

YOUR GUIDE TO
UNDERSTANDING
KEY DISCUSSION
POINTS



BELIEF BRIEF



GAYTHER

LGBTQIA+ FOCUS

Christianity Edition



"The Bible is not God, nor is it a substitute for God... to treat it as if it were God... is to treat it in the very way that it itself condemns."

REVEREND PROFESSOR PETER J. GOMES - THE GOOD BOOK

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CONTENT WARNING | The Belief Briefs aim to encourage questioning of established ideas, the use of divisive language, and the provision of alternative perspectives. They are not meant to insult or belittle any faith or belief but to challenge assumptions and promote reflection. If questioning your beliefs makes you uncomfortable or you prefer your truths remain unchallenged, approach with caution.



How often have you seen, heard, or had firsthand experience of someone using outdated rhetoric, selective interpretations of religious scripture, or personal opinions to justify how they speak about others and, more importantly, how they treat you?

Too often, these views and opinions are rooted in fear, misinformation, or limited engagement with the communities involved, all of which can lead to racist, homophobic, or transphobic language and actions that clash with modern societal values and with the principles of compassion, dignity, and humanity found across numerous faiths and cultures worldwide.

Even though many of these opinions may come from far-right groups, extremists, bad-faith actors, or simply uninformed individuals, they are still hard to ignore. If we do not challenge them, these false stories and baseless claims can quickly be accepted as truth, shaping public perceptions of people and influencing how they are treated in everyday life, politics, and society.

The Belief Briefs are here to support and inspire open conversations. They are a collection of downloadable guides covering a wide range of topics, from Christianity to transgender identities. Created to gently challenge assumptions, long-standing opinions, and misinformation, they do so without attacking anyone's faith or personal beliefs. The hope is to foster understanding, encourage critical thinking, and promote open, evidence-based dialogue where everyone can feel heard and respected.

These briefs examine how misinformation, selective interpretation, and historical narratives are often accepted as fact without question. They also show how some people or groups might use long-standing beliefs to support personal, political, or ideological aims.

By using historical background, factual details, and thoughtful reasoning, the Belief Briefs are here to help you better understand tricky topics, spot and challenge misinformation, and join in more meaningful conversations.

Think of the Belief Briefs as a helpful guide for tackling fact-related challenges, encouraging critical thinking, and sharing well-informed views on common beliefs and social stories.

02 INTRODUCTION



A person's faith and beliefs are deeply personal, shaping their values, identity, and worldview. Unlike common opinions, beliefs are often tied to emotions, culture, family, and community, making discussions about them sensitive and complex. Many religions and denominations are based on stories, teachings, and principles that aim to guide rather than judge, fostering compassion, humility, justice, and a good life.

The main challenge is not faith itself but its interpretation. Over time, religious texts have been translated, reinterpreted, and sometimes selectively used to support personal, political, or ideological goals. While many faith communities seek to evolve and deepen their understanding through experience, others may cling to rigid views that are not always historically, culturally, or contextually accurate.

Many sacred texts were written centuries ago in societies with norms and structures that differ significantly from today's views on gender, sexuality, and identity. Understanding this historical context is vital for interpreting these texts in modern discussions. These Belief Briefs aim to encourage respectful and thoughtful engagement with faith-based claims, whether online, in public, or in personal conversations.

This issue extends beyond religion. Political rhetoric and media often frame LGBTQIA+ identities as political debates rather than human realities, using terms like 'LGBTQIA+ ideology.' Such language relies on fear, oversimplification, and misinformation. It is essential to question and challenge these narratives whenever they arise, in conversations, institutions, politics, or government.

The aim is not to silence belief but to foster understanding, accountability, and respectful dialogue based on facts, empathy, and shared humanity.

03 CORE CLAIMS

In the Core Claims section, we will explore common arguments both supporting and opposing the treatment of the LGBTQIA+ community. While many perspectives seem well-established, rooted in centuries of tradition and belief, closer examination often reveals them to be modern reinterpretations. History indicates that societies and individuals who have shared the same faith for thousands of years did not always view certain beliefs or values as these arguments imply.

Throughout history, the Bible has sometimes been used to justify difficult issues like slavery, the oppression of women, and racial segregation. Thankfully, over time, thoughtful learning, moral development, and personal experiences have helped most Christians to reinterpret those passages in a more positive and compassionate light.

For centuries, scholars and theologians have debated the interpretation and meaning of religious texts and scriptures. For every person advocating harsher or more extreme interpretations, others argue that some positions upheld by churches and religious institutions have been misinterpreted, misquoted, or distorted, undermining their true meaning and understanding.

