

My Take: The Bible condemns a lot, but here's why we focus on homosexuality



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By **R. Albert Mohler Jr.**, Special to CNN

Are conservative Christians hypocritical and selective when it comes to the Bible's condemnation of homosexuality? With all that the Bible condemns, why the focus on gay sex and same-sex marriage?

Given the heated nature of our current debates, it's a question conservative Christians have learned to expect. "Look," we are told, "the Bible condemns eating shellfish, wearing mixed fabrics and any number of other things. Why do you ignore those things and insist that the Bible must be obeyed when it comes to sex?"

On its face, it's a fair question. But it can be posed in two very different ways.

First, the question can be asked to suggest that the Bible's clear condemnation of sexual sins can simply be set aside. The other way of posing the question represents a genuine attempt to understand how the Bible is to be rightly applied to life today.

In truth, those asking the question the first way really don't want an answer.

An honest consideration of the Bible reveals that most of the biblical laws people point to in asking this question, such as laws against eating shellfish or wearing mixed fabrics, are part of the holiness code assigned to Israel in the Old Testament. That code was to set Israel, God's covenant people, apart from all other nations on everything from morality to diet.

As the Book of Acts makes clear, Christians are not obligated to follow this holiness code. This is made clear in Peter's vision in Acts 10:15. Peter is told, "What God has made clean, do not call common."

In other words, there is no kosher code for Christians. Christians are not concerned with eating kosher foods and avoiding all others. That part of the law is no longer binding, and Christians can enjoy shrimp and pork with no injury to conscience.

The Bible's commands on sexual behavior, on the other hand, are continued in the New Testament. When it comes to homosexuality, the Bible's teaching is consistent, pervasive, uniform and set within a larger context of law and Gospel.

The Old Testament clearly condemns male homosexuality along with adultery, bestiality, incest and any sex outside the covenant of marriage. The New Testament does not lessen this concern but amplifies it.

The New Testament condemns both male and female homosexual behavior. The Apostle Paul, for example, points specifically to homosexuality as evidence of human sinfulness. His point is not merely that homosexuals are sinners but that all humanity has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

The New Testament condemns a full range of sexual sins, and homosexuality is specified among these sins. In Romans, Paul refers to homosexuality in terms of "dishonorable passions," "contrary to nature" and "shameless." As New Testament scholar Robert Gagnon has stated, the Bible's indictment "encompasses every and any form of homosexual behavior."

Some people then ask, "What about slavery and polygamy?" In the first place, the New Testament never commands slavery, and it prizes freedom and human dignity. For this reason, the abolitionist movement was largely led by Christians, armed with Christian conviction.

The Old Testament did allow for polygamy, though it normalizes heterosexual monogamy. In the New Testament, Jesus made clear that marriage was always meant to be one man and one woman.

"Have you not read that He who created them made them male and female?" Jesus asked in Matthew.

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." For this reason, Christians have opposed polygamy on biblical grounds.

Why are Christians so concerned with homosexuality? In the first place, that question is answered by the simple fact that it is the most pressing moral question of our times. Christians must be concerned about adultery, pornography, injustice, dishonesty and everything the Bible names as sin. But when my phone rings with a call from a reporter these days, the question I am asked is never adultery or pornography. It is about homosexuality.

Christians who are seriously committed to the authority of the Bible have no choice but to affirm all that the Bible teaches, including its condemnation of homosexuality. At the same time, our confidence is that God condemns

those things that will bring his human creatures harm and commands those things that will lead to true human happiness and flourishing.

In other words, we understand that the Bible condemns all forms of sin because our Creator knows what is best for us. The Bible names sins specifically so that each of us will recognize our own sinfulness and look to Christ for salvation and the forgiveness of our sins.

Christian love requires that we believe and teach what the Bible teaches and that we do so with both strong conviction and humble hearts. The Church must repent of our failures in both of these tasks, but we must not be silent where the Bible speaks.

Are Christians hypocrites in insisting that homosexual behavior is sin? We, too, are sinners, and hypocrisy and inconsistency are perpetual dangers.

The church failed miserably in the face of the challenge of divorce. This requires an honest admission and strong corrective.

At the same time, this painful failure must remind us that we must not fail to answer rightly when asked what the Bible teaches about homosexuality. Love requires us to tell the truth.

The opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of R. Albert Mohler Jr.