**What Does the Bible Say about X?**

**Unequivocally Unequivocally**

**Supports X Opposes X**

**1 2 3 4 5**

**Evenly Split about X**

**Preponderance for Preponderance for**

**Supporting X Opposing X**

**Continuum of Possible Answers**

**Interpreting and Applying the Bible for Difficult Questions (such as LGBTQ Inclusion)**

**Keith Wyma**

**Whitworth Church**

**Necessary Starting Point/Top Priority: Follow God’s Word!**

**Basic Question: Does the Bible *support* or *oppose* X?**

1. **Does the Bible *directly* speak of X?**
2. First essential principle of interpretation: The Bible (or any other person or source) can ***neither*** *directly support/command* ***nor*** *directly oppose/condemn* something (X) that the biblical authors (speakers) had *no conception of.*
3. E.g., “spending an hour a day on the internet” or “funding a space program to go to the moon.”
4. Second essential principle of interpretation: *Original context* and *original language* are crucial to what the Bible *actually* says/speaks of.
5. Translations can *obscure* this and make the Bible *seem* to directly and clearly speak of (or command or condemn) something when it *doesn’t.*
6. E.g., ‘kill’ in 6th Commandment or ‘homosexual’ in Paul’s letters.
7. ***If* the Bible directly speaks of X, how *unequivocally/unmistakably* is it addressed?**
8. See the continuum.
9. E.g., predestination vs. free-willed choice of repentance.
10. E.g., “worship only the LORD” re: Namaan in the OT, or *Jesus* in the NT.
11. **What is the *scope* of the Bible’s direct address of X?**
12. *Original language and context* again are key.
13. E.g., ‘adultery’ in 7th Commandment—what does that *cover*?
14. OT Jewish understanding.
15. Jesus’ understanding in NT
16. Contemporary situations: emailing/texting; emotional closeness/dependence; etc.?
17. ***If* the Bible is *not* unequivocal about X and/or the *scope* of its passage(s) is *limited,* how do we *interpret* and/or *apply* Scripture?**
18. What if the Bible is *split* in its references to X?
19. E.g., the role of faith vs. works in salvation.
20. What if the Bible includes only *limited instances* of addressing X and the *scope* of that address is debatable?
21. E.g., only *seven* mentions of same-sex acts in all the Bible, and there’s “massive debate about whether those passages can apply to monogamous, consensual, loving gay [marriage] (Preston Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved,* p17).”
22. What if the Bible *doesn’t* address X *directly*?
23. How should Christians regard military service—John the Baptist, Jesus and Peter re: Roman soldiers.
24. What if the Bible *doesn’t address* X *at all?*
25. E.g., smoking pot or a capitalistic economy.
26. What if the *preponderance* of the Bible’s address of X leans one way, *can it be right to interpret it the* *other way?*
27. E.g., slavery or the leadership of women in the church.
28. ***If* (IV), what *criteria* or *helps* do we appeal to in interpreting Scripture about, or apply it to, X?**
29. The *rest of the Bible—“Let Scripture interpret Scripture”—*what does the Bible say on related issues or themes, or how do the major scriptural themes, like God’s love and justice, or redemption, apply to X?
30. The *inspiration of the Holy Spirit*—but “testing the spirits” as in Berean church in Acts.
31. *Church history and tradition*—this is **key, but *not infallible,* and *can be overruled.***
32. E.g., slavery and church leadership for women.
33. *Subsequent discovery*—i.e., what do we know or what have we learned that the biblical authors—and the church tradition—*didn’t know?*
34. *Natural-scientific* discovery—e.g., the geologic age of the Earth vs. the 5000-year-old, 7-day creation, or the genetic possibilities of being intersex, or that there is no biological basis of race.
35. *Moral* discovery—e.g., human rights in regard to views on slavery, or that inequality and oppression of women is wrong.
36. *Psychological and sociological* discovery—e.g., that racism infects human institutions, not just human hearts, or finding that there is lifelong, non-voluntary—innate? genetic?—sexual orientation which is not feasibly subject to change or reprogramming.
37. *Changes in context* that *move out of the scope* of the Bible’s address of X—e.g., women’s theological training progressing from Paul’s time.