While everyone has the right to their beliefs and opinions, problems occur when these beliefs are enforced on others in ways that cause harm or deny dignity. In such cases, there should be space for challenge, discussion, and correction, allowing those who misuse or misrepresent facts to gain a deeper understanding and reflection.

Let us now examine some of the principal arguments that have been made and continue to be advanced regarding LGBTQIA+ people.

#1 CLOBBER PASSAGES

A set of verses commonly cited against LGBTQIA+ people



- Certain passages in the Bible are often cited by conservative Christians in discussions about homosexuality. These are sometimes referred to as the "clobber passages," though the term is mainly used in academic or critical contexts. These verses are commonly understood by some readers as condemning homosexual acts, and for many believers, they represent clear moral teaching from scripture. At the same time, these passages are interpreted differently across Christian traditions, and their meaning is widely debated among theologians, historians, and biblical scholars.
- The most commonly referenced passages include Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, Romans 1:26–27, 1 Corinthians 6:9–10, and 1 Timothy 1:10.

- For many Christians, these texts feel morally significant and are taken as straightforward guidance rather than symbolic or culturally limited statements. Because of this, disagreements in interpretation are often less about whether the Bible should be taken seriously and more about how ancient writings should be understood in their historical and cultural context.

ALTERNATIVE

- Some point to passages such as John 8:7 (“Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone”) as a reminder not to judge others too harshly. From this perspective, the focus is less on isolating individual verses and more on the broader ethical themes in scripture, including repeated teachings on humility, compassion, and restraint in judging.
- A key issue in interpretation is that these passages come from very different historical, linguistic, and cultural contexts. Many scholars argue that ancient texts do not map neatly onto modern understandings of sexual orientation. Instead, some suggest that certain biblical references may address exploitative, non-consensual, or ritualised sexual practices, rather than committed same-sex relationships as understood today.
- More broadly, the Bible was written over many centuries and includes a wide range of literary genres, cultures, and historical settings. Because of this diversity, interpretation is rarely straightforward, and meaning often depends on context.
- It is also important to note that ancient societies did not have a modern concept of sexual orientation or LGBTQIA+ identity, which can affect how these texts are read today.
- Within Christianity itself, there is already a long tradition of reinterpreting or contextualising biblical teachings in light of historical change. This can be seen in shifting interpretations of passages relating to slavery, the roles of women, and dietary laws.
- Overall, the debate is not simply a matter of “Bible verses versus modern values,” but rather a broader question of how ancient texts should be understood in light of language, history, and ethics.
- In summary, the disagreement is less about whether scripture should be taken literally and more about how ancient language and context should be interpreted in a modern world.

DISPUTED TERMS

- **ARSENOKOITAI** - a rare Greek term used by Paul. Some scholars link it to exploitative sexual behaviour, including prostitution, coercion, or abuse, rather than to consensual same-sex relationships.
- **MALAKOI** - literally meaning “soft.” Historically used in multiple ways, including moral weakness, luxury, laziness, or effeminacy.
- **MIŠKEVĒ ’IŠŠĀ** - a Hebrew phrase from Leviticus that some scholars argue may refer to specific purity or dominance violations rather than to all same-sex intimacy.

Lost in translations for terms like arsenokoitai, malakoi, miškevē 'iššâ, qedeshim, and Sodom



- Some Christians argue that the Bible is clear and definitive on homosexuality. Others argue that translation, historical context, and disputed terminology make the issue far more complex. Simply put, many believe the Bible is clear and that its meaning has always been consistent.
- Most people want certainty when it comes to scripture. Faith traditions often depend on the idea that God's message is stable and reliable. The difficulty is that the Bible comes through layers of language, culture, and translation, which naturally introduce interpretive complexity.

ALTERNATIVE

- The Bible was written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, and has passed through centuries of translation. Key terms are still debated today. Even small linguistic differences can significantly alter meaning, especially when translating into modern identity categories that did not exist in the ancient world.
 - The Old Testament was primarily written in Hebrew, with some Aramaic, whilst the New Testament was written in Koine Greek.
 - The Bible was translated into Latin by St. Jerome in the late 4th century and later into various European languages over the centuries.
 - The specific English word "homosexual" did not appear in some Bible translations until the 20th century, notably in the Revised Standard Version (RSV) translation in 1946.
 - Ancient languages rarely map neatly onto modern identity categories such as "gay," "straight," or "sexual orientation."
 - In summary, the desire for certainty is understandable, but the history of translation makes simplicity more complicated than it first appears.
-
- **QEDESHIM** - often associated with pagan temple or cultic practices rather than with loving same-sex relationships.
 - **SODOM** - many scholars and Jewish traditions interpret the sin of Sodom primarily as violence, inhospitality, arrogance, and abuse rather than as homosexuality itself.
 - Because these terms are debated, many scholars caution against presenting modern anti-LGBTQ interpretations as universally settled or linguistically unquestionable

HAS CHRISTIANITY ALWAYS BEEN CLEAR ON HOMOSEXUALITY?

