

With reference to our study on how Presbyterians read and interpret Scripture, in the context of same-sex relationships, this is how both positions would generally apply each exegetical step. For more detailed explanations of the affirming or non-affirming position, you can refer to the position papers in other handouts.

A. B. The Use of Original Languages and Employment of the Best Manuscripts

Affirming of Same-Sex Relationships: Does not dispute the accuracy of the manuscripts, it does disagree on the accurate translations of two words in the ancient Greek:

Arsenokoites: Unknown meaning since the Apostle Paul seems to have invented the word, but might best be rendered “male temple prostitute” or “pimp.”

Malakos: “Weak-willed,” “vain,” or “playboy”. Notes that it is usually used in Greek literature in a heterosexual context.

Non-affirming of Same-Sex Relationships: Does not dispute the accuracy of the manuscripts, it sometimes disagrees on the accurate translations of two words in the ancient Greek:

Arsenokoites: “Man-bedder” is used to describe homosexual temple prostitution.

Malakos: When used in conjunction with arsenokoites, should be understood as a passive male homosexual sexual partner.

C. The Priority of the Plain Sense of the Text

1. The Definition of Literary Units

Affirming of Same-Sex Relationships: The words directly pertinent to same-sex relationships are negative to homoerotic acts.

Non-Affirming of Same-Sex Relationships: The words directly pertinent to same-sex relationships are negative to homoerotic acts.

2. The Recognition of the Cultural Conditioning of Language

Affirming of Same-Sex Relationships: The words directly pertinent to same-sex relationships are negative to homoerotic acts, but they are primarily incidental (with the exception of Romans 1). For example, Canaanite cults practiced homosexual temple prostitution. The condemnation on temple prostitution is direct, while the fact that it is homosexual is incidental.

Non-Affirming of Same-Sex Relationships: The words directly pertinent to same-sex relationships are negative to homoerotic acts, but it is thought that are less incidental. For example, Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed for an attempted gang-rape of angels is directly pertinent, but that it was a homosexual gang is particularly offensive to God and not incidental.

3. The Understanding of Social and Historical Circumstances

Affirming of Same-Sex Relationships: The words directly pertinent to same-sex relationships are negative to homoerotic acts, but they are primarily incidental (with the exception of Romans 1). Additionally, all condemnations of homoeroticism are within a social and historical context where homosexuality was associated primarily with promiscuity, lust, pagan worship, pedophilia, slavery, and sexual abuse.

Non-Affirming of Same-Sex Relationships: The words directly pertinent to same-sex relationships are negative to homoerotic acts, but it is thought that they are less incidental. While condemnations of homoeroticism are within a social and historical context where homosexuality was associated primarily with promiscuity, lust, pagan worship, pedophilia, slavery, and sexual abuse—consensual same-sex relationships between adults did still exist.

IV. GUIDELINES CONCERNING HOW THE TEXT IS RIGHTLY USED

Using the Bible as a critical norm for faith and life involves a process of ordering, evaluating, and relating what is said in the Bible to the question at hand. The process is an exercise of theological knowledge, experience, and wisdom. It occurs through insight and reflection. Its practice cannot be prescribed by a set procedure. It can, however, be conducted and tested by a set of concerns, criteria, and responsibilities that belong to our tradition of interpreting Scripture.

A. The Purpose of Holy Scripture

Affirming of Same-Sex Relationships: The sexual orientation of homosexuality, like aspects of science, history, and social science, is not something that Scripture could have addressed. Therefore, we should be cautious about carrying over the negative cultural associations of homosexuality in the Bible to evaluating contemporary same-sex relationships.

Non-Affirming of Same-Sex Relationships: The Bible speaks extensively about human sexuality, and even if the authors did not address sexual orientation, they understood any homoeroticism to be fundamentally against God's will. Therefore, no new context of homosexual expression changes the Bible's applicability. Christian, monogamous, loving, same-sex marriages are simply a lesser sin of pagan, promiscuous, coercive, homoerotic acts.

B. The Precedence of Holy Scripture

Affirming of Same-Sex Relationships: Some who affirm same-sex relationships do not hold to the priority of Scripture. This has most often been in the Episcopal

Church and can confuse many non-affirming Christians. Presbyterians are called to reject this approach, and rather discuss the question of same-sex relationships under the priority of Scripture.

Non-Affirming of Same-Sex Relationships: Strongly holds the priority of Scripture. Is often concerned that those of the affirming position will jettison the priority of Scripture to achieve their goals.