**The NON-Affirming Side:**

**Arguments that the Bible OPPOSES Gay Marriage (Mostly from Preston Sprinkle’s *People to Be Loved* (Zondervan, 2015))**

1. **Sprinkle’s story, questions, and goals (pp15-18).**
2. Keys:
3. Debate is NOT about every same-sex activity, but ONLY about monogamous, gay marriage (p17).
4. The Bible only addresses same-sex activity SEVEN times—what is the SCOPE of those addresses (pp16-17)?
5. Does what the Bible *directly condemns* INDIRECTLY EXTEND to gay marriage? “The debate is not about what the Bible says. That much is clear. The debate is over what the Bible means” (p17).
6. Tradition CAN be mistaken, has it been so, here (p18)?
7. **What Does the Bible *Actually* Say?**
8. The **“Clobber Passages”—**see below.
9. **NOTE WELL: NONE of the passages explicitly or directly mentions monogamous, gay *marriage*. And they apparently COULDN’T, because it’s almost certainly not within the experience or conceptual horizons of the biblical authors.**
10. **Problems of** **scope** for **Gen 19 and Judges 19**: Both passages deal with actions (and even patterns) of *gang rape* and *murder.* These are obviously sufficiently evil to condemn (and even destroy), without implications for gay, consensual, married sex. Later biblical passages—including Jesus’ words—condemning Sodom do NOT mention same-sex acts as part of their guilt.
11. Sprinkle (pp42-44) “Let me be frank: I don’t think the story of Sodom contributes to the discussion about homosexuality. …If the Bible condemns all forms of homosexual relations, we need to look elsewhere.”
12. **Upshot: There’s good reason to think Gen 19 and Judges 19 do NOT even indirectly condemn gay marriage, any more than condemnation of heterosexual rape would imply condemnation of heterosexual marriage.**
13. **Lev 18:22, 20:13:** Both are straightforward condemnations of male, same-sex acts. The main questions, here, are of scope (what acts are and are not covered) and context (especially whether this is **ceremonial, civil or moral law**).
14. On the side of *wider* ***scope***that could **forbid** *gay marriage*:
15. There are *no qualifiers*, no violence is assumed, just condemnation of a certain kind of sex that would be present within (male) gay marriage (p45).
16. The condemnation is particularly strong, with the ‘detestable/abominable’ label.
17. On the side of *narrower* ***scope*** that could **leave space** for *gay marriage:*
18. It does **not mention women doing same-sex acts**—in fact the **OT has no mention of this at all**—could *female* same-sex (and thus *female gay marriage*) be allowed or not culturally cared about [see below]? Moreover, if the scope truly is all same-sex acts, this lack of mention makes no sense. Note that by contrast the bestiality condemnation includes both male and female acts.
19. Is it simply understood “behind” the verses that male same-sex acts would be performed by *married* men—i.e., making this an especially detestable/abominable kind of *adultery?* Later in his book, Sprinkle acknowledges that, “…in Jewish tradition*, homosexual intercourse was described as a form of adultery*” (118) [emphasis added].
20. On the side of *wider* ***context*** that could **forbid** *gay marriage:*
21. Nearly all the surrounding laws in Lev 18-20 are *moral laws,* e.g., no adultery (18:20, 20:10), no oppression of neighbor (19:13) and even the Second Greatest Commandment (19:18), and OT’s moral laws still apply to Christians (pp49-51).
22. **Key point:** “The most fail-proof test to see if an Old Testament law is still valid for Christians is to see if it’s repeated in the New. …Not only are Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 repeated in the New, but Paul uses a Greek word that appears to have been created directly from these two verses” (pp49-52). Note that *OT prohibitions being repeated in NT “sin lists”* is important in *Jim Edwards’* understanding of the LGBTQ issue, too.
23. On the side of *narrower* ***context*** that could **leave space** for gay marriage:
24. At least one law in Lev 18-20—about sex with menstruating women—seems to be *ceremonial,* about ceremonial purity, so there is a possibility 18:22 and 20:13 are, too.
25. 20:13 specifies *punishment,* making it a case of Israelite *civil law*, and we know Jesus dispenses with that in the related case of adultery (John 8).
26. **Key point:** “…*as with a woman*…” may mean male same-sex is forbidden “because it feminizes the passive partner…” (p47). Israelite culture is *patriarchal* and generally sees men as better/higher than women (e.g., women not allowed in the inner tabernacle/temple; women not allowed to be priests; Jewish prayer: “Thank you, God, that I was not born a woman…,” etc.). So male same-sex acts would be *degrading to men.* *If* this condemnation is tied to that *misogyny,* then it may be like the Israelite laws on divorce, reflecting a *“hardness of heart”* in the culture, rather than God’s universal will (Deut 24:1, Matt 19).
27. *If* this condemnation is related to patriarchally-based horror at degrading men, that would also *explain both why it’s ‘detestable/abominable’ and why no female same-sex acts are condemned*.
28. Sprinkle downplays this OT patriarchy/misogyny to keep the context wide (p48), but this seems to ignore copious cultural evidence, and it’s worth noting in the *Gen and Judges passages that innocent women are blithely offered up to the rapists to preserve the threatened men*.