Historical development of doctrine and persecution



- Some argue that Christianity has always held a clear, consistent position against homosexuality. Critics counter that history is more complex and has evolved significantly over time. Simply put, many believe Christianity has always clearly condemned homosexuality.
- Many believers are trying to preserve what they understand to be a consistent moral tradition passed down through the centuries. From their perspective, continuity equals faithfulness. However, historically, interpretation has shifted significantly over time, often alongside broader cultural change.

ALTERNATIVE

- While many early theologians condemned same- sex acts, the intensity of these condemnations, along with their legal enforcement and political significance, developed gradually over centuries. Early Christian teachings were generally more concerned with issues such as idolatry, greed, social order, and specific sexual behaviours than with concepts of sexual orientation or identity as they are understood today.
- Same- sex relationships and forms of gender diversity have been documented across numerous cultures throughout recorded history, including in ancient Greece, Rome, Indigenous societies, regions of Africa, China, India, and elsewhere. Ancient Jewish and Christian writers were aware of same- sex behaviour, but interpretations and responses varied across periods and communities. Some historians have argued that certain medieval rites may have recognised same- sex unions, although scholars continue to debate the nature of these ceremonies and whether they can be compared to modern concepts of marriage.
- During the medieval period, church authorities increasingly formalised condemnations of same- sex acts. Key examples include Peter Damian's criticism of homosexual practices among clergy in the 11th century and Thomas Aquinas's classification of same- sex acts as an "unnatural vice" in the 13th century. However, the most severe legal enforcement emerged later, particularly during the 15th and 16th centuries, when inquisitorial and secular legal systems prosecuted sodomy more aggressively.
- The modern concept of homosexuality as a fixed personal identity did not emerge until the 19th century. During the 19th and 20th centuries, identity-based opposition to LGBTQIA+ people intensified, shaped not only by religious traditions but also by developments in law, psychiatry, and colonial governance. Much of the criminalisation and medical pathologisation of LGBTQIA+ individuals arose through these modern institutions rather than directly from early biblical texts.
- In summary, while traditions condemning same- sex acts have historical roots, the interpretation, enforcement, and social significance of these teachings have evolved considerably over time.

Genesis 2 and the creation narrative



- Some Christians argue that Genesis establishes God's design for all human relationships as exclusively male and female. Simply put, many believe God designed marriage as a relationship between a man and a woman from creation.
- Commonly Cited Verses: Genesis 2
- The argument is often rooted in a sincere belief that creation narratives reveal God's intended design for human relationships. The question is whether a creation account is intended to define every form of relationship or to describe a foundational origin story with theological meaning.

ALTERNATIVE

- Genesis is primarily a theological creation narrative rather than a comprehensive legal framework governing all human relationships. Genesis 2 focuses on the origin of companionship and human relationality, presenting one foundational model rather than addressing every possible form of relationship.
- The text does not explicitly address many later ethical or relational questions, and silence on a topic is not equivalent to an explicit prohibition. Within Jewish interpretive tradition, readings such as Bereshit Rabbah 8:1 describe the original human as androgynous or dual in form, indicating that even early interpretations resist a strictly binary reading.
- Broader interpretive history also shows that Genesis has been used to support ideas—such as strict female subordination—that are not universally upheld in contemporary Christian thought. Likewise, Jesus is described as celibate and unmarried, yet this is not interpreted as establishing a universal norm for human relationships.
- Taken together, these perspectives suggest that Genesis presents a foundational narrative about human origins and relationships, but not a detailed or exhaustive prescription for all future relational forms.
- In summary, Genesis offers a theological account of beginnings and a model of relationship, but does not function as a comprehensive rulebook defining every possible human relationship.

Angels and the sins of Sodom



- Some Christians argue that God destroyed Sodom solely because of homosexuality, rather than other themes that include coercion, humiliation, and a lack of consent. Simply put, many believe Sodom was destroyed because of homosexuality.
- Commonly Cited Verses: Genesis 19
- People connect this story to sexual ethics because the narrative is disturbing and involves sexual violence. However, when read alongside other biblical texts, especially Ezekiel, the emphasis appears broader than on sexuality alone.

