

YOUR GUIDE TO
UNDERSTANDING
KEY DISCUSSION
POINTS



BELIEF BRIEF



GAYTHER

LGBTQIA+ FOCUS

Islam Edition



"There is no compulsion in religion."

QURAN SURAH AL-BAQARAH (2:256)

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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.

01 ABOUT THE BELIEF BRIEFS



How often have you seen, heard, or had firsthand experience of someone using outdated rhetoric, selective interpretations of religious scripture, or personal opinions to justify how they speak about others and, more importantly, how they treat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

The concept of naskh (abrogation) is found within Islamic tradition. It is the idea that some verses in the Qur'an are understood to override earlier ones. This reflects that interpretation and selection between meanings are already part of the tradition itself.

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 THE STORY OF LOT (LUT)

The most commonly cited Quranic narrative on homosexuality



- Many Muslims believe the story of the Prophet Lut (Lot) shows that Islam condemns same-sex sexual relationships. Conservative Muslim scholars and communities frequently cite this account as evidence that same-sex acts are sinful. The narrative appears multiple times in the Quran and has traditionally been interpreted by many classical scholars as condemning homosexual behaviour.
- Relevant passages include Surah Al-A'raf 7:80–84, Surah Hud 11:77–83, Surah Al-Hijr 15:67–77, Surah Ash-Shu'ara 26:165–166, Surah An-Naml 27:54–58, and Surah Al-'Ankabut 29:28–35.
- For many Muslims, this interpretation seems both religiously and morally straightforward, and they view it as an effort to remain faithful

to divine revelation rather than an expression of hostility or prejudice. As a result, contemporary debates are often less about the Quran's authority and more about how these passages should be understood and applied.

ALTERNATIVE

- Alternative interpretations argue that the Quranic account of the people of Lot focuses primarily on aggression, humiliation, inhospitality, and sexual violence rather than on consensual same-sex relationships as understood today. In the narrative, Lot's people attempt to force themselves upon his guests, an act that can be understood as coercion, domination, and abuse rather than mutual intimacy.
- "Do you approach men with desire instead of women? Rather, you are a transgressing people." - Surah Al-A'raf 7:81
- "Indeed, you commit immorality, rob travellers, and commit evil in your gatherings." - Surah Al-'Ankabut 29:29
- Supporters of this interpretation note that the Quran does not use a direct equivalent of the modern term "homosexuality." Instead, the passages refer to acts described as *fahisha* (immorality, obscenity, or grave wrongdoing), a broad moral category used elsewhere in the Quran. They also argue that ancient societies did not possess modern concepts of sexual orientation or LGBTQIA+ identities.
- While the dominant classical interpretation viewed the story as condemning same-sex sexual acts, some scholars point to ongoing debates about the precise nature of the sins committed by Lot's people and how these passages should be understood in contemporary contexts.
- SUMMARY: The disagreement is not about the understanding of the Quran, but whether the story of Lot condemns all same-sex relationships or whether its primary concern is violence, coercion, exploitation, and other forms of transgression.

Islam is clear on LGBTQIA++



- Many conservative Muslims believe that the hadith literature provides clear evidence that same-sex sexual acts are prohibited in Islam. Alongside the Quran, the hadith are widely regarded in both Sunni and Shia traditions as essential sources of Islamic law and ethics. Because several narrations appear to condemn same-sex acts, many believers view the prohibition as well established within traditional Islamic teaching.
- For many Muslims, rejecting or reinterpreting these hadith can feel like rejecting part of the Prophet's guidance. Because the hadith help shape religious practice in areas such as prayer, fasting, marriage, and ethics, many believers see this issue as connected to preserving religious continuity, authority, and fidelity to the Islamic tradition.

ALTERNATIVE

- Some Muslims argue that the hadith evidence on same-sex acts is more complex than often assumed. They note that some narrations cited in these discussions have been classified by Islamic scholars as weak (da'if) or disputed based on their chains of transmission (isnad). Classical Islamic scholarship developed detailed methods for assessing hadith authenticity, particularly in matters involving severe legal punishments.
- Supporters of this perspective also point to differences among the classical legal schools. The Hanafi school, for example, did not always treat liwa (male same-sex acts) identically to zina (adultery), and the four major Sunni schools differed on questions of legal categorisation, evidentiary standards, and punishment. These disagreements suggest that the legal tradition was not entirely uniform.
- Progressive and reformist Muslims often emphasise broader Quranic themes such as mercy, justice, and freedom of conscience when approaching these questions.
- "There shall be no compulsion in religion." - Surah Al-Baqarah 2:256
- "My mercy encompasses all things." - Surah Al-A'raf 7:156
- SUMMARY: The disagreement is not about how the hadith are perceived, but about how particular narrations should be authenticated, interpreted, and applied, and how they relate to broader Islamic principles.

