

Is Homosexual Practice No Worse Than Any Other Sin?

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In my work on the Bible and homosexual practice I often encounter the argument that (1) no sin is any worse than any other sin; therefore (2) homosexual practice is no worse than any other sin.* Usually the comparison is then made with sins for which accommodations are often made by Christians (like gluttony or remarriage after divorce), rather than with sins for which no accommodation is made (like incest or murder), as a way of either shutting up Christian opposition to homosexual practice altogether or contending that self-affirming participants in homosexual practice will still “go to heaven.” Even many evangelicals who neither support homosexual practice nor extend a pass from God’s judgment to those who persist unrepentantly in it subscribe to these two views.

Sometimes these claims are buttressed by an analogy, such as when Alan Chambers, former

head of Exodus International, declared at the opening night General Session of the 2012 Exodus International Conference: “Jesus didn’t hang on the cross a little longer for people who ... have been involved with same-sex attraction or who have been gay or lesbian.” It comes across as a nice sound bite and can be helpful for those who think that homosexual practice is too bad to be forgiven by God. But it doesn’t establish the claim that there is no “hierarchy of sin.” The length of time that Jesus hung on the cross is irrelevant. It is *the fact* of Jesus’ death that counts for atonement. Nor is anyone arguing that Jesus’ death cannot cover big sins. It covers big and little sins for those who repent and believe in the gospel.

Put simply, *Christ’s universal coverage of sin through his death on the cross does not mean that all sins are equal in all respects but only that all sins are equal in one respect: They are all covered.* If they were not, no one would enter the kingdom, for God is so holy that any sin would disqualify a person from entry if moral merit were the basis for acceptance. By way of analogy, one may have health coverage for all injuries great and small and pay the same amount for the coverage regardless

* This article is a slightly altered version of pp. 15-25 of an article that I wrote on June 30, 2012, entitled “Time for a Change of Leadership at Exodus?” The article questioned whether Alan Chambers should continue as president of Exodus International, a ministry to persons with same-sex attractions who sought help in living lives of sexual obedience to Jesus Christ. Because that article dealt with a matter that has now been resolved (Chambers ultimately destroyed Exodus; another group, Restored Hope Network, rose up in its place) this section dealing with a timeless issue might otherwise get lost in the shuffle.

of the injury; but that doesn't mean that all injuries are of equal severity. As we shall see, there is a mountain of evidence from Scripture (in addition to reason and experience) that shows (1) sins do differ in significance to God and (2) God regards homosexual practice as a particularly severe sexual sin.

Why an Egalitarian View of Sin?

Why, then, do so many insist on an 'egalitarian view of sin'? There may be several reasons working together.

First, many Christians are overeager to do whatever they can to soften criticisms from homosexualist advocates. The latter, many of whom are very good at being outraged at anything that disagrees with their agenda, go bonkers when they hear homosexual practice described as a severe sin.

Second, some are pushing an egalitarian view of sin at least in part out of pastoral concerns, so as not to turn off homosexual inquirers with a message that they might find hard to accept. The flipside of this is that they may want a theological basis for criticizing any sense of self-superiority or uncharitable spirit coming from the church. Some believe that the church is responsible for creating an angry and bitter "gay-rights" community by giving a pass to Christians involved in heterosexual sins while using the Bible to beat up on persons who engage in homosexual behavior.

There is some truth in this view. However, the idea that, if the church had just delivered the message on homosexual practice as sin with more love and more balance, there wouldn't be *any* expression of anger and bitterness from the gay-rights community is preposterous. Jesus was a

loving guy and yet he was crucified for speaking the truth. Sin hates any restraint of its power and those under the controlling influence of same-sex attractions are no different. In addition, expressions of outrage and efforts at intimidation are an integral part of the homosexualist strategy for coercing societal approval of homosexual practice.

Christians should take care that in their rush to appease homosexualist advocates they don't end up denying Scripture itself, which does characterize homosexual practice in very negative terms, not as the only sin to be sure but nonetheless as a grave offense. One wonders whether Christians who denounce other Christians for saying that homosexual practice is a severe sin deep down think that the Apostle Paul is a bigot for giving special attention to homosexual practice in Romans 1:18-32 as a particularly self-degrading, shameful, and unnatural practice that is in part its own "payback" for those who engage in it.