ALTERNATIVE

- When it comes to Sodom, modern discussions sometimes flatten a very complex narrative into a single issue, but the text itself is far more specific and far more disturbing. In Genesis 19, the central act is an attempted gang rape of visitors, an act of coercion, violence, and humiliation rather than anything resembling a consensual relationship.
- This is why many readers find it understandable that the story is associated with sexual wrongdoing, but other biblical texts interpret Sodom's sins more broadly. For example, Ezekiel 16:49 describes them as arrogant, excessive, greedy, and neglectful of the poor and vulnerable. Similarly, the story's emphasis on the violation of sacred hospitality reflects Ancient Near Eastern moral norms, in which protecting strangers was considered a serious ethical duty.
- Jewish interpretive tradition also frequently expands the critique beyond sexual behaviour alone. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 109a), for instance, highlights cruelty and inhospitality as central failures of Sodom. A comparable narrative appears in Judges 19, where similar violence is directed against a woman, reinforcing that the issue in both cases is violent domination rather than consensual relationships.
- It is also worth noting that the English term "sodomy" emerged much later in legal and cultural history and does not directly reflect the meaning of the original biblical text.
- In summary, the story of Sodom is primarily about violence, injustice, and moral corruption, not consensual relationships or loving partnerships.

Holiness code for an ancient Israelite society



- Many Christians view these verses as a direct and timeless prohibition of homosexuality. Simply put, many believe Leviticus clearly and permanently forbids homosexual behaviour.
- Commonly Cited Verses: Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13
- For many believers, Leviticus represents God's direct moral instruction, so it feels intuitive to treat its commands as serious and enduring. The tension arises because Christianity itself has historically distinguished between ritual law and moral law in different ways.

ALTERNATIVE

- The Levitical texts belong to the Holiness Code, a set of ritual and legal instructions given to ancient Israel. These laws cover both moral and ceremonial life within a highly specific cultural and religious context. Within that code are prohibitions on eating shellfish, wearing garments made of mixed fabrics, certain grooming practices, and tattoos, as well as strict penalties for various social and sexual transgressions.
- Most Christian traditions distinguish between ceremonial law (ritual purity and identity markers) and enduring moral teaching, often arguing that Christ fulfils or transforms the Old Covenant framework (see Galatians 3; Hebrews 8–10). As a result, many Levitical commands are not applied literally in modern Christian practice.
- The Hebrew term often translated as “abomination” (to'evah) frequently refers to ritual impurity, taboo, or culturally specific practice rather than universal moral condemnation. Some scholars also suggest the relevant passages may reflect concerns about idolatrous ritual contexts or ancient social hierarchies rather than a general ethical principle about relationships.
- At the same time, critics point out that selectively applying certain Levitical laws while ignoring others can raise questions about interpretive consistency.
- In summary, the key issue is not whether Leviticus is sacred, but how its laws are understood within their ancient covenant context and interpreted in later religious traditions.

About divorce, but used to justify the opposition to same-sex marriage



- Some Christians argue that Jesus defined marriage exclusively as between one man and one woman. Simply put, many believe Jesus defined marriage as between a man and a woman.
- Commonly Cited Verses: Matthew 19 | Mark 10
- Many Christians appeal to Jesus on the subject because they see him as the highest authority in defining marriage. That makes this passage feel decisive. The interpretive question is whether Jesus is defining a universal rule or responding to a specific legal and cultural dispute about divorce.

ALTERNATIVE

- Describing one form of marriage in a particular context is not the same as setting a universal boundary that defines or prohibits all other possible relationships. The Gospels do not record Jesus directly addressing same-sex relationships, even though such relationships were known in the Greco-Roman world.
- What Jesus repeatedly emphasises is compassion, humility, mercy, and concern for the marginalised, alongside strong criticism of hypocrisy and legalism. In that broader pattern, his ethical focus is far more often on how people treat one another than on policing identity categories.
- One passage sometimes brought into the discussion is Matthew 19:12, where Jesus refers to “eunuchs from birth,” a group some scholars interpret as potentially including people who do not fit conventional social or biological categories. While interpretations vary, this highlights that his teaching includes awareness of human diversity beyond standard norms.
- In summary, Jesus is responding to a specific question about divorce, not laying out an exhaustive rulebook for all relationships; his broader ethical emphasis is consistently on compassion rather than exclusion.

#8 LOVE THE SINNER, HATE THE SIN

A popular phrase not found in the Bible



- Some Christians claim they can affirm LGBTQIA+ people while condemning same-sex relationships or identities. Simply put, many believe you can reject behaviour while still loving the person.
- The phrase is usually used with good intentions, to hold moral beliefs while still affirming the dignity of individuals. The difficulty arises when people experience the distinction between identity and behaviour as artificial or emotionally separating.

