

Homosexuality

Catholic Answers



Every human being is called to receive a gift of divine sonship, to become a child of God by grace. However, to receive this gift, we must reject sin, including homosexual behavior—that is, acts intended to arouse or stimulate a sexual response regarding a person of the same sex. The Catholic Church teaches that such acts are always violations of divine and natural law.

Homosexual desires, however, are not in themselves sinful. People are subject to a wide variety of sinful desires over which they have little direct control, but these do not become sinful until a person acts upon them, either by *acting out* the desire or by *encouraging* the desire and deliberately engaging in fantasies about acting it out. People tempted by homosexual desires, like people tempted by improper heterosexual desires, are not sinning until they act upon those desires in some manner.

Divine Law

The rejection of homosexual behavior that is found in the Old Testament is well known. In Genesis 19, two angels in disguise visit the city of Sodom and are offered hospitality and shelter by Lot. During the night, the men of Sodom demand that Lot hand over his guests for homosexual intercourse. Lot refuses, and the angels blind the men of Sodom. Lot and his household escape, and the town is destroyed by fire "because the outcry against its people has become great before the Lord" (Gen. 19:13).

Throughout history, Jewish and Christian scholars have recognized that one of the chief sins involved in God's destruction of Sodom was its people's homosexual behavior. But today, certain homosexual activists promote the idea

that the sin of Sodom was merely a lack of hospitality. Although inhospitality is a sin, it is clearly the homosexual behavior of the Sodomites that is singled out for special criticism in the account of their city's destruction. We must look to Scripture's own interpretation of the sin of Sodom.

Jude 7 records that Sodom and Gomorrah "acted immorally and indulged in unnatural lust." Ezekiel says that Sodom committed "abominable things" (Ezek. 16:50), which could refer to homosexual and heterosexual acts of sin. Lot even offered his two virgin daughters in place of his guests, but the men of Sodom rejected the offer, preferring homosexual sex over heterosexual sex (Gen. 19:8–9). Ezekiel does allude to a lack of hospitality in saying that Sodom "did not aid the poor and needy" (Ezek. 16:49). So homosexual acts and a lack of hospitality both contributed to the destruction of Sodom, with the former being the far greater sin, the "abominable thing" that set off God's wrath.

But the Sodom incident is not the only time the Old Testament deals with homosexuality. An explicit condemnation is found in the book of Leviticus: "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. . . . If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them" (Lev. 18:22, 20:13).

Reinterpreting Scripture

To discount this, some homosexual activists have argued that moral imperatives from the Old Testament can be dismissed since there were certain ceremonial requirements at the time—such as not eating pork, or circumcising male babies—that are no longer binding.

While the Old Testament's *ceremonial* requirements are no longer binding, its *moral* requirements are. God may issue different ceremonies for use in different times and cultures, but his moral requirements are eternal and are binding on all cultures.

Confirming this fact is the New Testament's forceful rejection of homosexual behavior as well. In Romans 1, Paul attributes the homosexual desires of some to a refusal to acknowledge and worship God. He says, "For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct. . . . Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them" (Rom. 1:26–28, 32).

Elsewhere Paul again warns that homosexual behavior is one of the sins that will deprive one of heaven: "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9–10, NIV).

All of Scripture teaches the unacceptability of homosexual behavior. But the rejection of this behavior is not an arbitrary prohibition. It, like other moral imperatives, is rooted in natural law—the design that God has built into human nature.

Natural Law

People have a basic, ethical intuition that certain behaviors are unnatural and therefore wrong. We perceive intuitively that the natural sex partner of a human is another human, not an animal.

The same reasoning applies to the case of homosexual behavior. The natural sex partner for a man is a woman, and the natural sex partner for a woman is a man. Thus, people have the corresponding intuition concerning homosexuality that they do about bestiality—that it is wrong because it is unnatural.

Natural law reasoning is the basis for almost all standard moral intuitions. For example, it is the dignity and value that each human being naturally possesses that makes the needless destruction of human life or infliction of physical and emotional pain immoral. This gives rise to a host of specific moral principles, such as the unacceptability of murder, kidnapping, mutilation, physical and emotional abuse, and so forth.

To avoid the force of the natural law argument against homosexual behavior, some gay activists have offered a number of claims, which we will examine.

"I Was Born This Way"

Many homosexuals argue that they have not chosen their condition, but that they were born that way, making homosexual behavior natural for them.

