



**Universal Coalition of Affirming
Africans-Uganda (UCAA_UG)**

Understanding the Bible and LGBTQ persons

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Universal Coalition of Affirming Africans Uganda (UCAA-UG) invites you to pursue a deeper understanding of the bible and LGBTQ persons.

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EXPERIENCE AND SCRIPTURE.

Common Question: Doesn't beliefs about same-sex relationships and transgender identities contribute to serious harm in LGBTQ people's lives?

Answer: No. Experience should show good fruit, not bad fruits.

Studies have shown that "lesbian, gay, and bisexual young adults who reported higher levels of family rejection during adolescence were 8.4 times more likely to report having attempted suicide, 5.9 times more likely to report high levels of depression, and 3.4 times more likely to use illegal drugs compared with peers from families that reported no or low levels of family rejection".

Those consequences are bad fruit, and they should lead us to reconsider the source of that fruit: Our interpretation of Scripture.

Matthew 7:16-20 "By their fruit you will recognize them". Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

Christians have reconsidered their interpretation of Scripture, due to their experiences in the past. The early Christians chose to include Gentiles in the church without requiring them to be circumcised and obey the Old Testament law and they made this decision based on their experience. Peter declared of early Gentile believers, "**God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us...Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear?**" (Acts 15:8, 10)

In the 19th century, Christians reconsidered longstanding interpretation of Scripture that supported slavery. William Wilberforce and many other Christian abolitionists appealed to the horrific reality of slavery to urge other Christians to change their understanding of Scripture on the topic.

Why are people Gay/ Lesbian?

To answer this question, it helps to have general knowledge of the way all babies develop during a mother's pregnancy. Every human being's sexuality develops in the mother's womb. When a baby is first conceived and is in the embryo stage, the baby actually has both male and female sex characteristics (female Müllerian ducts *and* male Wolffian ducts). In typical sexual development what happens is that *either* the Müllerian ducts or Wolffian ducts regress, leaving one more dominant than the other.

In most cases, this influences the development of only one sex's characteristics: either male or female.

But other factors also come into play to shape sexual development. Hormones in the womb are particularly important. Hormones determine how external genitals develop, as well as the neuroanatomical of the brain. We are not just male or female because of external sex organs, but also because of how our brain develops. In a small percentage of cases, a baby's sexual development does not result in a body that is strictly male or female. They are born intersex. For example, chromosomal females (XX) with Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH) are exposed to high levels of testosterone in the womb, leading to male typical characteristics such as an enlarged clitoris resembling a penis, a deeper voice, hairy body, etc. These chromosomal females have higher rates of attraction to other females. That is, they are more likely to be lesbian than females without Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia. There are many other types of intersex conditions as well.

One phenomenon that influences whether a boy might be attracted to the same-sex is the Fraternal Birth Order Effect. This phenomenon has been observed in replicated studies across cultures. The studies show that a boy who has older biological brothers is more likely to be gay; the likelihood increases 33% with each older brother. A 2018 study provides preliminary confirmation that this occurs when the mother's body produces antibodies to male fetal proteins during pregnancy. In other words, mothers of gay sons have higher levels of antibodies than mothers of heterosexual sons. The Fraternal Birth Order Effect probably accounts for 15-28% of all gay men. Other factors like genetics can also influence the development of same-sex attraction. However, hormones seem to play a more significant role than genes.

These are just a couple examples. Our sexual development is complex and we don't have all the answers, but science is helping us to understand the body better than at any other time in history. Our sexual development in the womb can affect us in a variety of ways depending on how hormones, chromosomes, and genetics intersect. The result of sexual development in the womb means that some people will be born with atypical sexual development. While the majority of people will be born as typical males and females attracted to the opposite sex, a small percentage will not. This is through no fault of their own. Nor is it the mother's fault.

Same-sex attraction is not something that spreads as if it is contagious. Just as a small percentage of people are born left-handed, some people are born with atypical sexual development. The average age that gay or lesbian people realize they have same-sex attraction is 10 or 11 years old, at the time of puberty. This is often a frightening realization, leading to desperate prayers for God to heal them. Some Christians mistakenly believe people choose to be gay or are recruited into being gay. But that is not true. Scientific studies provide evidence for sexual development in the womb.

This should lead Christians to be compassionate toward gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and intersex people.

If People Don't Choose to Be Gay, Then Why Does the Bible Speak Against Same-Sex Relationships?

There are a small number of Bible verses that speak against same-sex relations. But, it's very important to understand the context of the biblical authors. The kind of same-sex relations that they saw were primarily exploitative, including pederasty (older men having sex with boys), use of male prostitutes or abuse of male slaves for personal pleasure. Clearly, we can agree with the biblical authors that pederasty, use of prostitutes, abuse of slaves (and slavery in general), and rape are sinful. But, same-sex relationships are not by nature exploitive or promiscuous. Just like heterosexual relationships are not by nature exploitative just because many engage in promiscuity. Some heterosexual men rape women, but we would not conclude, then, that all heterosexual sex is bad.

