

Women Of Faith In Action -WOFA

Not What I ...said

A TOOLKIT FOR RELIGIOUS INCLUSION OF LGBTQ PERSONS

Women of Faith in action

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Acknowledgements

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Finally, we express our profound admiration and appreciation for the brave queer Christians who navigate their faith and identities with resilience and pride. Your stories inspire us, and your voices fuel our commitment to creating a more inclusive and welcoming religious landscape.



Foreword

In a world that often grapples with the complexities of faith, identity, and acceptance, the *"Not What I Said"* Toolkit, developed by Women of Faith in Action, emerges as a beacon of hope and transformation. This comprehensive resource seeks not only to challenge the misuse of religious texts that have historically justified homophobia and discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals in Uganda but also to ignite a movement towards inclusivity and understanding within our faith communities.

As we navigate the intricate relationship between faith and humanity, it is essential that religious leaders—both Christian and Muslim—reexamine the interpretations of sacred texts that shape our beliefs and practices. The toolkit provides invaluable educational resources that offer clear explanations of key religious scriptures, presenting alternative, inclusive readings that promote empathy and respect. By understanding the historical and cultural contexts that influence these interpretations, faith leaders can foster discussions that celebrate the diversity inherent within our religious traditions.

Through practical guidance, this toolkit could encourage open dialogue and creates safe spaces for congregants to explore and interrogate their beliefs, nurturing a mindset shift towards a more compassionate and just approach to spirituality.

In addressing common misconceptions and providing factual clarifications, the "Not What I Said" Toolkit empowers religious leaders and community members to challenge discriminatory interpretations and advocate for a more inclusive understanding of their faith. It offers a strong foundation for faith leaders to inspire their preaching and sacred text studies, ultimately leading to a more welcoming environment for all.

I am hopeful that this initiative will foster a profound transformation in attitudes, enabling us to create faith communities where everyone—regardless of their sexual orientation—feels valued and accepted. Together, let us embark on this journey to promote dialogue, understanding, and inclusivity within our religious spaces.

With gratitude and hope,

Rev Ecclesia de Lange
Director
Inclusive and Affirming Ministries

Glossary Of Terms

1. **LGBTQ+**: An acronym standing for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, with the "+" recognizing other sexual and gender identities.
2. **Homosexuality**: Romantic, emotional, and/or sexual attraction to people of the same sex or gender. This term is critical for understanding discussions of LGBTQ+ rights in religious contexts.
3. **Inhospitality**: In religious scripture, this refers to the failure to provide care and hospitality, often linked to the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah, which many scholars argue was about inhospitality rather than homosexuality.
4. **Leviticus**: A book in the Old Testament, often cited in debates over homosexuality, especially Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, which are commonly interpreted to prohibit same-sex relationships. However, scholars argue for interpretations based on ritual purity and cultural context.
5. **Arsenokoitai**: A Greek term found in the New Testament, often translated as "men who have sex with men." Its exact meaning is debated and may refer to specific exploitative practices rather than consensual same-sex relationships.
6. **Malakoi**: A Greek word often translated as "effeminate" or "soft," used in biblical texts. It is commonly associated with moral laxity or indulgence rather than sexual orientation.
7. **Quaran**: The holy book of Islam, which contains the story of Lot (Lut). Progressive scholars argue that this story condemns violence and inhospitality rather than consensual same-sex relationships.
8. **Idolatry**: The worship of idols or false gods, often linked in scripture to moral and societal degradation, including behaviors condemned in the context of LGBTQ+ discussions.
9. **Pederasty**: Refers to sexual relationships between adult men and boys in ancient cultures, often associated with exploitative practices. Some scholars suggest that biblical prohibitions were aimed at such exploitative acts rather than consensual same-sex relationships.
10. **Sodom and Gomorrah**: Cities in the Bible often linked to homosexuality. However, many scholars argue that the sin of these cities was inhospitality, violence, and social injustice rather than same-sex relationships.