ALTERNATIVE

- The phrase "love the sinner, hate the sin" is not found in the Bible. It is commonly associated with later theological tradition, sometimes linked to Augustine and popularised in modern usage. While it is often intended to separate moral critique from personal rejection, many people experience that distinction very differently in practice.
- For many LGBTQIA+ individuals, identity, relationships, and lived experience are deeply intertwined rather than easily separated into "behaviour versus self." As a result, statements that appear to target actions can still feel as though they address personhood as a whole, even when that is not the intent.
- This is why the phrase can be controversial in pastoral and social contexts: its meaning depends not only on intention but also on how it is received and lived.
- In contrast, Jesus' teaching in Matthew 22:39, "Love your neighbour as yourself," is given without qualifiers and is consistently paired in the Gospels with criticism of exclusion, hypocrisy, and religious gatekeeping rather than of marginalised individuals themselves.
- In summary, intent matters, but so does lived experience; what is meant as a separation between action and identity is not always received that way.

The silence of Jesus on homosexuality



- Modern culture-war Christianity often places major emphasis on homosexuality despite Jesus never explicitly discussing it. Simply put, many believe Jesus clearly opposed homosexuality even if he did not mention it directly.
- For many believers, Jesus' authority is central, so what he does or does not say carries significant weight. The interpretive question is whether silence implies approval, disapproval, or simply a lack of direct engagement with that issue.

ALTERNATIVE

- One striking feature of the Gospels is that Jesus does not directly address homosexuality in any recorded teaching, despite speaking on a wide range of moral, social, and religious issues. This has led to ongoing debate about whether silence implies disapproval, indifference, or simply non-engagement with a question framed in later cultural terms.
- What Jesus consistently emphasises are themes such as hypocrisy, greed, forgiveness, compassion, humility, care for the poor, and warnings against self-righteous judgement. He also frequently associates with people considered social outcasts in his cultural context, prioritising inclusion and mercy over enforcing boundaries.
- Because of this, interpretations differ. Some Christians infer sexual ethics indirectly from Jesus' affirmations of marriage, while others note that affirming one relational model does not necessarily function as a blanket exclusion of all others. Similarly, Jesus speaks positively about celibacy in certain contexts, yet this is not taken to imply that marriage itself is disapproved.
- This contrast often fuels the observation that modern public debates tend to focus heavily on issues Jesus does not explicitly address, while sometimes giving less attention to themes he emphasises repeatedly.
- In summary, Jesus grounds ethics in love of God and neighbour, speaks extensively about compassion and humility, and does not directly address every modern moral category, leaving the interpretation of silence open to debate.

Romans 1, Corinthians, and Timothy



- Paul's writings are frequently cited as the strongest New Testament condemnation of homosexuality. Simply put, many believe Paul explicitly condemns homosexual behaviour as sinful.
- Commonly Cited Verses: Romans 1:26–27 | 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 | 1 Timothy 1:10
- Many Christians rely on Paul because his writings form much of the early theological framework of the church. The challenge is that Paul writes within a very different cultural and linguistic world, which requires careful translation into modern categories.

ALTERNATIVE

- Interpreting Paul's references to same-sex behaviour is therefore complex, especially because ancient Roman society lacked a concept equivalent to modern sexual orientation or identity. Many scholars argue that Paul's concern may have been directed at specific practices in the Greco-Roman world, such as exploitative relationships, prostitution, coercion, or pederasty—rather than consensual, equal relationships between adults.
- The key Greek terms in these discussions remain widely debated. *Arsenokoitai* is extremely rare, and its meaning is uncertain, with proposed translations ranging from economic exploitation or sexual abuse to broader immoral sexual conduct. *Malakoi* literally means "soft," but in ancient usage it could refer to a range of ideas, including moral weakness, luxury, or effeminacy, depending on context.
- In Romans 1, Paul links certain behaviours to idolatry and places them within a broader critique of pagan excess. However, the same passage is followed by a strong warning against self-righteous judgement (Romans 2), complicating straightforward readings that isolate one group for condemnation.
- It is also worth noting that Paul's use of "para physin" ("against nature") does not always carry a moral meaning in his writings; in Romans 11:24, he uses it in a positive or descriptive sense, showing its flexibility as a phrase.
- Because of these factors, Christian interpretations of these passages vary significantly today, with ongoing debate about whether Paul is addressing specific exploitative practices or making a broader claim about all same-sex relationships.
- In summary, the key issue is not whether Paul passages directly translate to LGBTQIA+ identities, but how his language and cultural context translate into modern categories of identity, relationship, and ethics.