Most gay and lesbian people don't want to hurt other people. They just want a stable family of their own. The biblical authors did not have the opportunity to witness loving, Christian, monogamous same-sex relationships. In fact, two to three thousand years ago, when the Bible was written people did not have access to the scientific knowledge that we have today that helps us to understand human sexual development and why some people are innately gay.

TRADITION AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION.

Common question: Doesn't supporting same-sex relationship requires to overturn 2,000 years of Christian tradition?

Answer: No. New information can lead to new understandings.

For the first 1,600 years of the church, nearly all Christians believed that the earth stood still at the centre of the universe. But the invention of the telescope led Christians to reconsider their interpretation of the Bible.

Psalms 93:1 says, "The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved." Joshua 10:13 says the sun "stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day." Ecclesiastes 1:5 says, "The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises."

Galileo argued that the biblical authors used figurative language when describing the heavens, so the text "would be accommodated to the understanding of every man."

Despite the weight of tradition, the telescope presented Christians with new information that required them to reconsider some of their beliefs and their interpretation of Scripture.

In the ancient world, same-sex attraction and behaviour were widely considered to be vices of excess that might tempt anyone like drunkenness. Same-sex attraction was not understood as the sexual orientation of a small minority of people.

Does this mean the biblical writers were ignorant or wrong about same-sex relationships?

No. The dominant forms of same-sex behaviour in the ancient world fit a pattern of lustful self-indulgence: sex between masters and enslaved men, prostitution, and pederasty (sexual relationships between adult men and adolescent boys).

Understandings of same-sex behaviour as stemming from excessive pleasure-seeking accurately reflected the most common practices of the day.

But surely there were some LGBTQ people in committed Relationships as well?

To the extent that same-sex behaviour was accepted in ancient societies, it had to conform to strict class and gender hierarchies. So an adult male citizen could have sex with an enslaved man, prostitute, or youth, as long as others viewed the adult male citizen as being dominant in the encounter. Sexual identity was defined not by sexual orientation, but by conformity to patriarchal gender roles. Men who were dominant in sex were generally viewed positively, whether they had sex with males, females, or both. Men who were seen as passive in sex were viewed negatively.

People didn't come out as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, because the sex of one's partners mattered far less than the gender role one took with those partners. Greco-Roman societies were sexually tolerant only when patriarchal status hierarchies went unchallenged.

The notion of two men or two women of equal social status entering into a lifelong, monogamous relationship would not have been accepted even by the most "progressive" Greeks and Romans, as such an arrangement would have undermined the patriarchal foundation of their societies.

What about ancient texts that describe loving same-sex relationships?

There are no ancient examples of lifelong, monogamous same-sex relationships between social equals, and certainly none that have societal support.

But aren't there some ancient texts that talk about same-sex Orientation?

There are some texts that describe certain forms of same-sex attraction as natural or even innate. But these texts typically refer to some men's desire to take the passive role in same-sex relations, not to same-sex attraction itself and that desire was not seen as precluding opposite-sex attraction as well.

There is a simple test to show that our understanding of same-sex orientation is uniquely modern: Until the 20th century, no Christian writings acknowledge that lifelong celibacy is the requirement for anyone based on the church's rejection of same-sex relationships.

Note: Affirming Christians are not overturning the Christian tradition on LGBTQ people. Until recent decades, there has been no Christian tradition on LGBTQ people.

THE GIFT OF CELIBACY

Common question: Doesn't the Bible's prohibition of same-sex relationships require gay Christians who cannot marry someone of the opposite sex to be celibate or single for life?

Answer: No, Celibacy is a gift, not a mandate.

The Bible teaches that celibacy is a gift, not something that should be forced upon anyone. In the Old Testament creation narrative, God says, "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). The Apostle Paul and Christian tradition teach that not everyone can achieve life-long celibacy. Paul counsels, "If they cannot control themselves, they should marry" (1 Corinthians 7:9). We can also apply this teaching to gay and lesbian people. It is better to be covenanted to one person than to be promiscuous and have sex with many different people.

The church can help gay and lesbian people be holy by encouraging them to commit to a monogamous, life-long partnership. If we try to force people to live in life-long celibacy when they are not able to do so, we are fostering promiscuity. The church can help gay and lesbian people toward holiness by permitting a covenanted same-sex partnership for those unable to achieve life-long celibacy.

Fourth century theologian, Ambrose said: "For virginity cannot be commanded, but must be wished for, for things which are above us are matters for prayer rather than under mastery . . . I do not then discourage marriage, but recapitulate the advantages of holy virginity. This is the gift of few only. Fifteenth century theologian, Martin Luther said: "Much as chastity [celibacy] is praised and no matter how noble a gift it is, nevertheless necessity prevails so that few can attain it, for they cannot control themselves . . . a Christian is spirit and flesh. According to the spirit he has no need of marriage. But because his flesh is the common flesh, corrupted in Adam and Eve and filled with evil desires, therefore because of this very disease, marriage is a necessity for him and it is not in his power to get along without it.

Paul the Apostle and Christian tradition teach that life-long celibacy is not possible for everyone. Not all gay and lesbian people can live a celibate life. Yet, heterosexual marriage does not work for them. They are not sexually attracted to the opposite sex. The best solution is to encourage gay and lesbian people to find a godly same-sex partner that they can commit to for life.