Executive Summary

The *"Not What I Said"* Toolkit by Women of Faith in Action is a comprehensive resource designed to challenge the misuse of religious texts to justify homophobia and discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals in Uganda. This toolkit empowers religious leaders, community members, and advocates to promote inclusive interpretations of religious scriptures, fostering understanding and acceptance.

KEY FEATURES:

1. Educational Resources: Clear explanations and interpretations of key religious texts commonly used to justify discrimination, providing alternative, inclusive readings.

2. Historical Context: Insight into the cultural and historical factors influencing interpretations of religious texts, showcasing the diversity within religious traditions.

3. Case Studies: Real-life examples of inclusive religious practices and communities that embrace LGBTQ+ individuals, demonstrating the possibility of alternative, affirming interpretations.

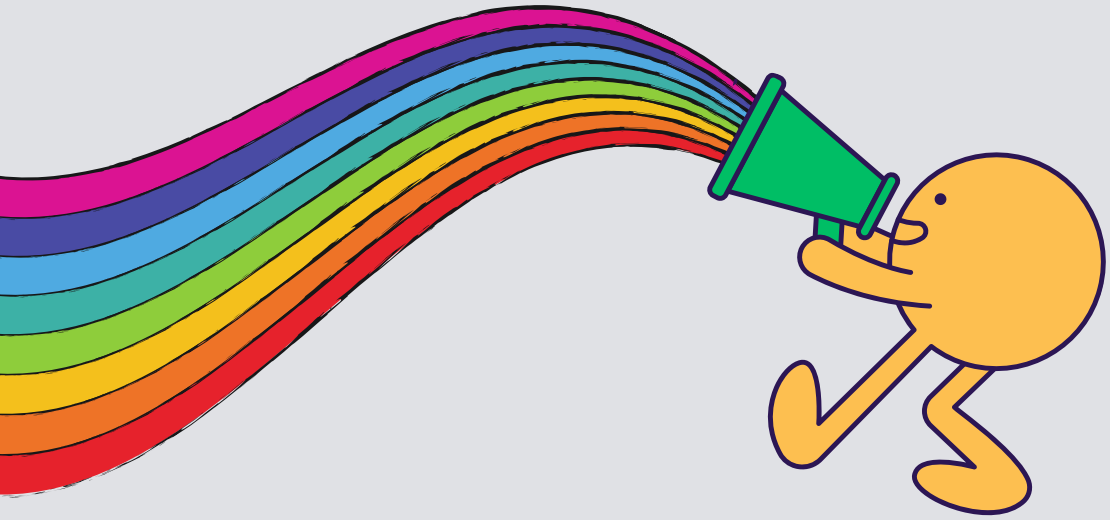
4. Community Engagement Strategies: Practical guidance for fostering dialogue and understanding within religious communities, promoting empathy, respect, and inclusion.

6. FAQs and Myth-Busting: Addressing common misconceptions and myths about LGBTQ+ issues in religious contexts, offering factual clarifications.

By equipping users with the knowledge and tools needed to counter discriminatory interpretations, the *"Not What I Said"* Toolkit aims to create more inclusive and welcoming faith communities. It encourages a shift in mindset towards a more compassionate and just approach to spirituality, where everyone can feel accepted and valued.

For more information or to access the toolkit, please contact Women of Faith in Action at **womenoffaithaction@gmail.com** or follow us on Twitter **@Womenoffaithin1**. Let's work together to promote religious inclusivity and justice for all.


HOLY
BIBLE



Introduction

Religious texts have long been a cornerstone of faith and guidance, shaping the beliefs and actions of communities worldwide. In Uganda, as in many other places, certain interpretations of these texts have been used to exclude or condemn LGBTQ+ individuals, fostering environments of stigma, discrimination, and even violence. The *"Not What I Said"* Toolkit is designed to challenge these interpretations and offer a more inclusive understanding of religious scriptures that have often been misused to justify homophobia.

