies from one person to another. Those of little faith will compromise merely because their views are unpopular. They are not comfortable knowing that public sentiment is against them. Others will withstand social ostracism (Luke 6:22), but lack the faith to endure physical torture. Others might endure torture, but renounce their faith before dying. Others will remain faithful through torture and even to the point of death (John 16:2; Hebrews 11:35-37; Revelation 2:10).

Christians must prepare themselves for persecution, for the Bible teaches that it is inevitable - “*Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*” (2 Timothy 3:12; *see also* Philippians 1:28; Matthew 5:10-12 *and* 1 Peter 4:12-16). There are circumstances from which there is

no escape, and in such circumstances the faithful Christian cannot avoid suffering at the hands of evil men (1 Thessalonians 2:14).

However, there is no inherent honor or value in being tortured, and some persecution is avoidable. For example, with the assistance of his brethren, Paul escaped capture in Damascus by being lowered in a basket out of a window and down the city wall (Acts 9:25; 2 Corinthians 11:33). If imprisonment and death are inherently good and honorable, then why didn't Paul allow himself to be captured? Why did he "appeal to Caesar," rather than suffer at the hands of the Jews? (Acts 25:11). Jesus told disciple-Jews to "*flee into the mountains*" in order to escape the Romans in their destruction of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:16). Jesus told the disciples that if they were "*...persecuted in one city, then flee to another...*" (Matthew 10:23). Again, if persecution is noble and good, then why did Jesus give instructions that would help saints to avoid it? The lesson is clear: **Some persecution is *avoidable* and Christians should use whatever wise and lawful means that are available to them to avoid *unnecessary* persecution.**

### What Can Christians Do?

Christians must not compromise divine truth in order to avoid persecution. However, they can speak and act in a way that will help them to avoid *unnecessary* persecution. They can be thoughtful and tactful in their teaching methods and terminology. "*A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver*" (Proverbs 25:11). Our speech must be "*always with grace, seasoned with salt, that we may know how to answer every man*" (Colossians 4:6). Jesus told the apostles *not* to premeditate beforehand what they would say on behalf of God, for they were directly guided by the Holy Spirit (Mark 13:11; Matthew 10:19, 20). There are no apostles today, and no one today is miraculously guided in speaking truth. And though the apostles needed not take thought "*how and what*" they would speak, we today must absolutely take such thought! We must *read* and *meditate* (1 Timothy 4:13, 15). We must "*study to show ourselves approved to God*" and we must "*speak as the oracles of God*" (2 Timothy 2:15; 1 Peter 4:11). We must assemble explanations of God's word that are consistent with sound doctrine (Titus 2:1).

### Serpents And Doves

When instructing the disciples in the limited commission, Jesus said:

*“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16).*

This admonition was given to the apostles, but it is equally applicable today. In teaching others, we should be both *wise* and *harmless*. We should not be obnoxious or unnecessarily offensive in our dealings with others. Our objective is to effectively communicate the gospel. This involves, as I said before, *premeditation*. As did Solomon of old, we must effectively “*arrange*” words and arguments. It requires that we “*seek out acceptable words*” - words that are like “*well-driven nails*” that are intended to positively effect thought and behavior (Ecclesiastes 12:10-14).

Of course, we must construct and make effective arguments without being *argumentative* (*the servant of the Lord must not “quarrel”* - 2 Timothy 2:24). People can be convinced by an effective argument, but they will not be *wrangled* into a state of conviction and conversion. Jesus warned against “arguing” the gospel when He told the apostles to *depart* from any house (of people) that rejected their teaching (Matthew 10:14). Some people have no interest in spiritual things. Jesus tells us, “*do not give that which his holy to dogs,*” and “*cast not your pearls before swine*” (Matthew 7:6). The Bible teacher “*must not be quarrelsome...*” (2 Timothy 2:24). Bible discussions are pointless when they degenerate into mere quarrels.

### **Wisdom In Addressing The Sin Of Homosexuality**

Gays, lesbians and transgenders now have a special status in our country as a legally protected minority group. “GLAD,” as it is known, has powerful lobbying influences in Washington, and they have been quite effective in pushing their pro-gay agenda. Government school curriculum now incorporates positive messages about gay relationships, even the curriculum used by very young children. Given the hostile political, legal and cultural environment in which we Bible teachers now find ourselves, we must be careful about how we address these sins. In order to avoid charges of “discrimination,” we must be *wise as serpents and harmless as doves*.

Homosexuality is sinful and it must be opposed, but it should be opposed along with every other *sexual* and *nonsexual* sin, and no more so than any other sin. Some people are quick to condemn homosexuality but do not condemn other kinds of fornication, such as adultery or premarital sex. By condemning one type of fornication (such as homosexuality), and ignoring

others, the Bible teacher appears to be biased in his view and treatment of a particular class of sinners. Such inconsistency discredits the teacher and can even provoke certain listeners. It leads to unnecessary trouble and hardship which might be avoided.

God's word defines *righteousness* (Romans 1:16, 17), and "*all unrighteousness is sin...*" (1 John 5:17). Any unforgiven sin will condemn the sinner (Romans 6:23), whether it be homosexuality, adultery, theft, greed, drunkenness or lying (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; Revelation 21:8). Homosexuality is just one of several different types of sin, and more particularly, it is just one of several kinds of sexual sin. This is obvious from the 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:9 passage, where Paul cites *adultery, fornication* and *homosexuality*. "Adultery" is used in cases where at least one of the sex partners is married to someone else. The word suggests a covenant violation - a mixing of things that do not belong together. By engaging in sexual relations with someone other than one's spouse, the adulterer violates his marriage contract. "Fornication" is a general term that includes all forms of sexual immorality, but as above, is sometimes mentioned in connection with other sexual sins. It includes all illicit sexual intercourse, including premarital (unmarried) sex (1 Corinthians 7:2), adultery (Hebrews 13:4), bestiality and homosexuality. Homosexuality is same-gender sex, whether male-with-male or female-with-female, as explained by Paul in Romans 1:26, 27.

The Bible teacher would be wise to recognize the fact that homosexuality is classified with other sexual sins that are equally condemning. We should not show bias in our denunciation of sins.

## Conclusion

It might be argued that homosexuality is worse than other sins because it is also "*against nature*" (Romans 1:26). While it is true that homosexuality is against nature, it is not the only sin that is against nature. Just a few verses later, Paul spoke of those who were "*without natural affection*" (Romans 1:31). A mother who has an abortion lacks *natural* affection. Parents who abuse their children lack natural affection. The same Greek word (*physis*) is used in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11:14, where Paul taught that it was against *nature* for a man to have long hair. (*Note: we should remember the "head-covering" context of that passage, but the point remains.*) Homosexuality is *against nature* because participants "*leave the natural use*" of the opposite

sex and pursue *same-sex* relations (see the earlier use of *physis* in the same verse, Romans 1:26).

Homosexuality is indeed sinful and destructive to society, but so is **adultery** which has destroyed millions of marriages and homes in this country and throughout the world. Sadly, adultery and the resultant divorces have actually driven many disillusioned young people to the practice of homosexuality. So, which is “worse?” Adultery, or homosexuality? The fact is that Christians should abhor and condemn *all sin* (Romans 12:9), and not teach or imply that one sin is better or worse than another. When consistent in this matter, we will be speaking as the oracles of God, and we might also save ourselves from unnecessary hardships.

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