29. **Upshot: Lev 18:20 and 20:10 *may* indirectly oppose gay marriage, but of themselves they (and the OT as a whole) do NOT present an *unequivocal/unmistakable* opposition to gay marriage based on God and not just culture.**
30. **Romans 1:26-27:** This includes (and is the ONLY biblical reference to) *female* same-sex acts and mentions male same-sex acts, as well. Nevertheless, questions of scope and context are in play, here, as well.
31. *Original Context:* How did Greek and Roman society understand same-sex relationships?
32. First, *‘homosexuality’* as a concept ***did not exist*** (nor did ‘*heterosexuality’*). “The term *homosexuality* is a modern sociological construct invented in the nineteenth century, and *gay* and *lesbian* refer to people whose *identity* is based on their *sexual attraction*. But ancient people didn’t think in terms of sexual identity…There is no term or concept for homosexuality, gay, or lesbian” (57) [emphasis added].
33. So, by the *first principle of interpretation*, above, **it *cannot* be the case that NT references should be understood as, or *translated* as, condemning *‘homosexuals’* in the way we understand the term** (yet see some of the translations, below)**.**
34. Second, the ancient world “thought in terms of *gender identity*…What mattered was masculinity and femininity. ‘Is Joey *manly*?’ or ‘Is Joey *effeminate*’ were the questions they would raise” (57) [emphasis added]. And manliness could include strength in battle, macho mannerisms, and even having sex with other men (cf. modern prison sex), while also likely being married to a woman and having a family—as long as the manly man was the penetrator (prison terms: “pitching”), not the penetrated (“catching” or “being someone’s bitch”—note the derogatory, *feminine* term).
35. Relatedly, in the ancient Near East outside of Israel, “People of high social standing [and men stood higher than women] were supposed to be the givers not the receivers of sexual intercourse. The gender of the receiver was largely irrelevant” (56).
36. In summary: “The biological sex of the person you had sex with didn’t matter a whole lot. What mattered was whether you were the active or passive partner in sexual relations. If you were active, then you’d be manly. If passive, then effeminate” (58). Assyria even had harsh legal penalties for high-status men being reduced to the passive partner (58).
37. Relatedly, men were believed to be the source of new life, not women. The “seed” of the man contained the whole being of the possible offspring (like the seed of a plant does), and the woman was just the “soil” to sow in—hence if no offspring, the woman was “barren” but “fertile” is there were offspring. The relevance, here, is twofold:
38. In sex, a woman has a *natural* ***use*** by a man as the means to procreation.
39. If a man were to masturbate, have gay sex, or otherwise waste his seed (cf. Onan in the OT), that would virtually equate to having abortions, i.e., denying existence to human beings, which was widely considered quite wrong.
40. This is related to the Greek terms Paul uses, as we’ll see.
41. Third, *some* writers in the ancient world described same-sex attraction as *innate* and *life-long,* e.g. from astrological settings at birth. This could mean the NT passages to be condemning same-sex relations, even if they’re from innate attractions. However, this “innatist” view was *not consensus* at the time, and *current scholars vehemently disagree with each other* about whether the ancient sources in question really meant this, e.g., Aristophanes in Plato’s *Symposium.* Even Sprinkle admits, “I’m not saying everyone was aware of this or that Paul and other New Testament authors necessarily held the same perspective” (60).
42. Fourth, some scholars point to evidence that the ancient Greco-Roman world contained *same-sex relations that were lasting, and even a kind of marriage*. Sprinkle builds from this to argue that the NT condemnations could possibly have had gay marriage in mind (62-64).
43. *However,* this claim is *highly contentious* (and Sprinkle underplays that)*.* Cf. the ‘women in ancient philosophy’ problem, e.g., Diotima from *Symposium.*
44. Also, even if such relations were real, they were *not the norm, and highly unlikely to be what Paul’s audience understood same-sex relations to be (and since Paul is a “task theologian” that applies to him, too).*
45. Fifth, the widely recognized type of same-sex relations were *sex with prostitutes (possibly religious/temple ones)* and *pederasty.* Older, higher-status men (active) would have relations that were both mentoring and sexual with younger men, including teenage boys (passive, and sometimes called, ‘*catamites’*). Again, many if not nearly all the older men would be married to a woman and have a family, as well. There are strong indications, given Paul’s terms, that he has (at least) such sex in mind in the NT condemnations.
46. Sixth, same-sex acts, esp. by men (and remember, these men were not seen simply as gay and were probably married), were widely seen as evidencing *extremities of sexual desire, or an overflow of lust.* That is, there was a common perception that such men had grown bored with heterosexual sex—presumably from having so much of it—and were looking for *sexual novelty* by having sex with other men: “…many Greco-Roman writers believed that same-sex eroticism was the byproduct of excessive lust” (98). There are important connections here, too, with Paul’s terms in the Epistles.
47. Thus, it *may be possible* that, “…Paul does not critique all same-sex relations. He only condemns those that result from excessive lust and uncontrollable passions” (98).