This toolkit is a vital resource for religious leaders, faith-based organizations, community advocates, and individuals who are committed to creating inclusive, accepting, and loving faith communities. It seeks to empower users with knowledge, historical context, and practical strategies to reinterpret these texts in ways that honor the dignity and humanity of all people, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Through exploring the original meanings, historical contexts, and diverse interpretations of key religious texts, *"Not What I Said"* aims to dismantle harmful beliefs and practices. It highlights interpretations that align with the core values of compassion, justice, and love, encouraging a reevaluation of how faith can be a source of unity rather than division. The toolkit also provides practical tools and guidance for fostering meaningful dialogue, advocating for LGBTQ+ inclusion, and building understanding across differences within faith communities.

Women of Faith in Action invites you to use *"Not What I Said"* as more than just a guide—it is a call to action. Let's work together to break down the barriers of exclusion and build a future where everyone, regardless of identity, is welcomed and affirmed in their spiritual journey.





Old Testament

THE STORY OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH

And the Lord said, "The outcry [of the sin] of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave.
Genesis 18:20

Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom(L)—both young and old—surrounded the house. They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them." Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him and said, "No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing. Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don't do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof." "Get out of our way," they replied. "This fellow came here as a foreigner, and now he wants to play the judge! We'll treat you worse than them." They kept bringing pressure on Lot and moved forward to break down the door.
Genesis 19:4-10

Before we get into understanding these scriptures, it is important we have the definition of homosexulaity at the back of our minds. ***Homosexuality is the romantic, emotional, and/or sexual attraction to people of the same sex or gender. It is a sexual orientation characterized by an enduring pattern of attraction, behaviors, or identity towards individuals of the same gender***. For example, a man who is attracted to other men or a woman who is attracted to other women would be considered **homosexual**.

It's important to note that homosexuality is a natural variation of human sexuality and has been observed in various cultures throughout history. It is not a mental disorder, and all major medical, psychological, and psychiatric organizations affirm that same-sex attraction is a normal variation of human sexuality.

The story of Sodom and Gomorrah is often cited in discussions about homosexuality, but many Bible scholars argue that the narrative does not condemn homosexuality itself. Instead, they offer interpretations that focus on other sins portrayed in the text. Here are some interpretations by Bible scholars that do not reflect homosexuality:

1. Inhospitality and Violations of Hospitality Norms:

Many scholars, including John Boswell and Kenneth Dover, argue that the primary sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was inhospitality. In the ancient Near Eastern context, hospitality to strangers was a deeply rooted cultural and moral expectation. The men of Sodom's attempt to assault the angelic visitors is seen as a severe violation of hospitality norms, showcasing violence and disrespect towards guests, which was considered an egregious offense.

2. Sexual Violence and Rape:

Scholars like Daniel A. Helminiak emphasize that the sin of Sodom was related to an intention to commit sexual violence or rape, rather than ***consensual homosexual relationships***. The narrative depicts an act of power and domination through attempted gang rape, not a condemnation of same-sex relationships. The focus is on the violence and lack of justice, rather than on sexual orientation.

3. Pride, Arrogance, and Lack of Justice:

The Book of *Ezekiel (16:49-50)* explicitly mentions the sins of Sodom as **pride, gluttony, laziness, and failure to help the poor and needy**. This interpretation is supported by scholars who highlight that the narrative condemns the moral failings of the cities, such as arrogance and social injustice, rather than sexual behavior. Ezekiel's reference broadens the understanding of the sin to include social and ethical transgressions.

4. Idolatry and Immorality:

Some scholars, such as James B. DeYoung, suggest that the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah included general immorality and idolatry, where the cities had abandoned God's commands and engaged in widespread unethical practices. The story, in this interpretation, serves as a warning against turning away from divine guidance and engaging in corrupt and immoral behavior.





5. Condemnation of Abuse of Power:
Certain interpretations focus on the abuse of power and the use of sexual violence as a tool of oppression. The story of Sodom and Gomorrah can be seen as condemning the powerful attempting to dominate the vulnerable through violent means. This perspective aligns the narrative more with a broader theme of justice, emphasizing the wrongful use of power over others.