THE WICKED WILL NOT INHERIT THE KINGDOM

Exclusion from God's kingdom



- Modern Christians frequently view this passage as often presented as definitive proof that homosexuals are excluded from God's kingdom. Simply put, many believe this passage clearly excludes homosexuals from salvation.
- Commonly Cited Verses: 1 Corinthians 6:9–10
- For many believers, these passages can feel especially serious because they appear to connect behaviour with salvation directly. That makes interpretation particularly sensitive. The debate among scholars often centres around how specific Greek terms map onto modern identity categories.

ALTERNATIVE

- The key terms in these passages, especially arsenokoitai and malakoi, do not map neatly onto modern identity categories like "gay." Arsenokoitai is rare and may have been coined by Paul himself, and its meaning remains uncertain, with interpretations ranging from exploitative sexual behaviour to broader sexual wrongdoing. Malakoi literally means soft, but in ancient usage it could refer to a wide range of ideas, including self-indulgence, moral weakness, or effeminacy, depending on context.
- More broadly, the ancient world did not operate with a concept equivalent to modern sexual orientation or identity. Sexual ethics were often framed around factors such as status, power, exploitation, and social role rather than enduring identity categories.
- For this reason, many scholars caution against directly translating these texts into modern labels without careful historical and linguistic context. Even within Christian scholarship, there is no single agreed interpretation of these terms.
- In summary, the debate is not about a blanket exclusion, but about what it actually means, and that question is still being seriously discussed rather than definitively settled.

Aquinas and the philosophy of “natural order”



- Some religious arguments against homosexuality rely not only on scripture, but on natural law philosophy, especially the work of Thomas Aquinas. The main argument is that sexual acts are considered morally valid only when ordered toward procreation and biological complementarity. Simply put, many believe Same-sex relationships are unnatural and therefore morally wrong.
- Natural law arguments come from a long philosophical tradition, especially in Christian ethics, and aim to ground morality in reason and human nature rather than cultural change. The key debate is how ‘nature’ is defined, and which aspects of human experience are considered morally relevant.

ALTERNATIVE

- More broadly, "natural" is not a straightforward ethical category. Many heterosexual relationships are not reproductive yet are widely understood as meaningful, loving, and morally legitimate. Most modern Christian and secular ethical frameworks therefore recognise multiple dimensions of sexual relationships beyond reproduction, including companionship, emotional bonding, and mutual care.
- Appeals to "nature" are also complex and historically contested. The term has been used in different contexts to support a wide range of conclusions, some of which, such as opposition to interracial marriage or gender equality, have since been widely rejected.
- Same-sex behaviour is also observed across many species in the animal kingdom, showing that "natural" does not map neatly onto human moral evaluation in any simple way.
- In summary, the ethical question is not simply what is "natural," but how human relationships are understood in terms of care, commitment, and moral meaning.

04 SELECTIVE SCRIPTURES

The Selective Scriptures section examines religious texts, or, depending on interpretation, rules that guide ethical and social life. Many of these teachings were highly relevant in their original historical and cultural contexts but are no longer strictly observed by many practitioners, who recognise that some aspects do not translate easily into modern life. At the same time, patterns of selective emphasis raise an important question: why are some teachings reinterpreted or set aside, while others are treated as fixed and universally binding?

Scriptural references are often invoked to support firm or unquestionable positions on contemporary issues, with statements such as “the Bible is clear on this” or “religion has always taught this.” Such claims are often presented as definitive, shaping moral views and social attitudes.

Religious belief is deeply meaningful for many people, offering moral guidance, identity, and community. However, religious texts and traditions have always been interpreted in diverse ways across cultures, denominations, and historical periods. Across history, many religious institutions have also adapted their interpretations in response to broader social and cultural change.

This discussion is not about whether religious traditions should evolve, since change is a consistent feature of both religious history and human society. Rather, it focuses on selective interpretation: the tendency for some teachings to be reinterpreted, contextualised, or no longer observed, while others, particularly those relating to sexuality, identity, or relationships, are sometimes treated as uniquely absolute.

Within most theological traditions, multiple interpretations and historical perspectives coexist. The aim of this section is not to critique personal faith, but to explore how selective emphasis within interpretation can shape moral reasoning and attitudes towards others.

In the sections that follow, we will consider examples of teachings that many believers no longer apply literally today, and use these as a starting point for examining how and why certain values are reinterpreted while others remain strongly upheld.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND ROLES



Many religious texts were written within deeply patriarchal societies, and their teachings on the role of women often reflected the cultural and legal norms of their time. While many believers today interpret these passages symbolically or within historical context, others continue to treat them as authoritative guidance on gender roles, leadership, family structure, and social expectations.