Homosexuality violates human nature



- Many Muslims believe that homosexuality is inconsistent with fitra, the natural disposition with which God created human beings. In traditional Islamic thought, fitra is often understood to encompass complementary male–female relationships, marriage, and family structures centred on procreation and social continuity.
- For many believers, this argument stems from a sincere desire to preserve what they regard as God's intended design for humanity, family life, and social stability.

ALTERNATIVE

- Some Muslims argue that the concept of fitra has been interpreted too narrowly in contemporary discussions of sexuality. In classical Islamic theology, fitra is often understood primarily as humanity's innate disposition to recognise God, seek truth, and possess basic moral awareness. However, some scholars have also extended the concept to encompass broader social and moral norms.
- “So direct your face towards the religion, inclining to truth - the fitra of Allah upon which He has created people.” - Surah Ar-Rum 30:30
- Supporters of this perspective note that same-sex behaviour has been observed across many animal species, challenging appeals to “nature” as a simple argument against homosexuality. They also point out that many LGBTQIA+ Muslims experience their sexual orientation as an intrinsic aspect of their identity rather than a chosen preference.
- Some contemporary scholars, including Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle, argue that principles such as divine justice (adl) and mercy raise important questions about whether it would be just for God to condemn people for an innate orientation. In this view, the discussion is not only about specific scriptural texts but also about how Islamic theology understands creation, human nature, justice, and moral responsibility.
- SUMMARY: The debate centres not only on scripture but also on differing understandings of fitra, nature, creation, justice, and identity.

Every Islamic scholar agrees



- Many Muslims believe that a longstanding scholarly consensus (*ijma*) within the Islamic tradition prohibits same-sex sexual acts. Because *ijma* is traditionally regarded as an important source of legal and religious authority, many believers view this consensus as carrying significant weight.
- Consensus has historically played an important role in preserving unity, continuity, and stability within Islamic law. As a result, many Muslims see challenges to established consensus as raising broader questions about religious authority, interpretation, and the preservation of tradition.

ALTERNATIVE

- Supporters of re-evaluating traditional interpretations argue that the classical scholarly consensus emerged before modern concepts of sexual orientation, sexual identity, and LGBTQIA+ experience. They contend that contemporary knowledge raises questions that earlier scholars did not seek to address.
- They also note that the four major Sunni legal schools differed on issues such as legal categorisation, evidentiary standards, and punishment, indicating that the Islamic legal tradition has long contained significant internal debate.
- Some contemporary Muslim scholars, including Khaled Abou El Fadl, Amina Wadud, and Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle, have argued for renewed engagement with these questions in light of modern understandings of sexuality, ethics, and human rights.
- “Will they not reflect?” - Surah Al-A'raf 7:184
- “Will they not use reason?” - Surah Ya-Sin 36:68
- Some historians also note that attitudes towards same-sex desire and relationships varied considerably across Islamic societies and historical periods. While classical jurists generally prohibited same-sex acts, social practices and cultural attitudes were often more diverse and complex than legal texts alone might suggest.
- SUMMARY: The disagreement is not about whether scholarship is at odds, but whether historical consensus can fully address modern understandings of sexuality, identity, and human experience.

Does Islam Mandate Execution?



- Many Muslims believe that classical Islamic law prescribes severe punishments for same-sex sexual acts, and some traditional jurists held that the most serious cases could warrant the death penalty. These rulings were developed within broader legal systems that placed strong emphasis on preserving public morality and enforcing religious norms.
- For some Muslims, such punishments are understood as part of maintaining moral order and upholding what they see as divine law, even though the evidentiary requirements were often extremely demanding and the punishments were historically rare in practice.