6. Greed and Exploitation:
Some scholars like Sherwood Anderson view the story in the context of economic exploitation and greed. Sodom is depicted as a place of wealth and indulgence but also of profound disregard for the needy. This interpretation emphasizes societal sins related to exploitation, neglect of social duties, and self-centeredness.

7. A Cautionary Tale of Divine Judgment:
Another interpretation is that the story is a general cautionary tale about divine judgment and the consequences of turning away from righteousness and compassion. In this view, the narrative serves as a moral lesson against various forms of wickedness, rather than focusing specifically on sexual acts or orientations.

Conclusion

These interpretations by Bible scholars highlight that the story of Sodom and Gomorrah is complex and multi-dimensional, with a range of meanings beyond the condemnation of homosexuality. The emphasis is often on themes of injustice, violence, inhospitality, and ethical failures, which broadens the understanding of what the narrative seeks to communicate.





LEVITICUS

This is the most quoted text of terror; ***man shall not lie with man as he would woman***! Often at antigay parades this is the scripture slapped on placards and t-shirts because is apparently the most direct.
What do the two most quoted scriptures actually say; Leviticus 18:22 and Leviticus 20:13? The Book of Leviticus in the Old Testament has two references condemning homosexuality: *"Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable"* (Leviticus 18:22) and *"If a man lies with a man as one lies with woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads"* (Leviticus 20:13).

Leviticus 18:22 and *Leviticus 20:13* are often cited as biblical passages condemning homosexuality. However, many scholars and theologians argue that these verses should not be understood in the context of modern concepts of sexual orientation. Instead, they offer interpretations that consider historical, cultural, and religious contexts of the ancient Israelites.

1. Context of Leviticus and Ancient Israelite Culture:
The Book of Leviticus is part of the Torah, or the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, which contains laws and guidelines for the Israelites. These laws were given in a specific historical and cultural context, primarily focusing on ritual purity, community cohesion, and distinguishing the Israelites from surrounding nations.

2. Prohibition Against Idolatry and Pagan Practices:
Many scholars believe that the prohibitions in *Leviticus 18:22* and *20:13* are more about avoiding practices associated with pagan worship and idolatry than about sexual orientation or relationships as understood today. In the ancient Near East, certain sexual acts, including male-male sexual relations, were part of temple rituals or fertility rites. These practices were seen as *idolatrous* and were prohibited because they went against the monotheistic worship of Yahweh (the God of Israel).

These verses could be interpreted as part of a broader prohibition against adopting the religious practices of surrounding nations, which often included ritual sex acts. The term *"detestable"* or *"abomination"* (Hebrew: *"to'evah"*) used in these verses is often associated with practices that are ritually unclean or that violate the covenantal relationship between the Israelites and their God.

3. **Concern for Purity and Holiness:**
The laws in Leviticus emphasize purity and holiness, both in religious practices and in the daily lives of the Israelites. The Holiness Code (*Leviticus 17–26*), where these verses are found, contains various laws that set the Israelites apart from other cultures. The prohibitions are framed within a context of maintaining ritual purity, cleanliness, and holiness before God.

For instance, Leviticus also prohibits eating certain foods, wearing clothing of mixed fabrics, and having sexual relations during menstruation. These laws are not about morality in the modern sense but about religious and ritual purity. Thus, the prohibition in these verses could be seen as a part of this broader concern with ritual purity.

4. Social Order and Gender Roles:
Some scholars suggest that these verses reflect concerns about maintaining social order and traditional gender roles. In the patriarchal society of ancient Israel, sexual relations were often linked to issues of property, inheritance, and social hierarchy. These laws might reflect a concern about preserving these structures. For example, the act of a man "*lying with a man as with a woman*" could have been seen as a subversion of traditional male dominance and social order.

5. Focus on Specific Acts, Not Orientation:
It's also important to note that the concept of sexual orientation, as understood today, did not exist in ancient times. The Levitical texts likely addressed specific sexual acts rather than an individual's sexual identity or orientation. Thus, these passages do not comment on loving, consensual same-sex relationships, but rather on specific behaviors within a specific cultural and religious context.