PASSAGE	RULE
1 Corinthians 14:34-35	Women must be silent in church
1 Timothy 2:12	Women must not teach or have authority over men
Ephesians 5:22	Wives must submit to their husbands in everything
Numbers 5:11-31	A husband who suspects infidelity can subject his wife to a "bitter water" trial
Deuteronomy 22:28-29	A rape victim must marry her rapist (if he pays the father)
Deuteronomy 21:10-14	Rules permitting taking female war captives as wives
1 Corinthians 11:8-9	A woman was made for a man, not a man for a woman

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY



Scriptural teachings on marriage and family life have historically shaped expectations around gender, authority, divorce, inheritance, and parenting. Over time, many religious communities have adapted or reinterpreted these teachings in response to changing social values, while debates continue over which principles should remain fixed and which should evolve.

PASSAGE	RULE
Deuteronomy 25:5-10	A man must marry his dead brother's widow (levirate marriage)

Genesis / throughout OT	Polygamy is practised by patriarchs (Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon) with no condemnation.
Numbers 31:17-18	Permission to take virgin girls as war spoils
Deuteronomy 22:13-21	A bride who cannot prove her virginity should be stoned to death.
Matthew 5:32 / Mark 10:11-12	Divorce and remarriage = adultery (many churches now permit divorce)
1 Corinthians 7:8-9	Paul says it is better not to marry at all.

CRIMINAL AND CIVIL LAW



Many religious traditions contain legal codes governing punishment, justice, property, and public behaviour. While few modern societies apply these laws in their original form, they remain historically significant and continue to influence moral and legal discussions in some cultures and communities.

PASSAGE	RULE
Exodus 31:14-15	Working on the Sabbath (Saturday) = death penalty
Leviticus 20:9	Cursing your parents = death penalty
Deuteronomy 21:18-21	A rebellious or stubborn son = death by stoning
Deuteronomy 22:20-21	Non-virgin brides = death by stoning
Leviticus 24:16	Blasphemy = death penalty
Exodus 21:7	Rules for selling your daughter into slavery
Exodus 21:20-21	Beating an enslaved person is permitted as long as they survive 2 days.
Leviticus 20:10	Adultery = death for both parties
Leviticus 20:27	Being a psychic or medium = death by stoning

FAITH RULES AND PRACTICES



Religious scriptures frequently set out rules relating to worship, ritual purity, prayer, observance, and daily conduct. Over time, many of these practices have been adapted, relaxed, or reinterpreted in different ways by various denominations and communities.

PASSAGE	RULE
Exodus 20:8-10	Strictly observe the Sabbath (Saturday, not Sunday - Sunday worship is itself a later tradition)
Numbers 15:38-40	Wear tassels on the corners of your garments
Leviticus 1-7	Animal sacrifice is required for atonement
Deuteronomy 6:8-9	Bind God's commands on your hands and foreheads; write them on your doorframes
Leviticus 15:19-30	Menstruating women are ritually "unclean" and must be isolated.
Leviticus 12:1-8	Women are "unclean" for weeks after giving birth and must make a sacrifice.
James 5:14	Sick people should be anointed with oil by elders, not see doctors

FOOD AND DIET



Dietary laws and food restrictions have played an important role in many religious traditions, often serving spiritual, cultural, or communal purposes. While some believers continue to observe these rules closely, others follow them more selectively or symbolically in contemporary life.

PASSAGE	RULE
Leviticus 11:9-12	No shellfish (prawns, lobster, crab)
Leviticus 11:7-8	No pork

Leviticus 11:13-19	No eagles, owls, bats, or seagulls
Deuteronomy 14:21	Don't boil a goat in its mother's milk
Leviticus 19:23-25	Don't eat fruit from a tree less than 5 years old
Acts 15:29	The early church banned eating blood or strangled animals
Leviticus 19:19	Don't plant two different crops in the same field
Leviticus 19:9-10	Leave the edges of your fields unharvested for people with low incomes

CLOTHING AND APPEARANCE



Religious teachings on clothing, modesty, grooming, and appearance have historically reflected broader social values surrounding identity, status, gender, and morality. Interpretations of these expectations vary widely today, with many communities adapting traditional standards to modern cultural norms.

