

For most Christians, the words of the Bible are of supreme importance in regard to matters of moral and spiritual well-being. For many conservative Christians, the controversy surrounding same-sex marriage is one of the issues that demonstrates the "moral decay" of a society and calls for a re-alignment with the biblical texts. However, without proper knowledge of the original language and context of biblical content, these passages can easily be taken to mean something quite different than was originally intended.

In Leviticus 18 and 20, it is called "an abomination" for a man to have intercourse with another man. In the American, English-speaking context, one cannot deny this negative language regarding homosexual intercourse. However, it is essential to note the meaning of the word "abomination" in the Hebrew, in which it was originally written. This word, "abomination," is reserved for acts that make one ritually unclean. As some may know, ancient Hebrews followed a code of dietary and behavioral laws that were believed to keep them pure in God's eyes. So, an act that was an "abomination" was one that broke the laws of this code and contaminated one's pureness. Other acts that would have merited the same label as homosexual intercourse were the eating of pork and heterosexual intercourse during menstruation, among nearly 2,000 others.

For those who claim to look only to the New Testament for moral guidance, Paul addresses homosexuality in his letter to the Romans. In chapter 1, Paul calls homosexual intercourse a "shameless" act, for which men received "the due penalty for their error." Still, before passing judgment, it is crucial that we consider Paul's motivation for writing such a thing. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul writes, "For a man... is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man. Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man." From this and other biblical passages, it is well known that Paul held the value of men to be considerably higher than women. In fact, we know that in the culture within which Paul was writing, women were the lowest social class, which gave them less social standing than the slaves of their day. And lastly, we know that among many of Paul's churches, there were those who engaged in pagan temple fertility practices after their conversion to Christianity, which included the prostitution of juvenile boys. In Romans, Paul is warning those within his churches to avoid practices that will connect them with the pagans, for example homosexual intercourse, as with the temple prostitutes. He is also making a more subtle command to the men of his congregation not to allow themselves to be penetrated as a woman does. For a man to be entered by another man, in the context of Paul's culture, was the equivalent of lowering one's self to a social status less than a slave's.

For Christians, the words of Jesus should be the defining source, by which we measure every other moral value; "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind... You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The rights and respect we afford ourselves ought not to ever come at the expense of our homosexual brothers and sisters.