

RADICAL LOVE:
being an inclusive
evangelical

**The New Testament
and sexuality**

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The biggest issue with the Bible...

- Not understanding it...
- ...But following it
- We expect *everyone*, not just ministers or academics, to read scripture, and be guided by it, relying on its plain meaning.
- And that works...
- ...Most of the time

Why that's usually OK

- In many areas, humans are the same as 2,000 years ago
- We get angry, fall in love, gossip, show off, tell jokes, like to play...



The problem...

- But sexuality is different
- **If we apply our modern cultural understanding of sexuality when we read the Bible, it can seriously mislead us**

Case study – 1 Corinthians 6:9

One of the key verses
often quoted in debates
around sexuality and the
Church

ἢ οὐκ οἶδατε ὅτι ἄδικοι θεοῦ βασιλείαν οὐ κληρονομήσουσιν; μὴ
πλανᾶσθε· οὔτε πόρνοι οὔτε εἰδωλολάτραι οὔτε μοιχοὶ οὔτε μαλακοὶ οὔτε
ἀρσενοκοῖται οὔτε κλέπται οὔτε
πλεονέκται, οὐ μέθυσοι, οὐ λοῖδοροι,
οὐχ ἄρπαγες βασιλείαν θεοῦ
κληρονομήσουσιν.

(Post)modern sexuality

- Categorised by *orientation* – *what gender is someone attracted to?*
- We have **terms** for those attracted to a different gender (heterosexual, or straight) and the same gender (homosexual, or gay or lesbian) and those attracted to people irrespective of gender (bisexual or pansexual)

Why it is misleading...

- You read 1 Corinthians 6:9 in your NIV Bible...
- You see a reference to 'homosexual offenders'.
- You check in your Good News Bible, and it reads 'homosexual perverts'.
- The plain meaning of scripture...?

Ancient Roman sexuality

Is different!

Ancient Roman sexuality

‘Ancient Romans lived in a cultural environment in which married men could enjoy sexual relations with their slaves without fear of criticism from their peers; in which adultery generally aroused more concern than pederasty; in which men notorious for their womanizing might be called effeminate, while a man whose masculinity had been impugned could cite as proof of his manhood the fact that he had engaged in sexual relations with his accuser’s sons...’

Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, 3

Ancient Roman sexual categories...

- NOT heterosexual vs homosexual
- No terms existed for orientation
- Any translations using 'homosexual' are highly misleading
- Not based on attraction...
...but **action and power**

Sexual categories in the ancient world for freeborn males

- Main category: **Dominant vs submissive**
- Acceptable (*and common*) to have sex with anyone below you in status
 - boys (freeborn in Greek culture, not Roman culture)
 - Slaves (male or female)
 - prostitutes
 - actors
 - bar staff

Sexual categories for freeborn males – who is off-limits?

- Off-limits - A freeborn woman who isn't your wife
- This is legally adultery
- None of the previous categories counted as adultery, and they were all socially acceptable

Attitudes to types of sex for freeborn males



- Procreative sex
- Anal sex (if you're penetrating)
- Sex with boys, slaves and prostitutes
- Sex as part of worship of fertility goddesses

- Oral sex (seen as passive)
- Sex where you are the submissive partner



Attitudes to types of sex for Jewish males

- ✓ • Procreative sex
- Pretty much anything else



Did the Roman empire know of loving, faithful same-sex adult relationships?

- 447 primary texts about same-sex activity in the Roman Empire period collected in a source book by Thomas Hubbard
- Hultgren (2011, 619-20) analysed these texts...

Did the Roman empire know of loving, faithful same-sex adult relationships?

- Most refer to pederasty
- Most are about men who have intercourse with both boys and women
- A few indicate that certain men were known for only being attracted to boys and men (but there was no specific term for this)

Six out of the 447 texts refer to 'marriage' of people of the same gender

- Two are pederastic (in one, the boy was castrated prior to the wedding)
- One is mentioned and held up to ridicule
- One is an imaginary marriage of men on the moon
- One is a deception where a man is passed off as a bride
- One is a lesbian relationship without fidelity

Quick summary

- In the Roman Empire, male same-sex activity was mostly heterosexual, married men abusing boys
- There was no concept of a loving, equal, relationship between two men

1 Corinthians 6:9

- ⁹ Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators [*pornoi*], idolaters, adulterers [*moichoí*], male prostitutes [*malakoi*], sodomites [*arsenokoitai*], thieves, the greedy...

Malakoi

From soft (malakos), so means 'softies'

BUT Roman ideas of 'softies' include:

- Male prostitutes
- The lazy
- The cowardly
- The idle rich
- Womanisers
- The sex-mad

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Arsenokoitai (arsenokoitēs)

- First ever appearance in literature
- male (*arsen*) + bed/intercourse (*koitai*)
- Hence *may* refer to the ‘active’, older person
- *May* be to do with prostitution/slavery
- Note – not one of the terms most commonly used in Greek (*erastes* – *eromenos*)

Arsenokoites = pederasty?

- 1 Cor. 6:9 has fornicators (*pornoi*), adulterers (*moichoi*) and *arsenokoitai*
- You shall not murder; you shall not commit adultery [*moicheuseis*]; **you shall not corrupt children** [*paidophthorēseis*]; you shall not be sexually immoral [*porneuseis*]; you shall not steal...

Didache 2.2 (end of first century)

Other examples...

You shall not be sexually immoral; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not corrupt children [*paidophthorēseis*].

Barnabas 19.4 (early second century)

...how much more shall all the nations appear to be under a curse who practise idolatry, who corrupt children [*paidophthorounta*], and commit other crimes?

Justin Martyr, *Dial. Trypho* 95. (second century)

Other examples continued...

You shall not commit adultery. You shall not worship idols. You shall not corrupt children [*paidophthorēseis*]. You shall not steal...

Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 3.12. (Late second century)

Which is more beautiful? To confess the cross, or to attribute to those you call gods adultery and corruption of children [*paidophthorias*]?

Athanasius, *Vita Antonii* 74. (Early fourth century)

One who approves of adulteries and corruption of children [*paidophthorias*]...

Gregory of Nazianzen, *Adv. Eunomianos (orat. 27)* 6. (Late fourth century)

Arsenokoites and 1 Corinthians

- ‘Vice lists’ sum up common wicked activities
- Pederasty appears regularly in Christian lists throughout the time of the early church with no explanation needed

Arsenokoites and 1 Corinthians

- Common sexual failings:
 - Sleeping with other people's wives – adultery
 - Sleeping with prostitutes – fornication
 - Sleeping with boys – *arsenokoitai*?
- What behaviour would the congregation in Corinth think Paul was referring to?

But what about...

- Sodom and Gomorrah?
- Leviticus?
- And Romans?

But what about...

- Sodom and Gomorrah?
- Leviticus?
- And Romans?
- **If we apply our modern cultural understanding of sexuality when we read the Bible, it can seriously mislead us**

**The argument is NOT about
the authority of the Bible
but how we interpret and
apply the Bible in a new
context**