48. Sprinkle: “I believe that this is by far the most persuasive affirming interpretation of Romans 1 that’s out there” (98).
49. Seventh, the *Jewish* culture at the time also *opposed same-sex relations*. E.g., Josephus and Philo (First Century) both condemn same-sex acts—based on Lev. 18:22 and 20:13—and talk about it as ‘*unnatural* desire’ (Philo) and that *marriage* must be “*according to nature*” (Josephus) (65). Jewish rabbis “…were a little more lenient on same-sex female relations, although they still believed they were sin” (66).
50. In summary, “[1] *Lack of procreation* was one of several reasons why same-sex intercourse was considered sin [by Jewish culture]. [2] *Blurring gender distinctions,* [3] *using your body in a way it wasn’t designed,* and[4] *forcing another man to act like a woman*, were among the other reasons. Or in some cases, there was no other reason than ‘God said so’ [in the Law].” (67) [emphasis added].
51. Paul is almost certainly influenced by this line of thinking—again, note his terms.
52. **Key Point: the Rom 1:26-7 condemnation seems to be a NT “sin list” re-affirmation of the OT Lev condemnations, meaning the Lev passages would be *moral law (not just civil or ceremonial) and still valid for Christians.* Sprinkle emphasizes this (52), and so does Jim Edwards.**
53. *Original language*: Definitions of key terms.
54. *Atimias—*dishonorable, shameful, degrading, disgraceful (literally, “without honor/reverence”)
55. *Pathe—*passions, desires
56. *Physiken—*natural
57. *Para physin—*contrary to/against nature, unnatural
58. *Chresin—*use, function
59. *Exekauthesan—*were inflamed/burned
60. *Orexthei—*desire, lust
61. *Translation Issues:*
62. Note that both the NIV and NRSVUE translate *chresin* as ‘intercourse’ or ‘sexual relations’ when the actual meaning, *‘use’* is much more emergent from, and revealing of, 1.b.i and 1.b.iii, above. *‘Use’* connotes inferiority; we *use* what is *lesser* (or at least what we see as lesser) than ourselves.
63. Note that the implication is that men *naturally (physiken) use(chresin)* women*,* but it’s *unnatural (para physin)* for women to *use (chresin)* women or men to *use (chresin)* men. This again connects to 1.b, above.
64. Note that *atimias pathe* (‘shameful desires’) and *exehauthesan…orexei* (‘burned with desire/lust’) clearly make 1.f, above, relevant to the passage.
65. With all this in view, does the *scope* of this condemnation cover only those *same-sex relations characterized by lust*?
66. Sprinkle’s argument for a *wider* scope:
67. Some ancient writers did *not* view same-acts behavior as resulting from excessive lust [true, but Paul *explicitly references it*, here].
68. The “excessive lust” argument wasn’t generally applied to *female* same-sex behavior, and Paul directly references female acts, here [*however,* Sprinkle significantly *overstates* the support of this general point, since Paul here explicitly attaches the female behavior to ‘shameful desires’].
69. “The phrase ‘against nature’ does not help the excessive-lust interpretation…’against nature’ does not mean ‘excessive lust.’” [True about the simple term-meanings, but given God’s created order—which is *nature*—*any desire* (and *lust* is such a desire) that *isn’t God-intended* is *against nature*.]
70. “It is not excess desire that Paul condemns. He condemns actions that result from sexual desire…Paul never says they [the desires] are excessive…” [Granted, the term ‘excessive’ doesn’t appear. But that’s a very *justified implication* from *‘shameful* desires’ and *‘burning with lust!’*] (the above, 98-100).
71. **Upshot: I do *not* believe the non-affirming position successfully answers the “excessive desire” argument that Rom 1’s scope may be limited to *lustful*, same-sex sex acts.**
72. **Sprinkle Concludes: the scope of Rom 1 includes married, gay sex.**
73. **Sprinkle Concedes:** “Having said that, if we climb inside Paul’s imagination, I seriously doubt that he was picturing a gay couple getting married after months of nonsexual courtship when he penned Romans 1. …Paul is describing same-sex acts that fit the historical context of Corinth (where he is writing from) and Rome (where his audience lives)” (100-101).
74. **Upshot:** **At the very least, Rom 1:26-27 does *NOT unequivocally/unquestionably*—even *indirectly—condemn gay marriage. Further, even the condemnations of same-sex acts—and then even if not referring in scope only to excessively lustful acts--.******burdened with heavy cultural baggage, which might make Paul’s condemnation culture-bound, like his condemnations of women’s not wearing hair-covering during prayer (I Cor 11:13-16 13Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? 14Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, 15but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. 16If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God. [note the parallel in the “against nature” language with Romans 1:26-27]).***
75. **I Corinthians 6:9 and I Timothy 1:10:** The keys to these verses are two terms Paul uses, one of which is apparently a term he coins in these epistles, which makes translations trickier because there are no prior uses to establish meaning. And *term-meaning is crucial because it will determine the scope* of what Paul refers to. Moreover, *original context is itself crucial to what the terms can mean.* So we must examine both to correctly interpret Paul.
76. Sprinkle rightly acknowledges this difficulty:

First Corinthians 5 and 1 Timothy 1 mention some form of same-sex behavior, there is massive debate over what Paul is talking about. It all comes down to how we interpret two Greek words, *malakoi* and *arsenokoites,* which have been translated with more than twenty different English words. In fact, I don’t know of any other pair of Greek words in the New Testament that have been subject to such a wide range of translations than *malakoi* and *arsenokoites.* And this is not just some ivory-tower discussion. Translations have real life implications and sometimes very expensive ones (103).

1. *Original Context:* All of what was described above, re: Romans 1, applies here as well, namely:
   1. No *concept widely or uncontroversially present of homosexuality* as a life-long, non-voluntary, possibly innate orientation, or of *gay marriage as a possibility*.
   2. *Gender identity as key,* including whether men are *manly* (esp. as sexual penetrators) or *effeminate* (esp. as sexually penetrated), and that *women were lesser status than men* with a *natural sexual use* by men as the “soil” in which their “seed” could grow for *procreation*. And **note: These two verses say nothing about female same-sex acts, only male.**
   3. *Generally recognized types of same-sex acts*, esp. for males, were largely *prostitution and pederasty* (and virtually all of that *adulterous)*.
   4. *Same-sex acts generally seen as lustful extremity,* including re: both males and females.
2. *Original Language—*defining the key terms:
3. (I Cor 6:9) *Malakoi—*soft, or delicate.
   * 1. This was a term with wider, cultural use to refer to *effeminate* men, men who acted like, or esp. allowed themselves to be used sexually like, women. Sprinkle: “…men who fundamentally confused gender distinctions” (106). This was a term of *mockery/disdain,* in much the same way that ‘pansy’ or ‘girly-man’ (or worse) have been used in English. And note that the KJV is actually a better translation on this! Not-coincidentally, the KJV was crafted before our society had the concept of homosexuality as an orientation, either.
     2. Some of the non-Pauline term-uses Sprinkle cites might even refer more precisely to *transgender,* e.g., Philo (1st C Jewish) talking about “men-women” who “desired wholly to change their condition for that of women,” or Phaedrus (Greek) about men who “looked like men on the outside, [but] everything else about them was feminine” (106-107).
     3. **Sprinkle argues** that *malakoi* in the Pauline usage refers to *men playing the passive/penetrated role in sex with other men* (105).
4. (I Cor 6:9 and I Tim 1:10) *Arsenokoites—*this is the term Paul coined here and Sprinkle acknowledges this makes it “hard to interpret” (108)—and note the “term uncertain” footnotes in some Bible translations of the verses. It’s a compound word of *arsen* (**‘male’**—irrespective of age, status, etc.) and *koite* (**‘bed,’** but with a generally understood usage of ‘to sleep with/go to bed with’—and note the English cognate ‘coitus’).
   * 1. **Sprinkle argues** that the term should be translated, ‘*one who sleeps with/has sex with males’* and that it then refers to the man who has the *active/penetrating role in role in sex with another man.*
     2. Sprinkle acknowledges many *other biblical scholars dispute that meaning*, but he also gives evidence from the Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament) translations of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13—which use *arsen* and *koite*—that *supports Paul having coined this compound word to talk about the same topic of those OT verses*. I think Sprinkle makes a good case for this meaning.
     3. Nevertheless, the *‘ones having sex with men’ are still going to be understood by Paul and his audience in light of the social context*, detailed above, esp. re: the *type of sex-acts commonly in mind*.
5. **Sprinkle Concludes:** Paul condemns both the*arsenokoites* (active) and the *malakoi* (passive), which **ties these verses with the OT Lev verses as a NT affirmation of them as continuing moral law,** and is a **blanket condemnation of male same-sex acts** (since both roles are mentioned), which would then **indirectly extend to condemning (at least male) gay marriage (119), and female gay marriage, too, because of Romans 1:26.**