While I have some sympathy for a pastoral motivation to stress more the element of universal sin to inquirers who might otherwise have anti-Christian prejudices activated, I cannot accept a blatant falsification of the Bible in claiming that the church, in viewing some sins (like homosexual practice) as worse than other sins, has created a tremendously damaging view that the Bible itself does not substantiate. I shall show below that both the general view that some sin is more heinous to God than others and the specific view that homosexual practice is a particularly severe sexual offense in God's eyes (in seriousness somewhere between adult-consensual incest and bestiality) are well documented from Scripture. Parenthetically, if people are really serious about the view that no one sin is worse than any other, they shouldn't be upset by the comparison to

consensual incest (since by their own reasoning incest is no worse than any other sin).

What a Hierarchical View of Sins Ought and Ought Not Do

Let it be understood what the biblical view of some sin as worse than others *does not* entitle anyone to do:

1. Deny one's own sinfulness apart from God and need for Christ's atonement.
2. Excuse one's own sin.
3. Treat others in a hateful manner or wish for them that they not come to repentance (in the manner of Jonah's initial view toward the Ninevites).
4. View anyone as immoral or spiritually inferior simply for the mere experience of urges to do what God strongly forbids.

On points 1 and 2, Paul believed *both* (1) that some sin is worse than others (idolatry and sexual immorality were major concerns, for example; and within the category of sexual immorality, he had particular revulsion for homosexual practice, then (adult) incest, then adultery and sex with prostitutes; Rom 1:24-27; 1 Cor 5; 6:9, 15-17; 1 Thess 4:6); *and* (2) that "all have sinned and fall short of in God's glory" and can only be made right by God's grace through Christ's redeeming work (Rom 3:23-25). The two points are not in opposition or even in tension. The fact that all sin is equal in one respect—any one sin can disqualify one from the kingdom of God if one doesn't receive Christ—does not infer that all sin is equal in all respects—some sins provoke God to bring judgment upon his people more than others.

With respect to the third point, recognizing the special severity of homosexual practice should in

no way lessen the pastoral love and care shown to persons acting out of same-sex attractions. On the contrary: The greater the severity of sin, the greater the outreach of love. This is the lesson that we learn from Jesus' outreach to tax collectors and sexual sinners. There is a tendency in the church, on both sides of the theological aisle, to correlate severity of offense with lack of love. So the liberal argues that in order to love someone we have to reduce the severity of the offense that the offender engages in or eliminate the offense altogether. The conservative sometimes maintains the severity of the offense at the cost of exercising love to the offender. Jesus (and Paul) taught us to uphold love and an intensified sexual ethic at the same time. He didn't have to lower the gravity of the offense of exploitative tax collectors in order to love them. Rather, because their offense was so grave (i.e., putting others at risk of starvation by collecting more in taxation than they were assigned to collect and profiting thereby), he devoted a greater proportion of his ministry outreach to them. The inverse relationship between the severity of the offense and the outreach of love (the greater the offense, the lesser the loving outreach; the greater the loving outreach, the lesser the offense) is pure paganism that we must drop from the church altogether.

Regarding the fourth point, no one is at fault merely for experiencing urges that one does not ask to experience and does not seek to cultivate. For example, the fact that someone experiences same-sex attractions at all is not something for which one is morally culpable and does not in any way justify a designation of the person as morally depraved. Same-sex erotic desires, like any desires to do what God expressly forbids, are sinful desires (i.e., they are desires to sin), which is why the one experiencing the desires should not yield to them either in one's conscious thought-life or in

one's behavior. Feelings of jealousy, covetousness, greed, pride, or sexual arousal for an illicit union are all sinful desires; but one isn't culpable for them unless one willingly entertains them in one's mind or acts on them in one's behavior.

Here is what the biblical view of different severity of sins *does* entitle one to do:

1. Use it to gauge the extent of another's movement away from God's grace and thus the level of intervention needed.
2. Deny that societal or ecclesiastical accommodations to some sins (like divorce and remarriage after divorce) justify accommodations to greater sins (adultery, incest, homosexual practice, pedophilia, bestiality). People can logically move only from greater to lesser offenses, not lesser to greater offenses.

God has given us all a sense of right and wrong with our consciences. We rightly have a sense that some actions are more evil than others and codify that sense in our laws, however imperfectly. Granted, even our consciences have been affected by the corrupting influence of sin, and nowhere more so than when we excuse our own sin. Moreover, our relative ordering of sins can be skewed by our own sinful desires. However, the *principle* that some sins are more heinous than others, not just in their effects on humans but also in the estimation of God, is God-given. If we didn't have that sense within our moral compass, society would be far more perverse than it already is.