2. The Use of Knowledge

Affirming of Same-Sex Relationships: Our historical knowledge about ancient homoeroticism combined with our medical understanding of homosexual orientation is helpful in guiding our interpretation of Scripture. Additionally, the universal condemnation of homosexual “reparative therapy” by the medical community and the sociological data that supports families of same-sex couples should be taken into consideration.

Non-Affirming of Same-Sex Relationships: Our knowledge of the significantly higher rates of promiscuity, sexually transmitted diseases, depression, and suicide rates found in the LGBT community should be helpful in guiding our interpretation of Scripture, showing how same-sex relationships can be harmful.

3. The Use of Experience

Affirming of Same-Sex Relationships: The existence of devoutly Christian, monogamous, loving, same-sex marriages with flourishing children, combined with the well-documented failures of the “ex-gay” movement that resulted in the closing of Exodus International, should be helpful in guiding our interpretation of Scripture.

Non-Affirming of Same-Sex Relationships: The testimonies of Christians claiming to have changed sexual orientations, as well as the growing network of Christian celibate gay spokespersons, should be helpful in guiding our interpretation of Scripture.

C. The Centrality of Jesus Christ

Affirming of Same-Sex Relationships: Jesus, though he lived in a culture predisposed to condemn homoeroticism, never made mention of it in any list of sins. Rather, Jesus was welcoming the social and ethnic outcasts—those normally condemned by the Judean religious leaders. Additionally, Jesus says that interpretation of Scripture should lean towards mercy and not sacrifice.

Non-Affirming of Same-Sex Relationships: Jesus, when addressing a question of the ease of divorce, implicitly condemned all homosexual relationships by affirming the unique purpose and permanence of the union between a man and woman. Jesus also said he was against sexual sin, and as a first century Jew, he would have implicitly included any form of homoeroticism in that category.

D. The Interpretation of Scripture by Scripture

Affirming of Same-Sex Relationships: Scripture mentions homoeroticism only up to five times and the context is always either temple prostitution, rape, or promiscuity. Meanwhile Scripture declares that forced celibacy is not good, defines what Godly love looks like in a way that does not exclude same-sex marriage, and encourages marriage over continually struggling with lust.

Non-Affirming of Same-Sex Relationships: The Scripture of both testaments speaks with one voice regarding any form of homoeroticism, all of which are negative. Meanwhile, heterosexual marriage is universally affirmed, as is celibacy for those who cannot marry. The Church is called the “Bride of Christ,” just as marriage itself represents God’s creative order.

E. The Rule of Love

Affirming of Same-Sex Relationships: To deny homosexual people relationships built on what are otherwise the exact same Christian principles prescribed for heterosexual relationships is unfair, harmful, and therefore unloving. Additionally, unless there is a sufficiently overriding reason, it is at odds with the Rule of Love to condemn a relationship that is itself producing genuine love.

Non-Affirming of Same-Sex Relationships: Though same-sex couples may be engaged in loving relationships, these relationships are against the will of God, and therefore harmful to the individuals engaged in them. It would be unloving to affirm that which is sinful and spiritually destructive. We are called to speak the truth in love.

F. The Rule of Faith

Affirming of Same-Sex Relationships: The Church did not officially condemn Homoeroticism for at least three hundred years after Jesus and same-sex relationships were not condemned until the 13th century. The Presbyterian Book of Confessions makes no mention of homosexuality. Additionally, while the majority of Christians throughout history have had a negative view towards homosexuality, there is significant evidence of affirming same-sex relationships by Christians in history.

Non-Affirming of Same-Sex Relationships: The majority of Christians in all time and all places have always taught that to engage in homoeroticism is a sin and the historical evidence for Christians affirming same-sex relationships is inconclusive.

G. The Fallibility of All Interpretation

Affirming of Same-Sex Relationships: Christians have often altered what were previously understood as “biblically-based” teachings, such as the earth’s position in the solar system, charging interest, slavery, the origins of human life, divorce, and the role of women in the church. To humbly change our position on same-sex relationships based on new historical, scientific, and experiential evidence does no more injury to the authority of Scripture than repealing the ban on charging interest, allowing women to be ordained, or abolishing slavery.

Non-Affirming of Same-Sex Relationships: To affirm same-sex relationships after only 40 years of debate in the Church is far too soon—relative to the span of Church history—to capitulate on the traditional position against same-sex relationships. Bowing to what seems mostly like secular cultural pressure, this would recklessly denigrate nearly 2,000 years of consistent biblical teaching.