

Does the Bible fail to endorse committed same-sex relationships only because it had no awareness or knowledge of them?

The Greco-Roman world of the 1st century did not use the binary concepts of 'gay' and 'straight' that we use today. The Greeks and the Romans viewed human beings simply as sexual beings who expressed their sexuality in a variety of different ways, with members of the opposite sex, with members of the same sex, or with both (either at the same time or at different stages of their lives). The Greco-Roman world also differed from ours in that its view of sexual relations was shaped by its view of the importance of social hierarchy. Thus same-sex relations between adult males were regarded as acceptable among the Romans providing the dominant sexual partner was of a higher social standing.

However, these differences notwithstanding, the Greco-Roman world was like ours in that those in it were aware of a similar range of relationships and sexual activities between members of the opposite sex and members of the same sex, both male and female, to those we know about today. The range ran from multiparty orgies at one end of the spectrum to platonic love at the other with everything in between including casual relationships, prostitution, pederasty, and same-sex 'marriages' as well as marriages between people of the opposite sex.

It is clear from the pages of the New Testament that the early Christians were aware of the range of sexual activity taking place in their society and that this included awareness of consensual same-sex relationships (to which St Paul refers in Romans 1:26–27).

However, in making a judgement about this range of activity the criteria that the New Testament writers apply are not the ones that many people tend to make today. Today many people ask whether a sexual relationship is loving, committed and consensual. The key questions the New Testament writers ask are whether a relationship is in accordance with the order of things established by God at creation (as recorded in Genesis 1 and 2) and whether it is in accordance with the law God subsequently gave to Israel. The reason the New Testament takes a negative view of same-sex sexual relationships is that they fail on both counts. They are against the created order put in place by God (Romans 1:26–27) and they are contrary to the Ten Commandments and the teaching of Leviticus 18 and 20 (1 Corinthians 6:9–11, 1 Timothy 1:10).

For the New Testament writers therefore the question of whether or not a same-sex relationship was a committed one would have been irrelevant in the same way it would be in the case of an incestuous or adulterous relationship. For them, all such relationships would be inherently wrong in all circumstances.