When examined in historical and cultural context, *Leviticus 18:22* and *20:13* may not be about homosexuality in the contemporary sense but rather about ritual purity, idolatry, and maintaining the distinct identity of the Israelite community. These interpretations suggest that these passages should not be used to condemn LGBTQ+ individuals today but understood as part of ancient Israel's unique covenantal laws.


JESUS
SAVES



New Testament

1st Corinthians 6:9-10

Paul writes in Corinthians: *"Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."*

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 is another passage often cited in discussions about homosexuality. However, a closer examination of the historical, cultural, and linguistic context reveals that this passage may not be addressing homosexuality as understood in contemporary terms. Here's an analysis of this scripture from perspectives that do not directly relate to homosexuality:

1. Historical and Cultural Context:

The First Letter to the Corinthians was written by the Apostle Paul to the early Christian community in Corinth, a city known for its diverse population and practices, including various forms of sexual behaviors and idol worship. The list of behaviors mentioned in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 reflects Paul's concern with practices that he viewed as contrary to the ethical and moral standards he was promoting within the Christian community.

2. Terminology and Translation:

The phrase often translated as "men who have sex with men" comes from two Greek terms: *"malakoi"* and *"arsenokoitai"*. The precise meanings of these terms have been debated among scholars, as they are not straightforward and carry cultural connotations that have shifted over time.

- *Malakoi*: This Greek word is often translated as *"effeminate"* or *"soft."* In the cultural context of Paul's time, *"malakoi"* could refer to men who were perceived as lacking self-control, being morally weak, or engaging in forms of luxury or decadence. It did not specifically refer to same-sex relationships as understood today, but rather to behaviors associated with moral laxity or excess.

- *Arsenokoitai:* This word is more ambiguous. Some scholars believe it refers to specific exploitative practices rather than a general condemnation of homosexuality. For instance, it could be referencing pederasty (sexual relationships between adult men and young boys), prostitution, or other abusive sexual practices common in Greco-Roman society. The term *"arsenokoitai"* appears infrequently in ancient texts, making its exact meaning difficult to determine, but it seems likely that it points to exploitative sexual behavior rather than consensual, loving same-sex relationships.

3. Condemnation of Exploitative and Immoral Behavior:
In light of these translations, many scholars interpret 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 as condemning behaviors seen as exploitative, abusive, or morally corrupt, rather than making a statement about consensual same-sex relationships or modern understandings of sexual orientation. Paul's writings often address power dynamics and ethical behavior, urging the early Christians to live in ways that reflect integrity and respect for others.

4. Focus on Justice and Community Ethics:
The broader context of this passage is Paul's concern with justice and ethical behavior within the community of believers. Paul lists several behaviors—such as theft, greed, drunkenness, and slander—alongside "men who have sex with men," suggesting his focus is on a range of actions that harm others or degrade the moral fabric of the community. This is not a specific or isolated focus on sexuality, but rather a call to live righteously and with integrity.



5. Social Context of Corinth:

The Corinthian society was known for its various moral and ethical challenges, including issues related to sexual immorality, corruption, and greed. Paul's admonitions are directed at urging a departure from practices that were inconsistent with the Christian ethic of love, mutual respect, and holiness. The inclusion of these behaviors in his letter likely reflects his concern for community harmony and ethical living rather than a detailed theological treatise on sexuality.

6. Understanding Moral Teaching Over Legalism:

Paul's letters often emphasize the importance of a transformed life in Christ, one characterized by love, self-control, and ethical behavior, rather than adherence to a rigid moral code. His concern was often with how members of the Christian community treated one another and lived out their faith. Therefore, these verses may be more about promoting ethical living that reflects the values of the kingdom of God rather than issuing blanket condemnations of specific groups of people.

Conclusion:

1 Corinthians 6:9-10, when read in its historical, cultural, and linguistic context, is likely addressing behaviors seen as unethical or harmful within the early Christian community rather than offering a blanket condemnation of homosexuality as understood today. The focus appears to be on maintaining a community that reflects justice, ethical behavior, and the values of Christian teaching, rather than on policing personal identities or orientations.