PASSAGE	RULE
Leviticus 19:19	No garments made of two different fabrics (e.g. polyester/cotton blends)
Deuteronomy 22:11	No wool and linen mixed
Leviticus 19:27	Don't cut the hair on the sides of your head
Leviticus 19:27	Men must not trim their beards
Leviticus 19:28	No tattoos
Deuteronomy 22:5	Women must not wear men's clothing (and vice versa)
1 Corinthians 11:5-6	Women must cover their heads in church
1 Timothy 2:9	Women must not wear gold, pearls, or expensive clothes

FINANCE AND ECONOMICS



Religious teachings on wealth, trade, debt, charity, and economic behaviour often reflected the realities of ancient societies and attempts to promote fairness or social stability. Some principles continue to influence ethical discussions today, while others are rarely observed literally in modern economic systems.

PASSAGE	RULE
Exodus 22:25 / Leviticus 25:37	Charging interest on loans is forbidden
Leviticus 25:23	Land cannot be permanently sold — it belongs to God
Deuteronomy 15:1	All debts must be cancelled every 7 years
Acts 2:44-45	Early Christians held all possessions in common (proto-communal living)
Matthew 19:21 / Mark 10:21	Jesus tells a rich man to sell everything and give to the poor
Luke 6:30	Give to everyone who asks; don't ask for your belongings back

05 QUICK REFERENCE

In the Quick Reference section, we provide a concise sheet summarising the main points and counterarguments. It's a handy guide for quickly checking facts or preparing a reasoned response, whether online or in person

#	POINT	CLAIM	COUNTERARGUMENT
1	CLOBBER PASSAGES	The Bible clearly condemns homosexuality	Verses are context-dependent, debated, and may address exploitative or ritual acts rather than orientation. Disputed texts and ancient context complicate certainty.
2	TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION	The Bible is clear and definitive	Written in Hebrew, Greek, etc., translated centuries later into English, with linguistic ambiguity affecting the meaning. Clarity is harder when the text passes through languages and centuries.
3	HISTORICAL CONSISTENCY	Christianity has always condemned homosexuality	Views evolved; enforcement and interpretation changed across history. Tradition exists, but interpretation has never been static.
4	ADAM AND EVE	Marriage is exclusively male–female	Genesis is an origin story, not an exhaustive law; no explicit exclusion of others. The creation story is not automatically a universal relationship code.
5	SODOM AND GOMORRAH	Destroyed due to homosexuality	Scriptures and Ezekiel emphasise violence, pride, and inhospitality. The story is about violence, not consensual relationships.
6	LEVITICUS	Direct eternal ban	Part of ancient purity law no longer fully applied; ritual context matters. The selective application of Leviticus raises questions about consistency.
7	JESUS ON MARRIAGE	Jesus defines marriage strictly	Context relates to divorce teaching; no direct mention of homosexuality. Jesus was answering a question, not setting a universal boundary.

#	POINT	CLAIM	COUNTERARGUMENT
8	LOVE THE SINNER	Behaviour ≠ identity	Identity and relationships are inseparable for many people; separation can feel like rejection. Intentional distinction can still feel like exclusion.
9	JESUS SILENCE	Jesus implicitly opposed homosexuality	Jesus never addressed homosexuality; focus was on hypocrisy, compassion, and justice. Silence is interpretively open, not automatically negative.
10	PAUL'S WRITINGS	Paul clearly condemns homosexuality	Greek terms debated; likely refers to exploitative Roman practices. Ancient language does not map neatly onto modern identity.
11	KINGDOM EXCLUSION	Homosexuals excluded from salvation	Greek terms unclear; identity categories are modern constructs. Meaning depends heavily on contested translation.
12	NATURAL LAW	Same-sex acts are unnatural	"Natural" is context-dependent; sex has meanings beyond reproduction. Nature is descriptive, morality is interpretive.

06 FURTHER READING

The Belief Briefs are intended to encourage critical thinking and informed discussion by examining assumptions, long-held views, and common misconceptions. Their purpose is not to challenge or undermine faith or personal belief systems, but to promote a deeper understanding of the topics explored.

If you would like to continue learning about this subject, we recommend the following resources for further reading.

SUGGESTED READING

Explore a selection of articles, publications, and educational materials designed to help you deepen your knowledge and engage with a range of perspectives on the subject.

- James Brownson – Bible, Gender, Sexuality
- Matthew Vines – God and the Gay Christian
- Dale Martin – Sex and the Single Savior
- William Loader – The New Testament on Sexuality
- David Gushee – Changing Our Mind
- Richard Hays – The Moral Vision of the New Testament
- Robert Gagnon – The Bible and Homosexual Practice
- N. T. Wright – Essays and lectures on sexuality and scripture
- Diarmaid MacCulloch – Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years
- Bart Ehrman – Early Christianity and biblical interpretation

YOUR LIFE

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