In the New Testament, Jesus says celibacy can only be accepted by those to whom it is given (Matthew 19:11-12). Paul, too, says that while he would prefer everyone be celibate like him, “each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that” (1 Corinthians 7:7).

Requiring all gay Christians to be single and celibate for life stands in tension with these teachings, which the Christian tradition has affirmed for two millennia.

Aren't straight people who never find an appropriate partner “Forced” into celibacy in the same way?

No. One difference is that if a straight person eventually finds an appropriate partner, they would be free to marry, while a gay person would not.

But more foundational is the reason a person is celibate. For the first 1,500 years of the church, Christians regarded celibacy as a superior calling to marriage, but even then, they didn't condemn marriage itself. They couldn't regard sex as inherently sinful without undermining the biblical doctrines of the goodness of creation, the incarnation, and the resurrection.

Moreover, as both Protestant and Catholic theologians have argued, celibacy should serve as a positive affirmation of marriage rather than a negation of it. Celibate Christians remind married Christians of the ultimate relationship their marriages point toward: our eternal union with Christ.

But non-affirming theology requires gay Christians to be celibate as a rejection of their sexuality, not as a fulfilment of it.

Isn't it devaluing celibacy to say that it is harmful for gay Christians to be celibate?

No. Celibacy should be honoured as a spiritual vocation. But it's an entirely different experience to be celibate because you regard every experience of sexual attraction you have as a blameworthy temptation to sin.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says that we should avoid not only sinful acts, but also the desires for those acts lust in addition to adultery, anger in addition to murder (Matthew 5:21-30). If all same-sex relationships are sinful, then same-sex attraction would be morally culpable as well.

Although many non-affirming Christians increasingly want to say there is nothing wrong with being gay as long as you aren't in a gay relationship, this distinction is not supported by Scripture. It makes no more sense to say “it's OK to be gay as long as you don't act on it” than to say “it's OK to feel greedy as long as you don't steal.”

Yes, Jesus was tempted in every way as we are (Hebrews 4:15), but there are two different kinds of temptation described in Scripture. One is an external sense of testing, and the other is an internal desire for sin. Jesus was tempted in the former sense, but not the latter, and under a non-affirming viewpoint, same-sex attraction would fall into the latter category.

Consistent non-affirming theology requires gay Christians to actively repent of every sexual desire they ever experience. The failure of the “ex-gay” movement has shown how destructive that approach is. That’s why the former president of Exodus International apologized for the trauma his organization inflicted on LGBTQ Christians.

Note: Requiring gay Christians to be celibate as a rejection of their sexuality undermines the historic Christian understanding of celibacy.

REFLECTION MOMENT

Take a moment to pause and reflect on your beliefs about celibacy.

Who do you know who has felt a calling to celibacy?

How has that calling affected their life?

How can your church better support those who have committed to lifelong celibacy?

FACTS ABOUT "EX-GAY" MINISTRIES.

For decades, conservative Christians have always encouraged Gay people to pursue “Ex Gay therapy” in order to develop a heterosexual orientation.

But in 2013, the leading Exodus International that was a leading “Ex Gay ministry” based in US, shut down and conceded that “reparative therapy” efforts have been deeply damaging to many LGBTQ people.

*The year before, Alan Chambers, the president of the organization, admitted that “99.9%” of people he knew “have not experienced a change in their orientation.” Chambers apologized for the “shame,” “false hope,” and “pain and hurt” his organization had caused to countless people. In his words, he had this to say “**Please know that I am deeply sorry....I am sorry we promoted sexual orientation change effort**”*

Note: Sexual Orientation is not a choice, and it is highly resistant to change.

SODOM AND GOMORRAH

Common question: Didn't God destroy Sodom and Gomorrah at least in part due to the fact that the men of the city wanted to engage in same-sex behaviour?

Answer: NO, Sodom and Gomorrah addresses gang rape.

In Genesis 19, God sends two angels disguised as men to Sodom, where the men of Sodom threaten to rape them. God then destroys the city with fire and brimstone.

The men's aggressive actions are preceded by lavish displays of hospitality from Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18) and Lot (Genesis 19). These preceding accounts place the focus on the men of Sodom's violent, disgraceful treatment of strangers.

Ezekiel 16:49 "Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy".

Same-sex rape was a common tactic of aggression and humiliation in the ancient world. Gang rape is completely different from loving relationships based on consent, much less mutuality and commitment.

A parallel story in Judges 19 shows that the men of Sodom's actions were not connected to sexual orientation.

In Judges 19, a Levite and his concubine rest from their travels in the city of Gibeah (in the tribe of Benjamin). A foreigner living in Gibeah offers them hospitality, but "some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house" and said, "Bring out the man who came to your house so we can have sex with him" (Judges 19:22).

The owner said, "No, my friends, don't be so vile. Since this man is my guest, don't do this outrageous thing. Look, here is my virgin daughter, and his concubine, I will bring them out to you now, and you can use them and do to them whatever you wish" (Judges 19:23-24).

Horrifically, the men rape the man's concubine to death. Their threat was to rape, and possibly not to have any kind of romantic encounter.