ALTERNATIVE

- No Qur'anic verse explicitly prescribes a fixed legal punishment, such as the death penalty, for same-sex sexual acts. The Qur'an's references to the people of Lot are narrative rather than legal in form.
- Reports attributed to the Prophet Muhammad regarding same-sex acts appear in the hadith literature. Still, their interpretation and application have been debated, and scholars have differed on questions of authenticity, evidentiary value, and legal implications.
- Classical Islamic jurisprudence developed a range of legal approaches to *liwat* (same-sex acts). The Hanafi school, for example, did not uniformly prescribe execution, and jurists more broadly differed on classification and punishment. In addition, Islamic legal systems imposed extremely high evidentiary standards for *hudud* punishments, making their application rare in practice.
- A combination of classical legal inheritance, colonial-era legal codes, and contemporary political developments has also shaped modern laws relating to same-sex relationships in some Muslim-majority countries.
- SUMMARY: The debate concerns not only scriptural interpretation but also legal methodology, historical jurisprudence, evidentiary standards, and the political evolution of law in different societies.

Muslim countries demonstrate what Islam really teaches



- Many Muslims view the treatment of LGBTQIA+ people in some Muslim-majority countries as an attempt, however imperfect, to uphold religiously informed moral norms amid rapidly changing social and cultural contexts. Others distinguish more sharply between Islamic teachings, historical legal traditions, and the ways modern states apply or enforce laws in practice.
- For many believers, contemporary policies and social attitudes are understood as part of an effort to preserve religious morality and social stability amid significant global change, even though there is considerable diversity of opinion across Muslim communities about how Islamic principles should be interpreted and applied today.

ALTERNATIVE

- Many historians argue that modern anti-homosexuality laws in some Muslim-majority countries reflect a combination of Islamic legal heritage, colonial-era legal systems, and later political developments rather than a single, continuous “classical Islamic position.”
- British colonial administrations introduced and expanded anti-sodomy laws across several parts of South Asia and Africa, and these laws were carried over into independence-era legal codes in modified form. In the Ottoman Empire, same-sex acts were decriminalised in the 19th century during the Tanzimat legal reforms (1858), reflecting broader legal modernisation trends of the period.
- Contemporary legal approaches also vary significantly. For example, Indonesia, the world’s largest Muslim-majority country, has no nationwide criminal prohibition on same-sex relationships, although some regions, such as Aceh, apply local regulations.
- Classical Islamic societies also contained a complex cultural record, including homoerotic poetry, expressions of same-sex affection, and gender nonconformity in literature and court culture. The poet Abu Nuwas is often cited as an example of this literary tradition, although such cultural expressions coexisted with juristic positions that generally prohibited same-sex sexual acts.
- “O you who believe, stand firmly for justice, even against yourselves.” - Surah An-Nisa 4:135
- “Allah commands justice, excellence, and compassion.” - Surah An-Nahl 16:90
- SUMMARY: Modern Muslim societies reflect a mix of religious interpretation, colonial legal inheritance, political authority, and cultural history, rather than a single, timeless, or uniform “Islamic” legal position.

History, Colonialism, and Cultural Memory



- Some Muslims argue that modern Western cultural and political developments shape contemporary LGBTQIA+ identity frameworks and terminology and may not align neatly with premodern Islamic categories or understandings of sexuality. From this perspective, concerns about LGBTQIA+ discourse are often linked to broader anxieties about colonial history, cultural change, and the preservation of religious and social identity in an increasingly globalised world.
- For many believers, these debates are therefore not only about sexual ethics but also about questions of cultural autonomy, moral authority, and communal identity in the modern era.

ALTERNATIVE

- Historical scholarship notes that expressions of same-sex desire, homoerotic literature, and diverse gender roles have existed across long periods in various Muslim-majority societies. However, their social meanings and legal interpretations have varied significantly over time and place.
- Historians often cite Persian poetic traditions, elements of Ottoman and Mughal court literature, and gender-diverse social categories such as the Hijra communities of South Asia, which do not map neatly onto modern Western identity frameworks.
- “We created you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another.” - Surah Al-Hujurat 49:13
- “And among His signs is the diversity of your languages and colours.” - Surah Ar-Rum 30:22
- Some scholars argue that modern anti-LGBTQ criminal laws in certain Muslim-majority contexts cannot be understood solely through classical Islamic jurisprudence, but must also be situated within colonial legal inheritance and modern state formation.
- The scholar Joseph Massad argues that contemporary categories such as “gay” and “straight” are historically recent and were globalised through specific Western intellectual and political frameworks. This perspective is debated among scholars of sexuality and Middle Eastern history.
- From this perspective, discussions of LGBTQIA+ identities in Muslim contexts often involve not only questions of sexuality but also questions of historical memory, cultural translation, colonial history, and the politics of identity formation.
- SUMMARY: The debate is not only about sexual ethics, but also about how history, culture, colonialism, and modern identity categories interact to shape contemporary understandings.

