A close-up photograph of two gold wedding rings resting on a wooden surface. The rings are positioned in the upper right quadrant of the image, with one ring slightly overlapping the other. The wood grain is clearly visible, and the lighting creates soft shadows and highlights on the metal surfaces.

A Reformed Look at Same-Sex Marriage

Can a rigorous look at scriptures lead
to affirming same-sex marriage?



Big picture...small picture...What does the Bible really say?

A reformed way of looking at scripture teaches us that we need to look both at specific passages, and at the overall context and message of the Bible to truly understand what God desires on any given topic. So, what does the Bible really say about same-sex marriage in the big picture, and in specific texts?

Big picture:

Jesus makes it very clear that the ultimate big picture is LOVE. When Jesus is asked what the greatest commandment is, this is how he replies:

“The most important one,” answered Jesus, is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

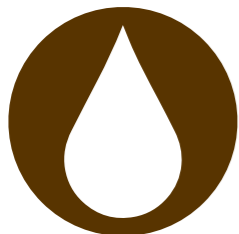
~Mark 12:29-31, NIV (see also Matthew 22:35-40 & Luke 10:27-28)

If the “big picture” is love, how are we doing?

Has the church been loving our LGBTQ+ neighbours?



The church has always known that we *ought* to love LGBTQ+ people. The CRC’s 1973 report on homosexuality says, “The homosexual may not,...be denied community acceptance, and if he is a Christian he is to be whole heartedly embraced by the church as a person for whom Christ died.” (Acts of Synod, 1973, p. 632)



Sadly, the church, has often not practiced that love with our LGBTQ+ neighbours. The book *Us Versus Us.*, by Andrew Marin highlights that. Though “86% of LGBTs were raised in a faith community from the ages of 0 to 18”, “54% of LGBT people leave their religious community after the age of 18” (p. 1 & 31)

Why? Listed reasons for leaving include: negative personal experiences (24%), theological considerations (21%), and institutional misgivings (13%) (p. 36)

One man said “I left the church because I couldn’t find one person who cared enough to listen to my story. I mean *really* listen.” (Ibid., p. 35)

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.

Galatians 5:14

The church needs to love LGBTQ+ people better...but what does the Bible *really* say about what that looks like?

Traditionally, we've believed the Bible speaks clearly about homosexual practice...that it's condemned by scripture. But what does the Bible really say? There are seven passages we need to look at.

1. Sodom & Gomorrah (Gen. 18:20-21; 19:1-13)

A good look at the story Sodom & Gomorrah leads to the conclusion that this passage is about power, greed, abuse, rape and more—not about consensual, committed, adult same-sex relationships.

2. The Travelling Israelites (Judges 19)

Similar to the 1st passage listed this story is also about rape, abuse, inhospitality, shame, power, etc. It is very evident that it

is not about consensual, committed, adult same-sex relationships.

3. Laws About Holy Living (Leviticus 18:22)

A scrupulous look at the context of this verse reveals that these commands are given in the context of “cultic” or “religious” practices forbidden to the Israelites. In other words, this passage (and the next) may not be at all about loving, committed, monogamous relationships between consenting, Christ-following adults, but about avoiding the idolatrous practices of surrounding nations.

4. Leviticus 20:13



There are 7 scripture passages that might refer to homosexual practice. In contrast, a word search tells us that the word “poor” is used more than 170 times in scripture.

Though this passage seems to condemn same-sex relationships, it does so *only for men*. In contrast, in Lev. 18:23 & 20:15-16, both men *and women* are commanded to abstain from sexual relations with animals.

Why *not* command men *and women* to avoid same-sex intercourse in Lev. 18:22 & 20:13? Is it possible that these commands are not only about idolatrous practices, but also about maintaining order in the Jewish patriarchal system of the time? If either (or

both) of those things are true, then is it not possible that these commands have no more bearing upon us than the command to not wear clothes made of different fabrics blended together (Lev. 19:19)?

Even today's *Jewish Study Bible* acknowledges "Biblical and ancient Near Eastern culture was not familiar with homosexuality in the sense of a defined sexual orientation or lifestyle."

5. 1 Corinthians 6:9

Though this "vice list" again seems to forbid male-male intercourse, there are two words key to understanding the true nature of this passage. The first word is "malakoi", which actually seems to mean "soft", or "effeminate", and the second word is "arsenekoittoi" which could mean "one who exploits economically by sexual means" — pimping. Paul may be highlighting in this list, in other words, those who either engage in pederasty (sex with minors — particularly young boys) and those who make money off exploiting others for sex.

6. 1 Timothy 1:10

The same word, "arsenekoittoi" is used in this "vice list" as in the previous passage, and so it is likely that this passage too is not condemning consensual, monogamous, same-sex relations between adults, but is condemning pederasty and sexual exploitation.