6. **However, Sprinkle’s conclusion is *significantly undercut* in several ways:**
   1. The use of *malakoi* puts the sex-acts Paul is condemning into the **cultural context** where it would call to mind *effeminate males (esp. prostitutes or others flamboyantly flouting gender roles)* and those playing the *passive role in pederasty*—that is, those who were the common targets of the slur *malakoi.* It is sex with *these and under these conditions* that the *arsenekoites* is pursuing.
      1. **All such sex is based on *unequal status and power* and is seen by *both parties* as *degrading* to the *passive* role, *so it is abusive*. There is good and adequate biblical reason for Paul to condemn such sex *apart from its simply being same-sex acts;* indeed, similar *heterosexual*****sex would also rightly be condemned.**
      2. **Further, in ancient non-Jewish cultures, often *only* the *malakoi* was condemned. It would have been morally surprising and convicting, in and of itself, to Paul’s gentile audience to have the *active role condemned, too*—and that could be *sufficient reason* for Paul to give the condemnation, and again, rightly so.**
      3. **This condemnation’s reason would then *not extend to gay marriage.***
   2. Sprinkle rightly frames the I Tim 1:10 condemnations as violations moving through the Ten Commandments, and writes that “The sexually immoral and the *arsenokoites* both refer to the seventh commandment: ‘You shall not commit adultery.’” (117). Further, Sprinkle acknowledges: “…in Jewish tradition, homosexual intercourse was described as a form of adultery” (118). In other words, **I Cor 6:9 and I Tim 1:10 may, indeed, be reaffirming Lev 18:22 and 20:13 as moral law for Christians, *but as condemning a particularly hateful form of adultery, which would then not extend to gay marriage*.**
   3. Even if Sprinkle’s term-interpretation is correct, those terms are ***burdened with heavy cultural baggage***, which might make Paul’s ***condemnation culture-bound***, like his condemnations of women’s not wearing hair-covering during prayer (I Cor 11:13-16 **13**Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? **14**Does not *the very nature of things* teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, **15**but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. **16**If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God. [*note the parallel* in the emphasis-added “*against nature” language with Romans 1:26-27*]). In that case, ***it would not extend to gay marriage today.***
   4. Further, ***if*** the condemnation is *culture bound,* ***then even if it might be correct to think that Paul, given his condemnations in the NT, would also have condemned gay marriage (if it had been brought up to him)—which is what Sprinkle proposes, based on sources of Paul’s surrounding Jewish culture that were horrified at male homosexuality’s feminized “use” of men and the lack of procreation in gay sex—such a condemnation would be infected with cultural biases, seemingly be a product of human hardness of heart rather than straightforward application of God’s revealed Word, like was the case with the Israelite laws on divorce (Deut 24:1, Matt 19).***
7. **Upshots:**
8. **I Cor 6:9 and I Tim 1:10 *do NOT clearly condemn all homosexual sex*—let alone *homosexuality/same-sex-orientation*, itself (or *homosexual people,* themselves)—and translations that have made it seem they do are *misleading, and perhaps infected with cultural bias, themselves.***
9. **There is *solid, relevant evidence* available that I Cor 6:9 and I Tim 1:10 would have referred, in Paul’s mind and the epistle-recipients’ minds, to *abusive and degrading same-sex practices.***
10. **Further *copious evidence* of *cultural attitudes*—both Jewish and gentile—gives reason to believe that a *wider scope of condemnation would be culture-bound.***
11. **So at the very least, I Cor 6:9 and I Tim 1:10 *do NOT unequivocally/unmistakably condemn/oppose gay marriage, even indirectly.* And given the points, above, *Christians approaching the Bible with carefulness and in good conscience and viewing it as God’s inspired Word can interpret these Pauline condemnations to leave significant room for gay marriage to be consistent with scriptural/biblical, moral commands.***