Faith and sexuality as incompatible identities



- Many Muslims believe that certain understandings of LGBTQIA+ identity may be incompatible with traditional interpretations of Islamic teachings on sexuality and morality. From this perspective, affirming LGBTQIA+ identities can be seen as potentially at odds with obedience to divine revelation and established moral frameworks within classical Islamic jurisprudence.
- For many believers, this concern reflects a desire to remain faithful to what they understand to be God's guidance, even amid changing social norms and contemporary debates about identity and rights.

ALTERNATIVE

- Many LGBTQIA+ Muslims around the world continue to practise Islam through prayer, fasting, charity, pilgrimage, and other forms of spiritual devotion. Organisations such as Imaan LGBT provide community, spiritual support, and advocacy for LGBTQIA+ Muslims navigating questions of faith and identity.
- The Qur'an emphasises God-consciousness (**taqwa**), sincerity, and divine judgment over human judgment. Some Muslims argue that reducing a person's relationship with God to questions of sexuality can overlook broader Islamic values, including mercy, humility, justice, and personal accountability.
- "Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you." - Surah Al-Hujurat 49:13
- "Allah knows best what is within your hearts." - Surah Aal-Imran 3:154
- "Do not claim yourselves to be pure; He knows best who is righteous." - Surah An-Najm 53:32
- From this perspective, ultimate judgment belongs to God alone, and a person's spiritual standing encompasses far more than any single aspect of identity.
- SUMMARY: The disconnect is not about whether Islam should be applicable to LGBTQIA+ lives, but about whether sexual orientation determines religious legitimacy or a person's relationship with God.

The Prophet never approved of same-sex relationships



- Some Muslims argue that, because there are no reported positive examples of same-sex unions or relationships in the Sunnah, Islamic law does not provide a basis for their religious validation. From this perspective, the absence of prophetic precedent carries significant moral and legal weight, particularly within traditions that emphasise the Prophet Muhammad as the primary ethical model.
- For many believers, this reflects a broader principle in Islamic thought, in which the life and teachings of the Prophet are central to defining moral boundaries. As a result, both explicit actions and the absence of endorsement in the Sunnah are often regarded as important guides in ethical and legal reasoning.

ALTERNATIVE

- Some contemporary scholars argue that the absence of explicit textual approval in the Qur'an or Sunnah does not necessarily imply a permanent or universal prohibition, particularly when modern ethical categories do not map neatly onto premodern legal and social contexts.
- They note that questions about sexual orientation, identity, mental health, and consensual adult relationships are often framed in contemporary terms that differ from the conceptual frameworks of 7th-century Arabia and later classical jurisprudence. From this perspective, Islamic ethical reasoning may require attention not only to textual silence or precedent but also to broader principles.
- Some scholars, therefore, emphasise values such as compassion, justice, and human dignity when engaging with contemporary ethical questions.
- "And We have not sent you except as a mercy to the worlds." - Surah Al-Anbiya 21:107
- "Speak to people kindly." - Surah Al-Baqarah 2:83
- SUMMARY: The debate concerns how Islamic legal and ethical reasoning should interpret textual silence, evolving social contexts, and enduring moral principles.

One of the objectives of Sharia



- Many Islamic legal scholars emphasise the preservation of lineage, inheritance structures, and family organisation as key objectives within Islamic law. These concerns are often discussed within broader legal and ethical frameworks that seek to maintain social stability and clearly defined familial responsibilities.
- For many Muslims, family structure is central to Islamic civilisation, and lineage and child-rearing are regarded as important social and spiritual responsibilities. From this perspective, questions of sexual ethics are often closely linked to concerns about family continuity and communal wellbeing.

ALTERNATIVE

- Islamic ethics place strong emphasis on values such as tranquillity, affection, companionship, and justice in marriage and family life. These themes are often discussed alongside legal and structural considerations in marital relationships.
- Many marriages in Muslim communities are non-procreative due to infertility, age, choice, or circumstance, yet remain fully valid under Islamic law. Some scholars, therefore, argue that the ethical legitimacy of relationships in Islam is not determined solely by reproductive capacity.
- Modern Muslim thinkers discussing *maqasid al-sharia* (the higher objectives of Islamic law) often highlight human welfare, dignity, mental well-being, and social stability as key considerations in ethical reasoning.
- “And among His signs is that He created for you spouses from among yourselves so that you may find tranquillity in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy.” - Surah Ar-Rum 30:21
- SUMMARY: The disagreement centres on whether procreation is the defining purpose of marriage in Islam, or whether marriage encompasses broader ethical and relational objectives.