7. Romans 1:26-27

This is, probably, the most significant passage in the Bible seeming to speak on matters of same-sex sexuality.

However, notice that in verse 25 Paul talks about people who "worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator..."

Once again, we find that the Bible is speaking about idolatry and that there is *no evidence* that the biblical writers, or the culture around them, had any understanding of same-sex *orientation* or of committed, mutual, same-sex relationships.



There are 7 scripture passages that might refer to homosexual practice. In contrast, a word search tells us that the word "poor" is used more than 170 times in scripture.

Some argue that the words translated as "natural" and "unnatural" in our English translations strongly support a traditional understanding of homosexual practice. However, Paul uses the same word (translated as "contrary to nature" in Romans 11:24 when he says that God include Gentiles in his people. It seems that a better translation for this word may simply be "unconventional."

If the Bible doesn't speak explicitly about homosexuality as we understand it today, what are we to do?

The Bible is silent on many things. It does not speak about smartphones, or COVID-19, or automobiles, or black holes. Some would argue that, since the Bible doesn't speak about it, we shouldn't "allow" homosexual marriage. But not only is that argument hypocritical for most of us, considering all the things we do which the bible does not talk about, it also stands directly in opposition to the Bible's highest commands: to love God and our neighbours.


If the Bible was clear about homosexuality as we understand it today, then there wouldn't be any debate on this topic, but since it is not, isn't it best for us to "default" back to love by celebrating committed, consensual, monogamous relationships between adults? Shouldn't Christ-followers embrace fellow Christ followers who seek to honour their commitment to God and each other, regardless of their sexual orientation?



The Bible has been around for a long time. Why the “new” interpretations now?

Good question! There are a few answers to that...

1. The Reformers believed in “*sempra reformada*”—always reforming—meaning the church is called to constantly examine their beliefs in the light of scripture. These thoughts here are, in large part, a natural continuation of that process.
2. As part of that process the church has, in the past, often been prompted by science, society and/or other Christians to examine long-held doctrines. We have revised our understanding of many things, including the Earth as the centre of the universe, the legitimacy of slavery, and the roles of women in the world and the church. This is, again, a natural part of what it means to be “church”
3. In that ongoing self-examination, it has become evident that the cultures of Bible times did not, as near as we can tell, have any concept of homosexual orientation, per se.
4. Further, it has also become evident that the church in general has severely neglected our call to love our LGBTQ+ neighbours.



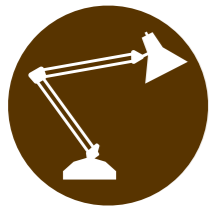
I can see clearly now

What can I do?

What's my action plan?



Love your God and your neighbour in all ways and at all times.



Lovingly study scriptures and be “iron sharpening iron” (Pr. 27:17) with your fellow Christ followers, where possible.



Lovingly communicate your beliefs to your Council, Classis, Pastor and Denomination.



Pray for Christ-followers everywhere, that we may all actively participate in the “ministry of reconciliation” given us by Christ.



This has been a lot to take in, and I need more information. Where do I go?

There are many, many, many books and resources you can look at to find out more about the Bible and homosexual relationships. Here are some that are either referred to in this paper, or that we recommend you check out.

- Auburn Seminary. "My Mind Was Changed: A New Way to Talk with Conflicted Christians about Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People in Church and Society". Auburn Seminary. <https://auburnseminary.org/report/my-mind-was-changed/>
- Brownson, James V., *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*. Eerdmans, 2013 - Brownson is the James and Jean Cook Professor of New Testament at Western Theological Seminary
- Chu, Jeff. *Does Jesus Really Love Me? A Gay Christian's Pilgrimage in Search of God in America*. Harper Perennial, 2014 - Chu is, among other things, an ordained minister in the Reformed Church of America
- Lee, Justin. "The Great Debate" <https://tinyurl.com/6k376vzh>
- Lee, Justin. *Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays-vs.-Christians Debate*. Jericho Books, 2013
- Marin, Andrew. *Us Versus Us: The Untold Story of Religion and the LGBT Community*. NavPress, 2016
- Myers, David G. & Letha Dawson Scanzoni. *What God Has Joined Together: The Christian Case for Gay Marriage*. HarperOne, 2006 - Myers is a Professor of Psychology at Hope College
- Rogers, Jack. *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church*. Westminster, 2009 - Rogers is Professor of Theology Emeritus at San Francisco Theological Seminary and was Moderator of the 213th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
- VanderZee, Leonard. "A Biblical, Theological and Personal Case for Gay Marriage" Speech delivered for All One Body. Video: <https://tinyurl.com/y58tc2e2>
Written speech: <https://tinyurl.com/yyqvqfu7> - VanderZee is an ordained minister in the CRCNA (retired).
- Vines, Matthew. *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships*. Convergent Books, 2015