Don't Ezekiel 16:50, 2 Peter 2:7, and Jude 7 mention same-sex behaviour as part of the reason for Sodom's destruction?

No: There are more than 20 references to Sodom and Gomorrah in Scripture after Genesis 19. Only two of them mention sexual sins at all.

Ezekiel 16:50 says, "They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it". The word abomination is used 117 times in the Old Testament 111 of those uses have no connection to same sex behaviour.

2 Peter 2:7 says that Lot was "greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked." This phrase is not a specific reference to same-sex behaviour.

Jude 7 says that Sodom and Gomorrah “gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion.” Some translations render this as “unnatural desire,” but it literally means “different flesh”. This phrase likely refers to the attempted rape of angels, given that Jude 6 refers to the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling.

Out of more than 20 references to Sodom and Gomorrah in the rest of scripture, none mention same sex behavior as even part of the reason for Sodom’s destruction.

But haven’t Christians always understood the sin of Sodom to one same-sex behaviour?

Yes, but that was not the original interpretation of the Sodom story, which dates back to the 14th century BC.

Isaiah 1 equates the sin of Sodom with oppressing marginalized groups, murder, and theft. Jeremiah 23:14 links it with adultery, idolatry, and power abuses. Amos 4:1-11 and Zephaniah 2:8-11 compare it to the oppression of the poor, as well as prideful and mocking behaviour. Other Jewish writings say God loathed the people of Sodom "on account of their arrogance and punished them for having received strangers with hostility.

When did Christians start to interpret the story as being about same-sex behaviour?

No Jewish literature until the writings of Philo in the first century connected the sin of Sodom to same sex reading of the story did not become the mainstream interpretation among Christians until the time of Augustine in the early fifth century.

The term “sodom” was not coined until the 11th century, and even then, it was widely used to refer to all non-procreative sexual acts, not same sex relations specifically. The earliest Christians read the Sodom story as a parable about inhospitality, arrogance and violence, not same sex behaviour.

LEVITICUS 18:22 AND 20:13

Common question: Doesn't Leviticus prohibit male same-sex relations as an abomination and as part of the moral law, not the ceremonial law?.

Answer: No. The prohibition of same-sex relationships in Leviticus are grounded in cultural concerns about patriarchal gender roles, which the New Testament points us beyond.

Leviticus 18:22 prohibits male same-sex intercourse, and Leviticus 20:13 prescribes the death penalty for violators. But Christians have never lived under the Old Testament law.

The Old Testament contains 613 commandments for God's people to follow. Leviticus includes rules about offerings, clean and unclean foods, diseases, bodily discharges, sexual taboos, and priestly conduct. But the New Testament teaches that Christ's death and resurrection fulfilled the law, which is why its many rules and regulations have never applied to Christians. Romans 10:4 says, "Christ is the end of the law." Colossians 2:13-14 says that God "forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. **Hebrews 8:13 "By calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear".**

Prohibitions of things like mixed fabrics were part of the ceremonial law, but wasn't the prohibition of male same-sex relations part of the moral law?

Some argue that all laws related to sexual conduct carry over to the New Testament, but Leviticus also prohibits sex during a woman's menstrual period (Leviticus 18:19), which most Christians do not regard as sinful.

Others suggest that the term "abomination" indicates that same-sex behaviour is particularly egregious, but we widely accept other practices that were called abominations: charging interest on loans (Ezekiel 18:13), burning incense (Isaiah 1:13), and eating pork, rabbit, and shellfish (Deuteronomy 14:3-21). Even the death penalty applied to some practices we now accept: working on the Sabbath (Exodus 35:2) and charging interest on loans (Ezekiel 18:13). The Old Testament doesn't distinguish between "ceremonial" and "moral" laws.

Doesn't Leviticus prohibit male same-sex behaviour for a reason that hasn't changed God's complementary design of men and women?

As Hebrew scholar **Saul Olyan** and rabbinic scholar **Daniel Boyarin** have argued, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 specifically prohibit male same-sex anal intercourse not all same-sex acts. That act was seen as uniquely degrading to men, as it placed them in the socially inferior, “female” role. Male same-sex intercourse was prohibited because it subverted patriarchal gender norms of male dominance in a society that devalued women.

Leviticus doesn't distinguish between active and passive partners. Why?

Leviticus 24:22 says the Israelites "are to have the same law for the foreigner and the native-born." Old Testament scholars **Richard Elliott Friedman** and **Shawna Dolansky** argue that the prohibitions of male same-sex relations exist because “by cross-cultural perception such intercourse would necessarily denigrate the passive partner and violate his equal status under God’s law.” Consequently, both partners would be culpable.

Leviticus also doesn't address female same-sex relations, which undermines the belief that male same-sex relations were prohibited because they violate gender complementarity.

Does this mean the Bible is a misogynistic text?

While patriarchal norms certainly shape the Old Testament text, patriarchy wasn't unique to ancient Israel. But even though the Old Testament law does not treat men and women equally, there are countercultural elements within the Old Testament, including the presence of women leaders. In the New Testament, women like Lydia, Phoebe, Euodia, and Syntyche also hold leadership positions. **Galatians 3:28** “**There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus**”.