All traditional scholars condemned same-sex acts.



- Classical Quranic interpretation was broadly unified in condemning same-sex sexual acts, though scholars differed on legal categorisation, evidentiary standards, and appropriate punishments under Islamic law.
- For many Muslims, centuries of scholarly interpretation carry significant intellectual and spiritual authority and are not easily set aside. From this perspective, the continuity of classical scholarship is regarded as an important safeguard for preserving religious meaning, legal coherence, and communal tradition.

ALTERNATIVE

- Many historians of Islamic intellectual history note that classical scholars interpreted scripture within the social, legal, and intellectual contexts of their time, which differed significantly from modern understandings of sexual orientation and identity. At the same time, these interpretations were shaped by established linguistic, theological, and legal methodologies.
- *Tafsir* traditions often reflected broader social and legal assumptions of their historical context while remaining grounded in textual interpretation and earlier scholarly authority.
- Islamic intellectual history also contains long-standing traditions of disagreement, legal reasoning (*ijtihad*), and interpretive development across different schools of thought.
- “Will they not reflect?” - Surah Al-A’raf 7:184
- “Will they not use reason?” - Surah Ya-Sin 36:68
- “Indeed, Allah commands justice, excellence, and compassion.” - Surah An-Nahl 16:90
- Some contemporary scholars argue that reinterpretation is not an exception but a recurring feature of Islamic intellectual history.
- SUMMARY: The debate concerns whether fidelity to tradition requires preserving classical conclusions unchanged, or whether interpretive renewal is consistent with Islamic intellectual tradition.

Can Interpretation Evolve?



- Many Muslims hold that divine revelation, as found in the Qur'an and the Prophet's teachings, remains fixed and authoritative even as societies and cultural norms evolve. From this perspective, moral and legal guidance is understood to derive from revelation rather than from shifting social values.
- For many believers, concerns about adapting religious teachings to contemporary culture are tied to fears that excessive flexibility could render religious meaning unstable or overly subjective, potentially weakening the continuity and authority of the tradition.

ALTERNATIVE

- Islamic history contains long traditions of reinterpretation (*ijtihad*) in response to changing social, political, and economic circumstances. Across periods and legal schools, Muslim scholars have addressed evolving questions in areas such as governance, economic practice, medical ethics, and social regulation. However, the scope and direction of change have varied significantly across contexts.
- Some Muslims, therefore, argue that ethical development and contextual reinterpretation need not contradict revelation itself but can be understood as part of the ongoing effort to apply enduring principles to new circumstances.
- "Allah intends ease for you, not hardship." - Surah Al-Baqarah 2:185
- "And consult them in affairs." - Surah Aal-Imran 3:159
- "My mercy encompasses all things." - Surah Al-A'raf 7:156
- SUMMARY: The disagreement is not about whether revelation remains authoritative, but about how its enduring principles should be interpreted and applied in changing human societies.

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 Quran 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
Quran 4:34	Husbands have authority over wives; they may admonish, then separate, then strike disobedient wives.
Quran 2:282	A woman's testimony is worth half that of a man in financial disputes.
Quran 4:11	Female heirs inherit half of what male heirs receive.
Classical law	Women require a male guardian (wali) to marry, travel, or make legal decisions.
Classical law	Women must not travel without a male mahram (guardian)
Quran 24:31 / 33:59	Women must dress modestly; scholars extended this to require a head covering (hijab) or a full veil.

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
Quran 4:3	Men may marry up to four wives (with conditions of equal treatment)
Classical law	Girls can be married at puberty (based on the Hadith about Aisha)

Quran 2:230	A divorced woman must marry and divorce another man before returning to her first husband (tahleel)
Classical law	A husband can divorce his wife by saying "I divorce you" three times (talaq)
Classical law	Muslim women may not marry non-Muslim men (though men may marry Christian/Jewish women)

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
Quran 5:38	Theft = amputation of the hand
Quran 24:2	Fornication/adultery = 100 lashes
Classical Hadith	Apostasy (leaving Islam) = death penalty
Classical Hadith	Homosexuality = death penalty. Not explicitly in the Quran; derived from Hadith and analogy
Quran 5:33	Waging war against God/the state = crucifixion, amputation, or exile
Classical law	Non-Muslims (dhimmis) must pay a special tax (jizya) and have restricted rights.
Quran 4:3, 4:24	Slavery is permitted; sex with enslaved women is permissible.
Classical law	Detailed rules govern the treatment, manumission, and trade of enslaved people.