Logic, Experience, and the Great Christian Traditions

Surely all reasonable persons are bound to acknowledge that for a woman's husband to tell

her a "white lie" about spending \$50 rather than \$25 on a new watch is not as bad as if he had committed adultery against her with five other people. Surely reasonable people must admit that in God's eyes (and not just ours or the victim's) it is worse for a parent to rape a child than for a parent to scold a child a little more than is necessary for an offense.

Nobody actually lives in the belief that all sins are equally severe on a moral plane. Indeed, often it is those who argue in connection with homosexual practice that all sin is equal that get particularly upset if one compares homosexual unions to (adult) incest, bestiality, or pedophilia. They do so precisely because they regard incest, bestiality, and pedophilia as "really bad" and don't want homosexual behavior to be associated with them. Such a reaction, however, is already a concession to the obvious principle that some sins are worse than others. Not a day goes by that people don't regularly assess some actions as greater wrongs than others. In my household if my youngest child goes to bed but sneaks in a little flashlight to do so reading or drawing beyond any reasonable bedtime and against her parents' wishes, she has done wrong but in a relatively light way as compared to, say, hitting her sibling.

Not only is the belief that all sins are equal to God in all respects manifestly absurd to human logic and experience, but also the great Christian traditions are agreed that some sin is worse than others. This is recognized even within the Reformed tradition, which emphasizes (rightly) universal human depravity (note: I am an ordained elder of the Presbyterian Church USA). For example, the Presbyterian Larger Catechism of the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) states: "All transgressions of the law of God are not equally heinous; but some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more

heinous *in the sight of God* than others” (7.260, my emphasis; elaboration in 7.261; cf. the Shorter Catechism 7.083).

Not only is this a Protestant view, it is also a Catholic view (note the difference between venial and mortal sins, as well as differentiations of gravity within the category of mortal sins) and an Orthodox view. I invite anyone to cite for me a creedal formulation from a major Christian denomination that contends that all sin is equally bad in God’s estimation. (Maybe there is; but I am unaware of such.) For a contemporary evangelical perspective, see J. I. Packer’s *Christianity Today* [article](#), “All Sins Are Not Equal” (2005).

Now I will grant that citing the consensus view of the major Christian traditions does not prove that some sins are indeed more heinous to God than others. My point is simply that the view on that subject espoused in this article stands within the historic mainstream of Christian faith.

Scriptural Support for the View that Some Sins Are Worse Than Others

Still, I’m a “Scripture man” so let’s go to Scripture. **Supporting evidence for the view that the Bible regards some sins as worse than other sins** is virtually endless so I’ll stop after giving a nice dozen.

(1) In the Old Testament there is a clear ranking of sins. For instance, in **Leviticus 20**, which **reorders the sexual offenses in ch. 18 according to severity of offense/penalty**, the most severe sexual offenses are grouped first (20:10-16). Among the first-tier sexual offenses (along with adultery, the worst forms of incest, and bestiality) is same-sex intercourse. Of course, variegated penalties for different sins can be found

throughout the legal material in the Old Testament.

(2) After the **Golden Calf episode** Moses told the Israelites, “**You have sinned a great sin**. But now I will go up to Yahweh; perhaps I can make amends for your sin” (Exod 32:30). Obviously the Golden Calf episode was a huge sin on the part of the Israelites, a point confirmed by the severity of God’s judgment. There had to be lots of sinning taking place among the Israelites from the moment that they stepped out of Egypt. Yet only at particular points did God’s wrath “burn hot” at the actions of the Israelites. Why so if all sins are equally heinous to God?

(3) **Numbers 15:30** refers to **offenses done with a “high hand”** (deliberately and perhaps defiantly) as more grievous in nature than relatively unintentional sins (15:22, 24, 27, 29).

(4) In **Ezekiel 8** Ezekiel is lifted up by angel “in visions of God to Jerusalem” where he sees varying degrees of idolatry going on in the Temple precincts and the angel twice uttering the phrase, “**You will see still greater abominations**” after successive visions (i.e. things detestable to God; 8:6, 13, 15; cp. 8:17).