In Matthew 19:8, Jesus said, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard." The New Testament witness moves Christians away from patriarchy and toward gender equality (see Galatians 3:28) which means that the rationale for the Leviticus prohibitions does not extend to Christians.

ROMANS 1:26-27

Common question: Doesn't Paul condemn same-sex behaviour as "shameful" and "unnatural" in Romans 1, so the church must reject all same-sex relationships?

Answer: No. Romans addresses unrestrained lust.

Romans 1:26-27 reads: "Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error."

In Romans 1:26-27, Paul condemns lustful same-sex behaviour between men, and likely between women as well.

In Romans 1-3, Paul argues that all people Jewish and Gentile- are in need of salvation. In Romans 2, he speaks to his fellow Jews, saying that even one violation of the Law renders them in need of reconciliation to God.

In Romans 1, Paul says that Gentiles, too, need salvation, because while they do not have a written law to break, they have violated what they know to be true about God through his creation. Rather than worshiping God, they worshiped idols, and as a result, God gave them over to their own devices. God also "gave them over to the lusts of their hearts," and they became "inflamed with lust" and engaged in sexual behaviour with people of the same sex.

In the ancient world, it was assumed that all people could be satisfied with heterosexual sex, but that some people went beyond it due to their insatiable lust leading them to engage in same-sex behaviour.

Paul isn't condemning being gay as opposed to being straight. He is condemning self-seeking excess as opposed to moderation a concern made clear by his repeated use of the term "lustful," and by his description of people "exchanging" or "abandoning" heterosexual sex. Committed same-sex relationships simply aren't in view in Romans 1.

Even if Paul describes only lustful behaviour, and not loving relationships, he uses the terms "natural," "unnatural," and "shameful" to describe same-sex couplings. Wouldn't that imply that all same-sex relationships are sinful, regardless of how loving and committed the partners are?

1 Corinthians 11:13-15

Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering.

Paul uses the exact same Greek words in 1 Corinthians 11 as he does in Romans 1. But most Christians today believe the terms “nature” and “disgrace” in 1 Corinthians 11 describe what was *customary* in the first century, not what should be a universal rule for Christians about hair length.

In fact, we know that long hair in men isn’t always shameful, because the Nazirite vow forbade men from cutting their hair (Numbers 6:5). Samson’s decision to *cut* his hair was shameful in his context, while his long hair was actually a source of strength (Judges 16:17-19). What is honourable and shameful varies across times and cultures.

If the terms “nature” and “disgrace” are culturally specific in 1 Corinthians 11, we must ask whether they are also culturally specific in Romans 1. Indeed, in the ancient world, same-sex behaviour between men was regarded as shameful and unnatural because it reduced the status of the passive male to the lower cultural status of a female. But for Christians who believe that men and women should have equal value in Christ, which logic doesn't apply.

What is the “due penalty for their error” that Paul describes in Romans 1:27?

The idol worshipers failed to give God the honour he was due, so God allowed them to dishonour themselves as the penalty for their idolatrous error. Their shameful behaviour *was* the penalty.

Male passivity, female dominance, and a lack of self-control made same-sex behaviour emblematic of excess and dishonour. These factors also made same-sex relations an apt illustration of what happens when we fail to honour God: we ourselves are given over to dishonour.

But the problems Paul focuses on in Romans 1 do not characterize same-sex unions today that are based on love, commitment, and self-giving.

Note: Christians should agree with Paul that sexual behaviour that is motivated by lustful self-seeking is wrong, but same-sex relationships based on long-term commitment and love must be assessed differently.

1 CORINTHIANS 6:9 AND 1 TIMOTHY 1:10

Common question: Doesn't these texts say that "homosexuals" will not inherit the kingdom of God. Hence, the church cannot affirm same-sex relationships without abandoning the gospel?

Answer: No. 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy address exploitation.

In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Paul warns that those who persist in sin will not inherit the kingdom of God. In his list of wrongdoers, he includes two Greek words that connect to some forms of same-sex behaviour.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 (KJV): "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

1 Timothy 1:10 also uses the term *arsenokoitai* in a similar "vice list." Given that many modern Bible translations render *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* as "homosexuals" or "men who have sex with men," it's worth taking a close look at these two Greek terms. The term *malakoi* literally means "soft," and it was widely used to describe a lack of self-control, weakness, cowardice, and laziness.

Given that those negative characteristics were unfortunately (and unfairly) attributed to women in the ancient world, the term was also long translated as "effeminate." Although most uses of the term in ancient literature were not related to sexual behaviour, men who took the passive role in same-sex relations were sometimes called *malakoi*, which is why many non-affirming Christians argue that it represents a condemnation of same-sex relationships.

But even in sexual contexts, *malakos* was most frequently used to describe men who were seen as lacking self-control in their love for women. It's only in the past century that many Bible translators have connected the word specifically to same-sex relationships. More common English translations in past centuries were terms such as "weaklings," "wantons," and "debauchers."

Even if *malakoi* doesn't necessarily refer to same-sex behaviour, doesn't the fact that Paul places it next to the term *arsenokoitai* make that meaning more likely?