But because something was not chosen does not mean it was inborn. Some desires are acquired or strengthened by habituation and conditioning instead of by conscious choice. For example, no one chooses to be an alcoholic, but one can become habituated to alcohol. Just as one can acquire alcoholic desires (by repeatedly becoming intoxicated) without consciously choosing them, so one may acquire homosexual desires (by engaging in homosexual fantasies or behavior) without consciously choosing them.

Since sexual desire is subject to a high degree of cognitive conditioning in humans (there is no biological reason why we find certain scents, forms of dress, or forms of underwear sexually stimulating), it would be most unusual if homosexual desires were not subject to a similar degree of cognitive conditioning.

Even if there is a genetic predisposition toward homosexuality (and studies on this point are inconclusive), the behavior remains unnatural because homosexuality is still not part of the natural design of humanity. It does not make homosexual behavior acceptable; other behaviors are not rendered acceptable simply because there may be a genetic predisposition toward them.

For example, scientific studies suggest some people are born with a hereditary disposition to alcoholism, but no one would argue someone ought to fulfill these inborn urges by becoming an alcoholic. Alcoholism is not an acceptable "lifestyle" any more than homosexuality is.

The Ten Percent Argument

Homosexual activists often justify homosexuality by claiming that ten percent of the population is homosexual, meaning that it is a common and thus acceptable behavior.

But not all common behaviors are acceptable, and even if ten percent of the population were born homosexual, this would prove nothing. One hundred percent of the population is born with original sin and the desires flowing from it. If those desires manifest themselves in a homosexual fashion in ten percent of the population, all that does is give us information about the demographics of original sin.

But the fact is that the ten percent figure is false. It stems from the 1948 report by Alfred Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. The study was profoundly flawed, as later psychologists studying sexual behavior have agreed. Kinsey's subjects were drawn heavily from convicted criminals; 1,400 of his 5,300 final subjects (twenty-six percent) were convicted sex offenders—a group that by definition is not representative of normal sexual practices.

Furthermore, the ten percent figure includes people who are not exclusively homosexual but who only engaged in *some* homosexual behavior for a period of time and then stopped—people who had gone through a fully or partially homosexual "phase" but who were not long-term homosexuals. (For a critique of Kinsey's research methods, see *Kinsey, Sex, and Fraud*, by Dr. Judith Reisman and Edward Eichel [Lafayette, Louisiana: Lochinvar & Huntington House, 1990].)

Recent and more scientifically accurate studies have shown that only around one to two percent of the population is homosexual.

"You're Just a Homophobe"

Those opposed to homosexual behavior are often charged with "homophobia"—that they hold the position they do because they are "afraid" of homosexuals. Sometimes the charge is even made that these same people are perhaps homosexuals themselves and are overcompensating to hide this fact, even from themselves, by condemning other homosexuals.

Both of these arguments attempt to stop rational discussion of an issue by shifting the focus to one of participants. In doing so, they dismiss another person's arguments based on some real or supposed attribute of the person. In this case, the supposed attribute is a fear of homosexuals.

Like similar attempts to avoid rational discussion of an issue, the homophobia argument completely misses the point. Even if a person were afraid of homosexuals, that would not diminish his arguments against their behavior. The fact that a person is afraid of handguns would not nullify arguments against handguns, nor would the fact that a person might be afraid of handgun control diminish arguments against handgun control.

Furthermore, the homophobia charge rings false. The vast majority of those who oppose homosexual behavior are in no way "afraid" of homosexuals. A disagreement is not the same as a fear. One can disagree with something without fearing it, and the attempt to shut down rational discussion by crying "homophobe!" falls flat. It is an attempt to divert attention from the arguments against one's position by focusing attention on the one who made the arguments, while trying to claim the moral high ground against him.

The Call to Chastity

The modern arguments in favor of homosexuality have thus been insufficient to overcome the evidence that homosexual behavior is against divine and natural law, as the Bible and the Church, as well as the wider circle of Jewish and Christian (not to mention Muslim) writers, have always held.

The Catholic Church thus teaches: "Basing itself on sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered. They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2357).

However, the Church also acknowledges that "[homosexuality's] psychological genesis remains largely unexplained. . . . The number of men and

women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's cross the difficulties that they may encounter from their condition.

"Homosexual persons are called to chastity. By the virtues of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom, at times by the support of disinterested friendship, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection" (CCC 2357– 2359).

Paul comfortingly reminds us, "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

Homosexuals who want to live chastely can contact *Courage* (<http://couragerc.net/>), a national, Church-approved support group for help in deliverance from the homosexual lifestyle.

Catholic Answers is one of America's largest lay-run apostolates of Catholic apologetics and evangelization. It was founded in 1979 by attorney Karl Keating.