(5) **Jesus referred to “the weightier matters of the law”** (Matt 23:23) such as justice, mercy, and faith(fulness), which were more important to obey than the tithing of tiny spices, even though the latter too had to be done (Matt 23:23). These formulations imply that violations of weightier or greater commandments (like defrauding the poor of their resources for personal gain) are more severe than violations of lesser or ‘lighter’ commandments (like paying tithes on small foods like spices), which Jesus stated should be done without leaving the weightier matters undone. Jesus adds the following criticism: “**Blind guides, those who strain out the gnat but who swallow**

the camel" (23:24). What's the difference between a gnat and a camel if all commands and all violations are equal?

(6) **Jesus famously pinpointed the two greatest commandments** (Mark 12:28-31). **He also said, "Whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments** (of the law) and teaches the people (to do things) like this will be called least in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:19). Again, to have greater and lesser commandments is to have greater and lesser violations.

(7) I would submit that **Jesus' special outreach to economic exploiters (tax-collectors) and sexual sinners**, all in an effort to recover them for the very kingdom of God that he proclaimed, was not so much a reaction to their abandonment by society as an indication of the special severity of these sins and the extreme spiritual danger faced by such perpetrators. In this connection one thinks of **the story of the sinful woman** who washed Jesus' feet with her tears, wiped his feet with her hair, kissed them with her lips, and anointed them with ointment (Luke 7:36-50). Jesus explained her extraordinary act by telling a parable of two debtors: **the one whom the creditor "forgave more" would be the one who would "love him more."** The clear inference is that the sinful woman had done something worse in God's eyes. Although Jesus' Pharisaic host did not appreciate the woman coming into contact with Jesus, Jesus extolled the woman's actions: "Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many [or: much, great], have been forgiven, for she loved much [or: greatly]; but the one who is forgiven little, loves little" (7:47). Many Christians treat the notion of being forgiven of greater sins as a bad thing. Jesus turns the idea on its head. Think about how Christians who stress that all sins are equal could use the biblical concept of some sins being more severe than others: *Some of us*

may have needed more forgiveness, but I tell you that this has made us understand the Lord's grace that much better and so love the Lord that much more.

(8) Another obvious instance of prioritizing some offenses as worse than others is Jesus' characterization of **"blasphemy against the Holy Spirit"** as an "eternal sin" from which one "never has forgiveness"—in context referring to the Pharisees' attribution of Jesus' exorcisms to demonic power (Mark 3:28-30).

(9) According to **John 19:11** Jesus told Pilate, "You would not have any authority against me if it had not been given to you from above. Therefore **the one who handed me over to you has greater sin.**" The reference is either to Judas (6:71; 13:2, 26-30; 18:2-5) or to Caiaphas the High Priest (18:24, 28). "Greater sin" obviously implies the Pilate's action is a lesser sin.

(10) **Paul talks about different grades of actions in 1 Cor 3:10-17:** One can construct poorly on the foundation of Christ and suffer loss while still inheriting the kingdom. However, to "destroy the temple of God," the local community of believers, over matters of indifference would bring about one's own destruction at the hands of God. This destruction is contrasted with being "saved ... through fire" over the lesser offenses. Major commentators of 1 Corinthians (e.g., Gordon Fee [Pentecostal], Richard Hays [Methodist], David Garland [Baptist], Joseph Fitzmyer [Catholic]) agree (1) that a distinction is being made between the degree of severity of actions; and (2) that Paul is addressing the individual believer's salvation. So Gordon Fee: "That Paul is serving up a genuine threat of eternal punishment seems also the plain sense of the text." "Those who are responsible for dismantling the church may expect judgment in kind; it is difficult to escape the sense of eternal

judgment in this case, given its close proximity to vv. 13-15" (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], pp. 148-49). So too Garland, who succinctly states that "bleak judgment" awaits those who destroy the community at Corinth; "their salvation is at risk" (p. 121).

(11) If all sin is equally severe to God then **why did Paul single out the offense of the incestuous man in 1 Cor 5 among all the Corinthians' sins as requiring removal from the community?** Why the particularly strong expression of shock and outrage on Paul's part? Furthermore, if there were not a ranking of commands, how could Paul have rejected out of hand a case of incest that was adult-consensual, monogamous, and committed? If the values of monogamy and commitment to longevity were of equal weight with a requirement of a certain degree of familial otherness, Paul could not have decided what to do. Obviously, this was not a difficult matter for Paul to decide. He knew that the incest prohibition was more foundational.