The term *arsenokoites* (the singular form) comes from two Greek words: *arsen*, meaning "male," and *koites*, meaning "bed."

Those words appear together in the Greek translation of Leviticus 20:13, leading some to speculate that Paul coined the term *arsenokoites* in order to condemn same-sex behaviour.

After Paul's apparent coinage of the term, most subsequent uses of it in ancient literature appear only in lists of vices. Those contexts indicate that the word likely relates to sexual or economic exploitation. So while that may involve same-sex behaviour, it would be exploitative forms of it, not loving relationships.

But isn't it possible that Paul used *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* together to condemn both the active and passive partners in male same-sex relations?

There were many word pairs in common use in ancient literature to describe both the active and passive partners in male same-sex relations words. However, were not used as a pair by other ancient writers.

Moreover, even if Paul *had* intended to condemn both partners in male same-sex relations, it's critical to remember the major gap between same-sex behaviour as it was practiced in ancient societies where it was based on status, power, and lust and committed same-sex unions today.

Some Bible translations render *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* as "homosexuals," but that term wasn't even coined until 1869 in German and 1892 in English. Not only that, the concept that the term describes didn't exist in the ancient world either.

Note: In order to be faithful to Scripture, we must recognize a distinction between the same-sex behaviour the Bible condemns and the desires of LGBTQ Christians for love, companionship, and family today.

MARRIAGE AND LGBTQ PERSONS

Common question: Same-sex relationships cannot fulfil the basic meaning of marriage according to Scripture. Shouldn't same-sex marriage be an acceptable in the church?

Answer: No, Marriage is about covenant.

The Bible teaches marriage is first and foremost *a covenant*. The Bible gives the rich metaphor of God's marriage to his people and the importance of faithfulness. Sex is to occur within the context of a life-long covenant. Sex is the act that bonds two people to create a new kinship unit. This is why Paul counselled not to have sex with a prostitute (1 Corinthians 6:15). Paul was not being prudish. Rather he understood that sex is meant to convey commitment for life as family. It is a commitment that declares "I will never leave you nor forsake you" just as Christ never forsakes the church. How often do we wish we had someone to depend on? Family that will love us no matter what? Sex within covenant conveys that beautiful truth of commitment and loyalty.

Covenant is the *foundation* of biblical marriage. That is why a marriage is valid even without procreation. It is why Elkanah reassured his wife Hannah that their marriage had meaning even if they didn't have children (1 Samuel 1). Gay and lesbian people can also form a covenant and exemplify loyalty and commitment to a partner. They can fulfil the biblical foundation of marriage: covenant.

Many Christians regard Ephesians 5:21-33 as a foundational biblical text on marriage. Here is part of the passage:

"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy....'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a profound mystery but I am talking about Christ and the church."

According to Ephesians, marriage is fundamentally about commitment keeping our covenant with our spouse as a reflection of God's own covenant with us through Jesus. Same-sex couples are just as capable of doing that as are heterosexual couples.

But the Bible (Genesis 1 and 2) only ever talks about marriage in heterosexual terms. Doesn't that necessarily exclude same-sex relationships, even apart from any negative texts about them?

These chapters describe the creation of the world and how the earth was populated through procreation. The animals reproduced after their kind and human beings reproduced. Reproduction is possible because human beings are sexually differentiated as male and female. But these chapters are *descriptive*, not prescriptive (giving a requirement). They simply describe what is most common.

We know these chapters are not saying everything there is to say about sexuality since intersex people are not mentioned. Yet intersex people exist. That is scientific fact. What we see in Genesis 1 is a literary device called "merism." A merism is when two words on the extreme are meant to capture the whole. For example, the biblical authors sometimes use the phrase "young and old." Now they don't literally mean *only* children and elderly people. When they say "young and old" they mean *everyone* of all ages.

In Genesis 1, we see merisms like day/night or heaven/earth. The authors aren't denying that dawn or dusk also exist alongside day and night. There are spectrums of light. Similarly, heaven/earth is meant to describe every created part of the universe not only the sky and ground. The same is true for male/female. Even though the authors don't specifically name every detail of creation in these short passages, doesn't mean people with minority sexual development are not included in God's creation.

Genesis 1-2 describes what most common, not all possibilities is. And since the creation story is especially about how the earth was populated, it makes sense that male and female are emphasized to describe how that population occurred and the family lineages that resulted.

The 4th century Algerian theologian, Augustine, acknowledged that some people are born with a different sexual development (i.e. intersex) and that we should not presume that God made a mistake. In his book, *City of God*, he acknowledged this variation in creation: "For God is the Creator of all things: He Himself knows where and when anything should be, or should have been created; and He knows how to weave the beauty of the whole out of the similarity and diversity of its parts. The man who cannot view the whole is offended by what he takes to be the deformity of a part; but this is because he does not know how it is to be adapted or related to the whole . . . God forbid, however, that someone who does not know why the Creator has done what He has done should be foolish enough to suppose that God has in such cases erred.