1 Timothy 1:10

In Timothy, Paul writes: *"The law is for people who are sexually immoral, or who practice homosexuality, or are slave traders, liars, promise breakers, or who do anything else that contradicts the wholesome teaching."*
1 Timothy 1:10 is another passage frequently cited in discussions about homosexuality. However, similar to other passages in the New Testament, a careful examination of the historical context, language, and broader message can offer interpretations that do not relate specifically to homosexuality as it is understood today.

1. Historical and Cultural Context:
The First Letter to Timothy is part of the Pastoral Epistles in the New Testament, traditionally attributed to the Apostle Paul, and is intended to provide guidance on church leadership and community conduct. Written to Timothy, a young church leader, the letter addresses issues relevant to maintaining order and ethical behavior within the early Christian community.

2. Broader Context of the Passage:
1 Timothy 1:9-10 provides a list of behaviors that are contrary to "sound doctrine" and ethical living within the Christian community. This list includes "sexually immoral," "slave traders," "liars," "promise breakers," and "anything else that contradicts wholesome teaching." These behaviors are grouped together to illustrate a broad range of actions considered morally unacceptable or damaging to the social fabric of the Christian community.

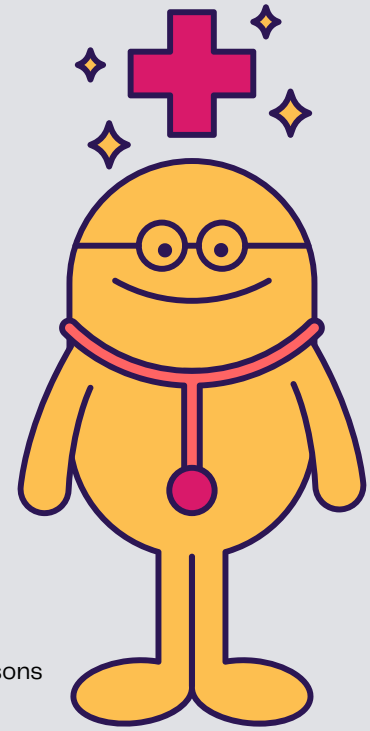
Focus on Exploitative and Harmful Practices: When viewed within the list of behaviors that includes "*slave traders*" and "*liars*," it becomes evident that the passage is condemning actions that exploit, harm, or deceive others. The use of "arsenokoitai" in this context may thus refer to exploitative sexual practices rather than consensual relationships.

3. Interpretation Beyond Modern Concepts of Sexual Orientation:
It's important to recognize that the concept of sexual orientation as an inherent aspect of identity is a modern understanding that did not exist in the first-century Greco-Roman world. The biblical texts do not discuss sexual orientation in the way contemporary society understands it. Instead, they often address specific actions or behaviors in the context of ethics and community standards.

4.. Moral and Ethical Guidelines for Community Behavior:
The purpose of 1 Timothy, like much of Paul's writing, is to instruct the early Christian community on how to live lives that are distinct from surrounding pagan cultures, focusing on ethical behavior that reflects their beliefs. The mention of behaviors such as "slave trading" and "lying" alongside "*arsenokoitai*" suggests that the concern was about ethical breaches and social injustices rather than condemning specific identities or orientations.

5. Law and Gospel Framework:
In *1 Timothy 1:8-11,* Paul discusses the role of the law in identifying sinful behavior. This passage uses a "vice list" common in moral teachings of the time, listing behaviors that contradict the "wholesome teaching" aligned with the gospel. The focus here is on the transformative power of the gospel to change lives and communities rather than on legalistic condemnation. Paul emphasizes that these behaviors are against the "sound doctrine" that leads to healthy, ethical, and spiritual living.

Conclusion:
1 Timothy 1:10, when read in its historical and cultural context, likely addresses behaviors perceived as harmful, exploitative, or contrary to the ethical teachings of the early Christian community rather than making a statement about homosexuality as understood today. The focus appears to be on prohibiting actions that exploit others or disrupt the moral and social order within the community. Understanding the ambiguity of the term "*arsenokoitai*" and the broader context of the passage can help provide a more nuanced interpretation that moves beyond a direct condemnation of same-sex relationships.