(12) **First John 5:16-17 differentiates** between "a sin that does not lead straight to death" (for which prayer may avail and rescue the offender's life) and "a sin that leads straight to death" ("mortal sin," for which prayer will not avail).

These twelve examples (do we really need to come up with more?) should make clear that the contention that the Bible nowhere indicates some sins to be worse in God's eyes than others is without merit.

Where Christians sometimes get mixed up on the issue is in thinking about Paul's argument for universal sin in Romans 1:18-3:20. Yes, Paul does make the point that all human beings, Jews and Gentiles alike, are "under sin" (3:9) and "liable to God's punishment" (3:19). In fact, his point is not

merely that "all sinned and fall short of [or: are lacking in] the glory of God" (3:23) but also that all have "suppressed the truth about God" and about ourselves accessible in the material structures of creation (1:18-32) or in the direct revelation of Scripture (2:1-3:20). Paul argues: We can't say that we sinned but didn't know that we sinned. We sinned and did know (somewhere in the recesses of our soul) or at least were given ample evidence to know. In short, all are "without excuse" for not glorifying God as God (1:20-21).

What Paul *is* saying is that any sin can get one excluded from God's kingdom if one thinks that one can earn salvation through personal merit or make do without Jesus' amends-making death and life-giving resurrection. What Paul *is not* saying is that all sin is equally offensive to God in all respects. The argument in Romans 2, for example, is not that Jews sin as much (quantitatively) and as egregiously (qualitatively) as Gentiles on average. Any Jew, including Paul, would have rejected such a conclusion out of hand. Idolatry (1:19-23) and sexual immorality / homosexuality (1:24-27) were not nearly as much of a problem among Jews as among Gentiles (obviously "the common sins" of 1:29-31 were more of a problem). Rather, the argument is that, although Jews sin less and less egregiously than Gentiles on average, they nonetheless know more because they have access to "the sayings of God" in Scripture (2:17-24; 3:1, 4, 9-20). So it all evens out in the wash, so to speak, as far as needing to receive God's gracious work in Christ is concerned (3:21-31).

Nevertheless, Paul didn't begin the extended vice list in Romans 1:18-32 with idolatry and sexual immorality (specifically, homosexual practice) and give expansive treatment to those two types of sin (9 verses as compared to 4 for all the rest) in order to demonstrate that all sin is equal. Yes, part of Paul's purpose in giving special

attention to these two sins may have been to lay a trap for the unsuspecting (imaginary) Jewish dialogue partner by appealing to his anti-Gentile prejudices. Certainly, too, they were particularly good examples for proving the point made in 1:18-20 about humans suppressing an obvious truth about God or about themselves visible in “the things made” (1:20). Yet there is a third reason for Paul to give these two vices special attention. It has to do with the fact that Paul nearly *always* began vice or offender lists with idolatry and sexual immorality, in either order, in his address to Christians—not just in Rom 1:18-32. He did so because he regarded idolatry and sexual immorality as especially severe offenses (within a set of not uncommon sins) that not only brought havoc to God’s people but also, frankly, really ‘ticked God off.’

That point is underscored for Paul by the story of Israel’s wanderings in the desert after leaving Egypt, a story which Paul discusses in 1 Cor 10:1-13. What really irked God and precipitated divine destruction was their idolatry and sexual immorality:

These things became examples (archetypes) for us, in order that we might not be desirers of evil things, just as those persons also desired. *Nor become idolaters*, just as some of them (were).... *Nor let us commit sexual immorality*, just as some of them committed sexual immorality and fell in one day twenty-three thousand. (1 Cor 10:6-8; my emphasis)

Scriptural Support for the View that Homosexual Practice Is a Particularly Severe Sexual Sin

Well then, if **biblical authors and Jesus** treat some sins as worse in God’s eyes than other sins,

do they regard *homosexual practice* as one of the more severe sexual sins? Many Christians who regard homosexual practice as sin say “no” (obviously “liberals” who do not view homosexual behavior as sinful would dismiss the question out of hand). Here are seven good arguments why I think the answer to the question is “yes.”