People with atypical sexual development whether intersex or gay are part of creation. These people also need family of their own. We might consider how God blesses faithful same-sex couples. Same-sex marriage was not on the radar screen in ancient societies. There are no examples of two men or two women of equal social status entering into

lifelong, monogamous relationships that are intended to form the basis of a family and home much less doing so with community support.

Scripture only discusses marriage in a heterosexual context because same-sex marriage was not an option in ancient societies, not because same-sex marriage was considered and rejected as outside of God's will.

The existence of gay Christians means the church has to modify one of two teachings: either celibacy as a vocation rather than a mandate or the scope of marriage. The question we face is whether the core principles of the Bible's teachings on marriage can extend to same-sex unions.

Only a man and a woman can biologically procreate. Doesn't same-sex couples' inability to procreate mean their relationships cannot fulfill the Bible's basis for marriage?

Procreation is a beautiful gift and a joy that men and women can share in marriage. However, a gift is different than a requirement. God did not command the man and woman to procreate in Genesis, rather God *blessed* them to be able to procreate (Genesis 1:28). But even though children are a good blessing, the biblical authors recognized that procreation is not necessary to validate a marriage. The Bible describes Hannah, a barren woman who was shamed by another woman for not being able to conceive a child. But Hannah's husband told her not to worry. He alone as her husband was better than 10 sons (1 Samuel 1:6-8). Eventually Hannah gave birth to Samuel. But it is clear their marriage was meaningful even if she never had a child. The Bible indicates support for barren women (and by extension infertile men).

The New Testament actually *minimizes* procreation. Christianity introduced something radical: one could choose *not* to marry or have children. Both Roman law and Jewish custom in the 1st century expected everyone to get married and have children. But Paul the Apostle taught that it was okay to be unmarried and not have children (1 Corinthians 7:7-8, 25-27). This was a radical proposal. In that time period, people who did not marry and have children were looked down upon. Marriage and procreation were considered important for the health of the community.

Why does Christianity say that procreation is not necessary? Because our hope of eternal life is found in Christ, not offspring. In Jewish tradition, children were the way that a man's name could live on. But with the promise of immortality, there is no longer pressure to have children. This is why Jesus says: "The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection" (Luke 20:34-36).

There is no marriage in heaven because we can no longer die; procreation is unnecessary to perpetuate life. In the 1st century, they could not envision marriage without procreation. So, Paul counselled celibacy. But with modern contraception and with advanced knowledge about reproduction, it's possible to have a marriage without having children. This is acceptable because God nor the Bible require us to have children. In fact, two people might not have children for the very purpose of having time to serve Christ in ministry. Marriage between two people without children is like Jesus sending out the disciples two by two to do his work.

In any case, the church has long allowed infertile men and women to marry despite not being able to procreate. So, also, we can be open to gay and lesbian people forming loving covenants even if they cannot have biological children. God can use them to serve in unique ways in the community because they are not encumbered by having children of their own. They can care for orphans or help the elderly or be pastors and evangelists.

Only non-Christians, who do not know the hope of immortality in Christ insist that people must procreate. Christians do not look for immortality in their children because we no longer need to fear death.

Procreation was a major concern throughout the Old Testament, as God was building his kingdom people primarily through biological procreation.

But the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus radically altered the significance of procreation among God's people. Now, God builds his kingdom through professions of personal faith, not through biological procreation.

Moreover, even in the Old Testament, the Bible never regards marriages that are incapable of procreation as being invalid on that basis. (See the marriage of Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 18 and the marriage of Elkanah and Hannah in 1 Samuel 1.)

In Matthew 19:1-12, Jesus may have made an exception to his prohibition of divorce in the case of adultery, but he made no such exception in the case of infertility. That indicates that covenantal commitment is more essential to marriage than the ability to procreate.

From the Song of Songs to Paul's teaching on sex in 1 Corinthians 7, the Bible never teaches that sex must be open to procreation in order to be moral.

Ephesians 5 says that the husband is the “head” of his wife, indicating that marriage relationships should be hierarchical. Doesn’t that mean marriage has to be between a man and a woman?

The Bible does reflect certain patriarchal norms in its discussions of marriage. But the best way to approach that issue is the same way that Christians approach biblical passages on slavery. We ask what direction Scripture moves relative to its original culture.

On both slavery and women’s roles, Scripture moves in a more egalitarian direction. Paul tells Onesimus to regard Philemon a man who was enslaved but had run away not as a slave, but as a brother, and he tells married couples that both husbands and wives yield authority over their bodies to one another (1 Corinthians 7).

In Galatians 3:28, we see a kind of blueprint of the kingdom of God: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructs his followers to pray for God’s kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven.

The Bible points toward a kingdom where the primary divisions of humanity Jew/Gentile, enslaved/free, and male/female are swept away in Christ. In the same way that Christians have embraced abolitionism, we should embrace gender equality rather than regarding hierarchical gender roles as essential to marriage.

God designed male and female bodies to come together as “one flesh.” But doesn’t human anatomy show that two men or two women weren’t designed for a “one-flesh” bond?

As we learned in section four, the phrase "one flesh" in Scripture refers to the formation of a new primary kinship bond, not the "anatomical fistedness" of male and female bodies. That's why Ephesians tells us that "the two will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24) really refers to the union between Christ and the church, which is based on God's covenantal love for humanity not anatomical design.