**[Further points that time requires we examine only in passing.]**

1. **The *Thematic* Argument that the Bible Views *Marriage as One-Man to One-Woman***
2. Sprinkle develops this as a second line of support for the non-affirming view (27-40).
3. BUT:

1. The *one*-man, *one*-woman argument is a *non-starter given the OT;* and

2. the attachment of the male-to-female relation to a divine paradigm for marriage depends on (a) a *controversial interpretation* of the Hebrew in Gen 2:18-20 re: a *‘suitable’* helper for Adam (32-33), and (b) *ancient Jewish cultural sources* that also viewed marriage as a *patriarchal/hierarchical relation and necessarily procreative*—which assumptions render such support questionable, and

3. The use of *biblical examples of heterosexual marriages*—even the marriage at Can, blessed by Jesus—only shows that heterosexual marriages are God-approved, *NOT that gay marriages aren’t*. Sprinkle admits: “I think the best counterargument is that none of the [biblical] texts we’ve looked at [on marriage] were written to refute same-sex relationships” (40).

**IV. The *Practical Solution* Argument that Christians Should *Love LGBTQ People* “without Footnotes” while *Condemning Same-Sex Relationships***

1. Sprinkle extensively, carefully develops this and vehemently condemns Christians’ common callous and even hateful approach to LGBTQ people (121-186).
2. I think Sprinkle has given the *most compassionate version of the non-affirming position*. ***If*** the non-affirming position seems the correct biblical interpretation, ***then*** Christians *must* try to care for LGBTQ people lovingly, and support their celibacy, etc.
3. BUT: We now have *heartbreakingly too much evidence that* ***this doesn’t work* *in practice (cf Reformation Project)***.

**The *Affirming* Side**

**I. The *Thematic* Argument that the *OT 🡺 NT Trajectory Is Increasing Inclusion***

**II. The *Thematic* Argument that *Jesus’ Yoke is Light/He Will Not Break a Bruised Reed* (Reformation Project)**

**III. The *Thematic* Argument that in Both OT and NT *God’s Love and Inclusion of Outsiders Is Surprising and Offensive to Insiders***

**Upshot: *All of these thematic arguments have merit, if God’s Word does not rule out gay marriage. So, it really comes back to the question of how to interpret the “clobber passages.”* Thus,**

**IV. *Textual* Arguments about *Scope and Context* that *Counter Non-Affirming* Biblical Readings (which we’ve already seen).**

**V. Final Upshots:**

**A. I believe the Bible does *NOT present us with EITHER 1 or 5 re: LGBTQ*, but puts us *somewhere between 2 and 4*, and we will *probably disagree about exactly where*.**

**B. We are going to have to *CHOOSE* between Affirming vs. Non-Affirming interpretations, while *knowing that other, sincere, careful Bible-believing Christians disagree with us,* and while *knowing and facing the possibility that WE could be the mistaken interpreters*.**

**C. In our choice, we must realize the *two possible errors we must navigate:***

**1. If we interpret *affirmingly and are mistaken,* we will have *taken something out of God’s law. Jesus condemns this in these terms: Matt 5: 18For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches [***[***i***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%205&version=NASB1995#fen-NASB1995-23254i)***]others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven;***

**2. If we interpret *non-affirmingly and are mistaken,* we will have *denied the Kingdom of God—and the work of that Kingdom—to people God wanted in. Jesus condemns this in these terms: Matt 18: 6but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. 7“Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes! Luke 17: 17 He said to His disciples, “It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come, but woe to him through whom they come! 2It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he would cause one of these little ones to stumble.***

**D. Knowing we must choose,**

**1. *Which possibility of these errors can we bear?***

**2. *Which of these errors would be worse in Jesus’ eyes?***

**3**. ***Can we be Christian brothers and sisters—be a church—with those who take the other interpretation (who guard more against the other error)?***

**Biblical Passages that Address Same-Sex Acts (NIV, unless otherwise identified; emphases added)**

1. Genesis 19:1-9 The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. **2**“My lords,” he said, “please turn aside to your servant’s house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning.”