(1) Both the highly pejorative description and the extended attention that the apostle Paul gives to homosexual practice in **Rom 1:24-27** indicates that Paul regarded homosexual practice as an especially serious infraction of God’s will. As a complement to idolatry on the vertical vector of divine-human relations, Paul chose the offense of homosexual practice as his lead-off example on the horizontal vector of inter-human relations to illustrate human perversity in suppressing the obvious truth about God’s will for our lives perceptible in creation or nature. It makes little sense to argue that Paul took extra space in Rom 1:24-27 to talk about how homosexual practice is “dishonorable” or “degrading,” “contrary to nature,” an “indecent” or “shameful/ obscene behavior,” and a fit “payback” for their straying from God in order to show that homosexual practice was *no* worse than any other sin. Paul obviously gave idolatry and homosexual practice more airtime because they were two classic, not-uncommon examples of great human depravity that could only occur after humans had first blinded themselves to the truth around them. In the case of homosexual practice, humans would have to suppress the self-evident sexual complementarity of male and female (anatomically, physiologically, psychologically) before engaging in intercourse with members of the same sex.

(2) **Jesus’ appeal to Gen 1:27** (“male and female he made them”) and **Gen 2:24** (“for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother

and be joined to his woman/wife and the two will become one flesh”) in his remarks on divorce-and-remarriage in **Mark 10:6-9** and **Matt 19:4-6** show how important a male-female prerequisite for marriage was to Jesus. Jesus argued that the “twoness” of the sexes ordained by God at creation was **the foundation for limiting the number of persons in a sexual bond to two**, whether concurrently (as against polygamy) or serially (as against repetitive divorce and remarriage). If Jesus regarded a male-female prerequisite as foundational for extrapolating other sexual ethics principles (i.e. marital monogamy and indissolubility), wouldn’t a direct violation of the foundation (homosexual practice) be more severe than a violation of principles built on that foundation (polygamy, adultery, remarriage-after-divorce)?

The argument that Jesus must have regarded divorce and remarriage-after-divorce as the more serious issues (i.e. because he explicitly criticizes them) misses the point that Jesus didn’t have to argue against homosexual practice in first-century Judaism because the very thought of engaging in such behavior was ‘unthinkable’ for Jews (we have no evidence of Jews advocating such behavior, let alone engaging in it, within centuries of the life of Jesus). Jesus was setting out to close the remaining loopholes in Judaism’s sexual ethics (another was adultery-of-the-heart), not to recapitulate more severe prohibitions already universally accepted by Jews. For example, the fact that Jesus said nothing about incest is an indication that he *accepted* the strong strictures against it in Levitical law. It is not an indication that he regarded remarriage-after-divorce as an equally serious or more serious offense.

(3) Apart from ruling out sex between humans and animals, **the male-female requirement for sexual relations is the only sexual requirement**

held absolutely for the people of God from creation to Christ. The first human differentiation at creation is the differentiation between male and female. In **Gen 2:21-24** the creation of woman is depicted as the extraction of a “rib” or (better) “side” from the human so that man and woman are parts of a single integrated whole. Woman is depicted as man’s sexual “counterpart” or “complement” (Heb. *negdo*). A male-female prerequisite is thus grounded in the earliest act of creation. Compare the situation with incest prohibitions: Most such prohibitions cannot be implemented until after the human family spreads out and becomes numerous. In addition, while we see a limited allowance of polygyny in the OT (multiple wives for men, though never polyandry, multiple husbands for women), subsequently revoked by Jesus, and some limited allowance in earliest Israel of what will later be termed incest in Levitical law (e.g., Abraham’s marriage to his half-sister Sarah; Jacob’s marriage to two sisters while both were alive), there is never any allowance whatsoever for homosexual practice in the history of Israel. Virtually every single law, narrative, poetry, proverb, moral exhortation, and metaphor dealing with sexual matters in the Old Testament presupposes a male-female prerequisite. The only exceptions are periods of apostasy in ancient Israel (e.g., the existence of homosexual cult prostitutes, which narrators still label an abomination).

Why are there no positive exceptions? The reason is evident: A male-female prerequisite belongs to an inviolate foundation supremely sacred to God. Homosexual practice is a *direct* violation of that foundation. **Polygyny** is a violation of the monogamy principle that is only *secondarily* extrapolated from a male-female prerequisite. **Incest** is a violation of a requirement of embodied otherness that is only *secondarily* extrapolated from the foundational analogy of

sexual otherness established at creation. Consequently, homosexual practice is worse than incest and polyamory because (1) it is a direct attack on a sexual paradigm instituted at the very beginning of creation, whereas incest and polyamory prohibitions develop later only secondarily from a male-female paradigm; and (2) homosexual practice, unlike incest and polyamory, is never practiced by positive characters in Old Testament narrative or sanctioned by Israelite law.

