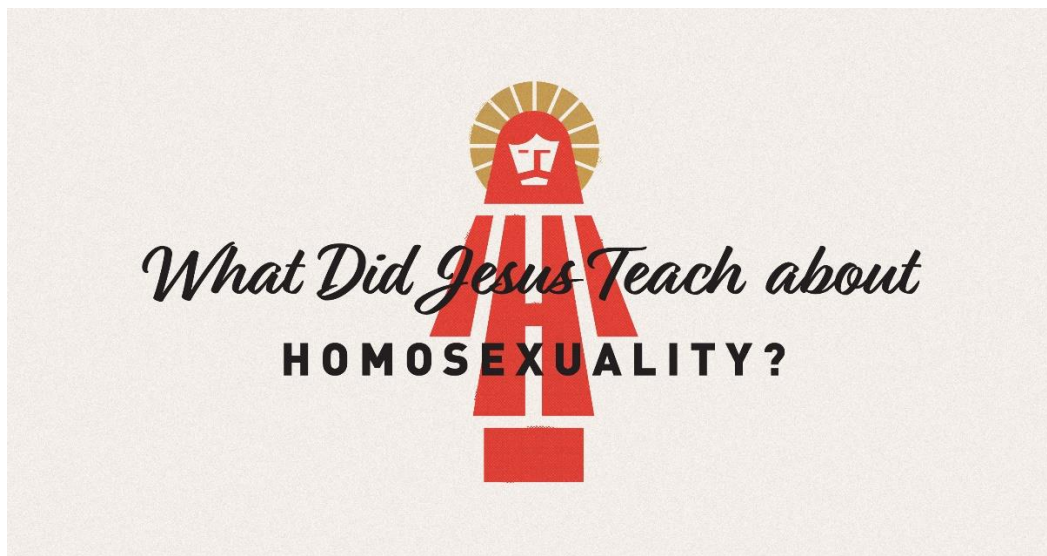


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What Did Jesus Teach about Homosexuality?

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1



Silence Equals Support?

In a 2012 article for *Slate* online, Will Oremus asked a provocative question: Was Jesus a homophobe?¹

The article was occasioned by a story about a gay teenager in Ohio who was suing his high school after school officials prohibited him from wearing a T-shirt that said, "Jesus Is Not a Homophobe."

Oremus was less concerned about the legal issues of the story than he was about the accuracy of the statement on the shirt. Oremus suggests that Jesus's views on homosexuality were more inclusive than Paul's. He writes,

While it's reasonable to assume that Jesus and his fellow Jews in first-century Palestine would have disapproved of gay sex, there is no record of his ever having mentioned homosexuality, let alone expressed particular revulsion about it. ...

¹ Will Oremus, "[Wait, Was Jesus a Homophobe?](#)" *Slate*, April 9, 2012

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Never in the Bible does Jesus himself offer an explicit prohibition of homosexuality.

Oremus seems to suggest that since Jesus never explicitly mentioned homosexuality, he must not have been very concerned about it.

There are at least two reasons that we should be skeptical of this view.

2

Two Problems

First, there are many ethical issues about which Jesus made no explicit statement. That observation hardly means that his moral vision has no relevance to those issues.

Jesus never said anything explicit about abortion, same-sex marriage, or child molestation. But it would be an incredible claim to conclude from that fact that Jesus's teaching is irrelevant to our ethical assessment of those issues.

Second, Jesus did speak explicitly about sexual immorality in general and the nature of marriage. He denounced the former (e.g., [Matt. 5:28; 15:19](#)) and defined the latter according to [Genesis 2:24](#): "For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh" ([Matt. 19:5](#) AT; par. [Mark 10:7-8](#)).

Jesus affirmed the covenanted union of one man and one woman as the only normative expression of human sexuality. It is incredible to suggest that these words from Jesus have no bearing on the question of homosexuality. They surely do.

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Jesus vs. Paul

So Oremus has misconstrued the relevance of Jesus's teaching to the homosexual question. Nevertheless, he goes on to contrast Jesus's attitude with that of the apostle Paul. He writes:

Even if Jesus viewed homosexuality as a sin, he had a penchant for reaching out to sinners rather than shunning them. ... Not all of Jesus' followers took such a tender view, however. In [Romans 1](#), Paul denounced gay sex as unnatural—an

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egregious example of pagan decadence—and said it would bring the wrath of God.

Here is another iteration of the hermeneutical cage match that is so popular today—the view that Jesus and Paul are fundamentally at odds over a variety of ethical issues.

On the one side is Jesus: peace-loving, enemy-forgiving, egalitarian, and inclusive with regard to homosexuals.

On the other side is Paul: war-loving, death penalty-supporting, patriarchal, and exclusionary with regard to homosexuals.

Whereas Jesus was all love and tolerance, Paul was about “wrath” and intolerance. And so the slogan from the T-shirt appears to be vindicated. Despite the hang-ups of people like Paul, Jesus was not a homophobe.

A False Fight

Those who stage hermeneutical cage matches between Paul and Jesus are staging a contest that neither Jesus nor Paul would ever have tolerated. The approach tends to undermine the New Testament’s claim to be a normative basis for ethics by making the *black* letters subservient to the *red* letters.

At the end of the day, this argument is not about the color of letters but about the nature of Scripture. Those who wish to establish biblical authority over the long haul will avoid the cage-match approach. And those who truly wish to be red-letter Christians will heed the words of Paul and the other apostolic authors of Scripture as the very words of Christ.

This article is adapted from [What Is the Meaning of Sex?](#) by Denny Burk and is part of the [What Did Jesus Teach?](#) series.



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