

Did Jesus Teach Anything about Homosexuality?

Rev. Greg Stover – October 2017



Rev. Greg Stover is a retired UM Pastor in the NCJ.

In conversation about same-sex relationships we frequently hear someone confidently assert, “Well, Jesus never mentioned same-sex practice or relationships!” Often the speaker follows confidently by saying, “As Christians we follow Jesus supremely as Lord; nowhere in his teaching did Jesus specifically mention homosexuality; therefore, followers of Jesus, of course, should affirm same-sex relationships and marriages.”

An appropriate response is, “Yes, but ... !” Yes, Jesus never mentioned homosexuality specifically. But, Jesus never specifically mentioned kidnapping, bestiality, identity theft, white-collar crime, racism, or a host of other things which Christians of every stripe rightly count as contrary to the way of Jesus. The Biblical literalism that concludes that because Jesus didn’t mention it he must affirm it, fails to consider the broader implications of Jesus’ teaching. In his teaching on marriage and human sexuality Jesus reflects continuity and consistency with the teaching of the Old Testament, the teaching of Paul the apostle and the remainder of the New Testament. A careful study of Jesus’ teachings leads to almost certain evidence that Jesus would not have affirmed same-sex intercourse or marriages. Let’s look more deeply at Jesus’ teaching about marriage and sexual relationships.

Matthew 19:3-11 (see also Mark 10:10-12) records Pharisees coming to test Jesus about divorce. One school of the Pharisees taught that a man could divorce his wife for any reason at all. A second school believed that only marital infidelity could justify divorce. While Jesus acknowledges that Moses permitted divorce, he also notes that Moses accommodated divorce in the law because God’s people hardened their hearts and disobeyed God’s original intention for marriage. Jesus sided with those Pharisees of the second school. In doing so, Jesus pointed directly back to the story of Creation: **“Have you not read, that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? Then Jesus added, “so they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”** (Mt. 19:4-6, NIV)

With these words, Jesus clearly affirms that marriage between a man and woman reflects the will of God and the ordering of God’s creation from the beginning. Homosexual practice was a well-known component of Greek and Roman culture surrounding the Jews. Yet, Jesus does not need to address the matter because the Hebrew Scriptures affirm marriage between one man and woman as the only context approved by God for sexual expression.

Additional insight about Jesus’ teaching is found in Mark 7:21-23. Jesus explains that it is **“... what comes out of a person that defiles. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil**

intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride folly.” The word in the text used for “fornication” is *porneiai*, literally “sexual immoralities.” Jesus’ listeners, steeped in Jewish tradition, would have quickly connected Jesus’ use of *porneiai* with the list of sexual offenses in Leviticus 18 and 20: incest, adultery, same-sex intercourse, bestiality. Jesus uses the same Greek word in Matthew 19:9 when he makes “unchastity” the sole exception to his stance against divorce.

Jesus did not hesitate to correct the misinterpretations and distortions of God’s law (See the “But I say to you” sentences in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5). If Jesus believed the creation accounts had neglected to affirm same-sex relationships or if he believed that the prohibitions of Leviticus 18 and 20 were out of date or misguided, it is hard to imagine that he would not have spoken boldly to correct the misinterpretation. Rather, Jesus’ life and teaching reflected a perfect balance of grace and truth expressed in holy love. Perhaps Jesus would respond to those engaged in homosexual acts today as he spoke to the woman caught in adultery --- **“I do not condemn you. Go, and sin no more.”**