(4) **Leviticus 20 lists homosexual practice among a first tier of sexual offenses** (adultery, the worst forms of incest, and bestiality; 20:10-16) that are worse than a second tier of sexual offenses (20:17-21). **In Leviticus 18**, although in the concluding summary (Lev 18.26-27, 29-30) all the sexual offenses in Lev 18 are collectively labeled “abominations,” “abhorrent” or “detestable acts” (*to’evoth*), **only man-male intercourse in 18:22 (and 20:13) is specifically tagged with the singular *to’evah***. Outside the Holiness Code in Lev 17-24 the term is normally used for various **severe moral offenses** (not merely acts of ritual uncleanness), including occasionally homosexual practice (Deut 23:18; 1 Kgs 14:24; Ezek 16:50; 18:12; probably also Ezek 33:26).

(5) **A triad of stories about extreme depravity—Ham’s offense against his father Noah (Gen 9.20-27), the attempted sexual assault of male visitors by the men of Sodom (Gen 19.4-11), and the attempted sexual assault of the Levite passing through Gibeah (Judg 19.22-25)—feature a real or attempted act of man-male intercourse as an integral element of the depravity.**

(6) The severe character of homosexual practice is amply confirmed in **Jewish texts of the Second Temple period and beyond** (for texts, especially Philo and Josephus, see *The Bible and*

Homosexual Practice, 159-83). Jews in the Greco-Roman period regarded **man-male intercourse as the prime example**, or at least one of the top examples, **of Gentile impiety** (e.g., *Sibylline Oracles* 3; *Letter of Aristeas* 152). Only bestiality appears to rank as a greater sexual offense, at least among “consensual” acts. There is some disagreement in early Judaism over whether sex with one’s mother is worse, comparable, or less severe. The absence of a specific recorded case of same-sex intercourse in early Judaism from the fifth century B.C. to ca. A.D 300 also speaks to the severity of the offense. Regarding the possibility of Jews engaging in this abhorrent behavior, a text from the rabbinic *Tosefta* comments simply: “Israel is not suspected” (*Qiddushin* 5:10).

(7) **The historic position of the church over the centuries** is that the Bible understands homosexual practice as **an extreme sexual offense**. For example, among the Church Fathers Cyprian (200-258) called it “an indignity even to see.” John Chrysostom (344-407) referred to it as “monstrous insanity,” “clear proof of the ultimate degree of corruption,” and “lusts after monstrous things.” Theodoret of Cyr (393-457) called it “extreme ungodliness.” John Calvin, no slouch when it came to emphasizing universal depravity, nonetheless labeled homosexual practice “the fearful crime of unnatural lust,” worse than “bestial desires since [it reverses] the whole order of nature,” “vicious corruption,” “monstrous deeds,” and “this abominable act.”

Final Thoughts

The Bible is clear and consistent on these four points:

- 1) Some commands of God are weightier and greater and more foundational than other commands.
- 2) Some violations are therefore greater than other violations.
- 3) Violations of greater commands are strong indications of a sick soul and of a life that either has never been led by the Spirit or is now turning away from being led by the Spirit
- 4) Only those who are led by the Spirit and walk in the light participate in the atoning work of the cross. As 1 John 1:7 says: *“If we are walking in the light as he himself is in the light we have partnership with one another and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”* The text doesn’t say: If you believed in Jesus at one point in your life, the blood of Christ will cleanse you from all sin no matter how you behave. It says: *“If we are walking in the light ... the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”* There is no sin-transfer to Christ apart from self-transfer; no living without dying; no saving of one’s life without losing it.

If I encountered a brother in the Lord going a bit overboard with money or material things; or beginning to have loose boundaries in interactions with persons that might be of sexual interest or beginning to have more struggles with sexual desire in his thought life; or complaining a bit much, I wouldn’t likely conclude that there was something seriously wrong with that brother’s spiritual life. But if I found out that this self-professed brother in the faith had become a bank

robber or was using a Ponzi scheme to bilk people out of their life savings; or was involved in an adulterous affair or sleeping with his mother or having sex with persons of the same sex, I would be more than a little concerned about the person’s relationship with Christ. Why? The bigger the sins, the greater the indication that the person is not living a Spirit-led life that necessarily and naturally flows out of genuine faith. Is there any Christian who doesn’t (rightly) think this way?