Ephesians 5:31-32 “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery but I am talking about Christ and the church.

Note: The essence of marriage according to the Bible is covenantal love not procreation, gender hierarchy, or anatomical complementarity. Same-sex couples live out that vision of marriage every day.

THE BIBLE AND TRANSGENDER BISEXUAL CHRISTIANS.

Arguments: “The Bible says God created people Male and Female, period.”

Response: “Yes, God did create male and female, but Genesis also says God created night and day, and we still have dusk and dawn. God created many things that aren’t listed in Genesis 1 and 2.

Genesis 1: 27 tells us, “So God created Humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” But that’s not the end of the story! In the creation account, God separates land from water, but that doesn’t negate the existence of marches, estuaries, and other places that are not-quite-land-not-quite-water. In the same way, human beings experience their gender in a way that don’t fit the either-or pairings in Genesis. Genesis shows us spectrum, not binaries.

Furthermore... In Galatians 3:28, Paul says, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus”. Rather than working backward towards Genesis, Christians are called forward into a new life in which gender constructs are lesser importance.

Argument: “The Bible says men can’t wear women’s clothes”.

Response: Scripture also holds stories of Biblical heroes who do exactly that. What about Joseph?

Deuteronomy 22:5 tells us, “A woman shall not wear a Man’s apparel, nor shall a man put on a Woman’s garment; for whoever does such things is abhorrent to the lord your God.” However, there is textual evidence to suggest that Joseph, of Technicolor dreamboat fame, was gender-non-conforming with his clothing, and he never lost God’s blessing.

Genesis 37:3-4 “Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a long robe with sleeves. But when his Brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his Brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him”. 2 Samuel 13:18 “Now, she was wearing a long robe with sleeves; for this is how the virgin daughters of the king were clothed in earlier times”.

Furthermore... In Mathew 6:25, Jesus tells us, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and body more than clothing?” When Jesus talked about food laws, he said that, what we put in our body is less important than what comes out of it in our speech and actions.

In the same way, this verse from Mathew helps us realize that what we put on our body isn't something we should be obsessing about.

Argument: "I can't call Transgender person their new name, that's just encouraging them".

Response: "Many people in the Bible give and receive new names. Would you refuse to use the new names of Sarah, Paul, Peter and Joshua?"

In Mathew 16:15-18, we read, "Jesus said to them, But who do you say that I am? Simon Peter answered, you are Messiah, the son of the living God. And Jesus answered him, blessed are you, Simon, Son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father in Heaven. And I tell you, you peter, and on this Rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." In this story, both Jesus and peter receive new names, Jesus is called "Messiah" to recognize who he already is, and Simon is called "Peter" to recognize who he is becoming.

Furthermore... While many names in the Bible are given by God or by Jesus, some names are given by other people like Moses renaming Joshua or people renaming themselves like Naomi/Mara. Names are usually given as a sign of a new identity, or to recognize a previous identity in a new way. Calling Transgender people by their new name is to see them for who they are now, and who they are becoming.

Argument: The Bible says transgender people who transition or have surgery are abominations".

Response: "In both Old and New Testaments, God welcomes gender-non-conforming people whose bodies have been changed".

Often times, people will point at Deuteronomy 23:1 ("No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the lord") to prove that transgender people should not medically transition. However, later on in the Old Testament, we see God changing this law, and instead welcoming eunuchs- people with changed sex characteristics.

Isaiah 56:4-5 " For thus, the lord: To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbath, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off".

Furthermore... One of the first converts to Christianity was a eunuch who stood outside the boundaries of race, ethnicity, and gender. Nothing about the eunuch's outsider identities could get in the way of God's love, or God's acceptance through baptism.

Acts 8:36-38 “As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?” He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him”.

THE BIBLE AND BISEXUAL CHRISTIANS

Bisexual people are a major part of the LGBTQ Christian community, but many in the church have misconceptions about what it means to be bisexual. Some questions people often ask:

How can you support bisexual people if you’re advocating for monogamous relationships?

Being bisexual doesn’t mean wanting to have multiple partners. It simply means being attracted to people of more than one sex. Bisexual people are just as capable of monogamous relationships as anyone else, and many bisexual Christians are happily married to a single partner.

What can I do to be more inclusive of bisexual people?

Don’t assume that everyone is either gay or straight, and don’t assume that bisexual people are simply going through a “phase. “Make space for bisexual people in your faith community to come out and share their stories.

WHO WE ARE

Universal Coalition of Affirming Africans Uganda (UCAA-UG) is an independent, non-partisan, non-governmental human rights organisation who seek to advocate for the respect for human rights of LGBTIQ persons using a faith based approach.

WHAT WE DO

We empower affirming faith leaders, LGBTIQ Christians and LGBTIQ Human Rights Defenders with Biblical knowledge to fight against Religious based homophobia in Uganda. We conduct inclusive social-economic services to promote inclusion and create safe spaces for LGBTIQ persons in our communities.

HOW TO GET CONNECTED

To learn more about us, visit our website at www.ucaaug.org. Follow us on Facebook to stay updated on our work.

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