Romans 1:26-27

"God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error."

Romans 1:26-27 is often cited in discussions about homosexuality, but a closer examination of the historical context, language, and broader themes in Paul's letter to the Romans can offer interpretations that do not specifically relate to contemporary understandings of homosexuality. Here's an analysis of this scripture from perspectives that are not directly about homosexuality:

1. Historical and Cultural Context:

The Letter to the Romans, written by the Apostle Paul, addresses both Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome. It aims to unify them and clarify the nature of sin, grace, and salvation. This particular passage, *Romans 1:26-27*, is part of a broader argument in which Paul describes the consequences of idolatry and turning away from God.

2. Understanding the Broader Argument:

In *Romans 1:18-32*, Paul is making a case against idolatry and how it leads to various forms of moral degradation. The key theme is not specifically about sexual orientation but rather about people turning away from God and the subsequent moral consequences of that choice.

Idolatry and Moral Consequences: The context of the passage indicates that Paul is discussing what he sees as the natural consequences of idolatry—turning away from worshiping God leads people into behaviors that he views as dishonorable and against the order of nature. Thus, the behavior described is a symptom of a deeper spiritual problem (idolatry), rather than the primary focus of Paul's argument.

3. Natural vs. Unnatural Relations:

The terms "natural" and "unnatural" in this passage are central to its interpretation. In Paul's cultural and philosophical context, "natural" referred to what was commonly accepted or in accordance with societal norms, while "unnatural" referred to behaviors that deviated from those norms.

- Cultural Norms and Social Behavior: In Greco-Roman culture, the concept of "natural" could be linked to the social and cultural expectations of gender roles and sexual practices. Some scholars suggest that when Paul speaks of "unnatural relations," he may be referring to practices that were culturally disapproved or seen as excessive or lust-driven, rather than making a blanket condemnation of all same-sex relations as understood today.

4. Focus on Excess and Idolatry:
Paul's emphasis in this section of Romans is on excess and the degradation that comes from abandoning a proper relationship with God, which leads to all sorts of behaviors that he sees as dishonorable, including "shameful lusts."

- Behavior Driven by Excessive Desire: Paul may be highlighting behaviors driven by excessive lust or passion, which in his view, is a departure from godly living. His concern is not necessarily about the nature of the relationships themselves, but about behaviors that are seen as out of control and symptomatic of a society that has turned away from God.

5. Paul's Use of Hyperbole and Rhetorical Strategy:
Paul often uses strong language and hyperbole to make a point. In Romans 1, he uses a rhetorical strategy to illustrate the depravity of those who have turned away from God, intending to shock his audience into recognizing the seriousness of idolatry and its consequences.

- Not a Detailed Ethical Analysis of Sexuality: This passage is part of a broader critique of a society that has rejected God, rather than a specific treatise on sexual ethics. Paul's description of these behaviors could be seen as an example of the extremes that result when people do not honor God, rather than a specific condemnation of homosexual relationships as understood today.



6. Sexual Practices in Pagan Worship:

Some scholars suggest that the practices described by Paul in *Romans 1:26-27* might refer to ritualistic sexual acts associated with pagan worship. In the ancient world, certain pagan religions included sexual rituals, and Paul's references could be a critique of such practices, particularly those that involved excess, exploitation, or idolatry.

- Condemnation of Exploitative or Idolatrous Practices: If Paul is speaking against specific sexual acts associated with idolatrous practices, his concern may be more about the context (idolatry and excess) rather than a blanket condemnation of same-sex relations.

7. Interpreting "Shameful Acts" and "Penalty for Their Error":

Paul speaks of people receiving in themselves "the due penalty for their error," which some interpret as a reference to spiritual consequences rather than specific punishments for certain types of sexual behavior.

- Spiritual Consequences of Turning Away from God: The "penalty" could be understood as the natural result of living in opposition to God's will, which for Paul includes behaviors that disrupt the social and moral order he advocates.