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
Quran 5:90	Alcohol is forbidden (haram)
Quran 2:173	No pork
Quran 5:3	No blood, carrion, or animals not slaughtered in God's name.
Classical Hadith	No intoxicants of any kind, including drugs

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
Quran 2:275-276	Charging interest (riba) is forbidden.
Classical law	Zakat (2.5% wealth tax for people with low incomes) is obligatory.
Classical law	Gambling is strictly forbidden.

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	THE STORY OF LOT (LUT)	The Quran clearly condemns homosexuality through the destruction of Lot's people.	The story focuses heavily on violence, coercion, humiliation, and inhospitality rather than consensual same-sex relationships as understood today. Traditional interpretation is strong, but modern scholars dispute whether the passage addresses orientation or sexual violence and domination.
2	HADITH-BASED ARGUMENTS	Hadith make Islam's prohibition of homosexuality completely clear.	Many cited hadith are disputed (*da'if*), or interpreted differently across legal schools. Hadith are central in Islam, but questions of authenticity and interpretation complicate claims of total unanimity.
3	THE FITRA ARGUMENT	Homosexuality violates the natural disposition (*fitra*) created by God.	Fitra traditionally refers to monotheism and moral awareness, not explicitly heterosexuality; many argue that orientation itself may be innate. The debate hinges on what "human nature" means within Islamic theology.
4	IJMA (CONSENSUS)	All Islamic scholars agree that homosexuality is prohibited.	Classical consensus predated modern concepts of sexual orientation, and scholars historically disagreed on legal details. There is broad historical agreement on prohibition, but disagreement over how consensus applies to modern understandings.
5	THE DEATH PENALTY	Islam mandates execution for homosexual acts.	No Quranic verse prescribes death; rulings derive mainly from disputed hadith and differing legal schools. Severe punishments exist in some traditions, but Islamic jurisprudence is not fully unanimous on them.

#	POINT	CLAIM	COUNTERARGUMENT
6	MUSLIM-MAJORITY COUNTRIES	Muslim countries reflect authentic Islamic teaching on LGBTQIA+ issues.	Colonial law, nationalism, politics, and culture heavily shaped many modern anti-LGBTQ laws. Modern Muslim societies reflect a mix of historical influences rather than a single Islamic model.
7	WESTERN IMPOSITION	LGBTQIA+ identities are foreign Western imports imposed on Muslim societies.	Same-sex love and gender diversity existed historically in many Muslim cultures long before modern Western activism. The idea of LGBTQIA+ identity as purely “Western” overlooks indigenous Islamic histories and traditions.
8	A GOOD MUSLIM CANNOT BE GAY	LGBTQIA+ identity and faithful Islam are incompatible.	Millions of LGBTQIA+ Muslims maintain sincere faith and argue that only God judges belief and intention. The core dispute is whether sexuality determines religious legitimacy or spiritual standing before God.
9	THE SUNNAH ARGUMENT	The Prophet never approved same-sex relationships; therefore, Islam cannot permit them.	The absence of explicit approval does not always constitute an eternal prohibition in Islamic law. Silence within scripture can be interpreted differently depending on legal methodology.
10	PRESERVING LINEAGE (*NASAB*)	Same-sex relationships undermine family lineage and the objectives of Sharia.	Islamic ethics also prioritise justice, dignity, mercy, and wellbeing alongside lineage. The disagreement concerns whether procreation is the defining purpose of relationships in Islam.
11	CLASSICAL TAFSIR	Traditional Quranic interpretation unanimously condemned same-sex acts.	Tafsir developed within historical contexts very different from modern understandings of sexuality and identity. Classical scholarship strongly shaped tradition, but reinterpretation has always existed within Islam.
12	REVELATION VS MODERNITY	Divine revelation cannot change to fit modern social values.	Islamic history includes reinterpretation (*ijtihad*) in response to changing ethical and social realities. The debate concerns how eternal principles should be applied within changing societies.

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.

- Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle - Homosexuality in Islam
- Khaled Abou El Fadl - Speaking in God's Name
- Amina Wadud - Qur'an and Woman
- Wael Hallaq - Sharia: Theory, Practice, Transformations
- Jonathan Brown - Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World

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