“No,” they answered, “we will spend the night in the square.” **3**But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate. **4**Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. **5**They called to Lot, *“Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.”* **6**Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him **7**and said, “No, my friends. Don’t do this wicked thing. **8**Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don’t do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof.”**9**“Get out of our way,” they replied. “This fellow came here as a foreigner, and now he wants to play the judge! We’ll treat you worse than them.” They kept bringing pressure on Lot and moved forward to break down the door.

1. Leviticus 18:22 **22**Do not have *sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman*; that is detestable [or “abomination” in NRSVUE].
2. 20:13 **13**If a *man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman*, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.
3. Judges 19:20-26 **20**“You are welcome at my house,” the old man said. “Let me supply whatever you need. Only don’t spend the night in the square.” **21**So he took him into his house and fed his donkeys. After they had washed their feet, they had something to eat and drink. **22**While they were enjoying themselves, some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house. Pounding on the door, they shouted to the old man who owned the house, “*Bring out the* *man who came to your house so we can have sex with him.”***23**The owner of the house went outside and said to them, “No, my friends, don’t be so vile. Since this man is my guest, don’t do this outrageous thing. **24**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. But as for this man, don’t do such an outrageous thing.” **25**But the men would not listen to him. So the man took his concubine and sent her outside to them, and *they raped her and abused her*throughout the night, and at dawn they let her go. **26**At daybreak the woman went back to the house where her master was staying, fell down [dying] at the door and lay there until daylight. [cf. 20:5, the Levite’s account: “**5**During the night the men of Gibeah came after me and surrounded the house, *intending to kill me. They raped my concubine, and she died*.”]
4. Romans 1:26-27 **26**Because of this, God gave them over to *shameful lusts*. Even their **women** exchanged *natural sexual relations* for *unnatural* ones. **27**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.

26 For this reason God gave them over to *dishonorable passions*. Their **females** exchanged *natural intercourse[a] for unnatural*, 27 and in the same way also the males, giving up *natural intercourse[b]* with females, were consumed with their *passionate desires* for one another. Males committed shameless acts with males and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error. [NRSVUE] [a] 1.26 Gk *use* [b] 1.27 Gk *use*

1. I Corinthians 6:9 **9**Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor *men who have sex with men*[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=I+cor+6%3A9&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28477a)]

[a] The words *men who have sex with men* translate two Greek words that refer to the passive and active participants in homosexual acts.

**9**Don’t you know that the unjust will not inherit God’s kingdom? Don’t be deceived! Neither immoral people, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor *practicing homosexuals of whichever sort*, [NTFE]

**9**Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! The sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, *male prostitutes*,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%206:8-10&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-28461a)] *men who engage in illicit sex*,[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%206:8-10&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-28461b)] [NRSVUE]

[a] [6.9](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%206:8-10&version=NRSVUE#en-NRSVUE-28461) Meaning of Gk *malakoi* uncertain [b] [6.9](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%206:8-10&version=NRSVUE#en-NRSVUE-28461) Meaning of Gk *arsenokoitai* uncertain

9Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God? Be not deceived: Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor the *effeminate*, nor *abusers of themselves with mankind* [KJ21]

**9**Don’t you know that wicked people won’t inherit God’s kingdom? Stop deceiving yourselves! People who continue to commit sexual sins, who worship false gods, those who commit adultery, *homosexuals* [GW]

1. I Timothy 1:10 1**0**for the sexually immoral, for *those practicing homosexuality*, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine

10 the sexually immoral, *men who engage in illicit sex*,[a] slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching

[a] 1.10 Meaning of Gk *arsenokoitais* uncertain

10for sexually immoral persons, for *homosexuals*, for kidnappers *and* slave traders, for liars, for perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, [AMP]

10 Yes, these laws are made to identify as sinners all who are immoral and impure: *homosexuals*, kidnappers, liars, and all others who do things that contradict the glorious Good News of our blessed God, whose messenger I am. [TLB]