Conclusion:

Romans 1:26-27, when read in its full historical and cultural context, can be interpreted as part of a broader critique of idolatry and its consequences rather than a specific condemnation of homosexuality as understood in contemporary terms. The passage appears to focus more on the destructive behaviors that arise from a departure from worshiping God, using "unnatural relations" as an example of the moral disorder that Paul sees resulting from idolatry and excessive desires. The interpretation of "natural" and "unnatural" in the context of cultural norms and the rhetorical style Paul employs suggests that his primary concern is with behaviors seen as excessive or idolatrous rather than making a specific statement about consensual same-sex relationships.



The Quaran

Interpreting the Quran in a way that promotes understanding and respect for LGBTQ+ individuals requires a nuanced and progressive approach that acknowledges the diverse perspectives within the Islamic tradition. This approach seeks to reconcile traditional texts with contemporary values of inclusivity and human dignity. Here are some progressive interpretations and perspectives on the Quran's teachings, particularly regarding LGBTQ+ individuals:

1. Contextual Understanding of the Story of Lot

The Quranic story of Lot (*Lut*) has traditionally been interpreted as condemning same-sex acts. However, progressive interpretations suggest that the focus of this story is not on consensual same-sex relationships but rather on issues of violence, exploitation, and inhospitality. Key points include:

- ***Inhospitality and Violence:*** Some scholars argue that the story of Lot primarily condemns the inhospitable and violent behavior of Lot's people, who attempted to harm Lot's guests. The narrative highlights their refusal to show hospitality and their engagement in violent acts, which are seen as immoral and contrary to the values of kindness and respect.

- ***Focus on Exploitation:*** The Quran criticizes the people of Lot for engaging in acts of exploitation and oppression. This interpretation posits that the text does not address consensual same-sex relationships but rather condemns exploitative and abusive practices, including the attempted rape of Lot's guests.

2. Emphasis on Ethical Behavior and Justice

A progressive reading of the Quran emphasizes broader principles of justice, compassion, and ethical behavior:



- *Principles of Justice and Equality:* The Quran advocates for justice and equality for all individuals. Verses that emphasize justice, fairness, and respect for others can be seen as supporting the rights and dignity of LGBTQ+ people. For example, *Surah An-Nisa (4:135)* calls for standing firmly for justice, even if it is against oneself or one's family.

- *Compassion and Respect:* The Quran teaches compassion and respect for others. *Surah Al-Hujurat (49:13)* emphasizes that all humans are created from a single soul and that diversity is a part of God's creation. This verse can be interpreted as advocating for respect and acceptance of all people, including those who are LGBTQ+.

3. Reinterpretation of Key Terms

Progressive scholars suggest reinterpreting key terms and concepts traditionally associated with condemnation of homosexuality:

- *Arsenokoitai and Other Terms:* The term "arsenokoitai," found in some Christian scriptures, is often cited in debates about homosexuality. Progressive interpretations suggest that such terms may refer to specific exploitative practices rather than consensual same-sex relationships. Similarly, some argue that the Quran's references to "unnatural" behavior may relate to specific cultural practices rather than a blanket condemnation of same-sex relationships.

- *Historical Context:* Understanding the historical and cultural context of Quranic verses is crucial. Progressive interpretations consider the social norms and practices of the time, arguing that the Quran's primary concern may have been with specific behaviors related to exploitation or abuse rather than a condemnation of same-sex relationships as understood today.

4. Focus on Inclusivity and Human Dignity

A progressive approach to interpreting the Quran emphasizes inclusivity and the inherent dignity of every individual:

- Embracing Diversity: The Quran acknowledges the diversity of creation and the uniqueness of each individual. Surah Al-Hujurat (49:13) highlights that God created people from different backgrounds and identities, suggesting a divine acceptance of human diversity.

- Respect for Human Rights: The Quran's teachings on human rights and dignity can be seen as supportive of LGBTQ+ rights. Emphasizing principles of non-discrimination, equality, and respect aligns with modern understandings of human rights.



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Not What I ...Said

A toolkit for religious inclusion of LGBTQ persons

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