What Does the Bible Say About Homosexuality?

The issue of homosexuality is pervasive in our culture. There are no onlookers anymore, unless you live under a rock, you probably know someone who is tempted by or living in this lifestyle. Since our Christian faith does and should affect all of life, we as Christians need to give thought to how we engage the LGBT community, how we deal with struggles and temptations in our own lives, and how God views our sexuality. As I meet with college students and ask questions, I’ve realized there is more confusion surrounding this area than almost anything else in culture and for the most part, we as Christians just don’t talk about it. For that reason, I’ve pulled together a few resources and am going to try to answer some common questions and allow God’s Word to speak into this issue. More than anything, I hope for this to be a resource that will help start conversations where we think well about the topic rather than running from it or assuming what popular opinion says is true and where sin gets brought out into the light so that healing and joy can happen.

Here are the questions I get most when talking about homosexuality:

*Does the Bible really say homosexuality is wrong?*

*What if I’m a Christian who struggles with Same Sex Attraction?*

*What if I’m a Christian and my friend struggles with homosexuality/is living a homosexual lifestyle?*

*What about people who identify themselves as homosexual coming to or serving in church?*

*What if I’ve failed in this area a million times? How do I have hope that God is working?*

I want to visit each of these questions, but the starting point is the Bible, build a framework for life from the author of life, look at what God says.

Let’s look at a few major passages on that deal with homosexuality, starting at the beginning: Genesis.

> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; 
> male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27 ESV)

Wayne Grudem in his book, Bible Doctrine, states the following:

The creation of man as male and female shows God’s image in (1) harmonious interpersonal relationships, (2) equality in personhood or importance, and (3) difference in role and authority.

God did not create human beings to be isolated persons, but, in making us in His image, he made us in such a way that we can attain interpersonal unity in various sorts in all forms of human society. Between men and women, interpersonal unity comes to its fullest expression (in this present age) in marriage, where husband and wife become, in a sense, two persons in one: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” (Gen. 2:24) (p. 199-200)
Without getting into all the implications of Biblical manhood and womanhood, this is what God prescribes for marriage in the very first chapter of the bible, before sin has entered into the world. This is God’s will for His creation. Also note that God created. Creation belongs to Him; it is His to do what He wants. We often start with our own desires rather than remembering we didn’t give ourselves life, we are His. Later in the Old Testament is the first text in the Bible stating directly that homosexuality isn’t honoring to God. To understand this text, keep in mind that the Israelites are God’s people who are to worship Him in the tabernacle in order to manifest God’s glory among all the other nations.

“Though on the surface Leviticus is a handbook of laws and regulations, it is actually much more than this. Composed as Israel was preparing to become a settled nation in a promised land, the book has affinities with utopian literature. Leviticus outlines how people should live in God’s ideal commonwealth, explaining the practices (the rules and regulations that God commands), and the institutional scaffolding (the Levitical priesthood) that produce God’s intended good society.” (ESV Study Bible notes, p.214) So often I think we come to the Bible forgetting the context surrounding what we read, the Character of God, and the motivation behind His commands. This forces us to see God’s patterns for living as rules and gives us a one-sided view of life. Let’s consider that these are God’s own people, people He’s chosen, people He loves, people He continually labors with to lead them into health and fulfillment and goodness because He knows ultimate fulfillment only comes from Him. If you are a Christian, you can trust that this is His heart toward you as well. He wants your ultimate and lasting joy too much to allow you to waste time on temporary pleasures. With than in mind, let’s read God’s command regarding homosexuality:

“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. (Leviticus 18:22 ESV) JD Greear in His blog series on homosexuality (http://tinyurl.com/7r6wu9b) is quick point out that “the text does not say that “homosexuals” are an abomination to God. Ultimately, all sin is an abomination to God, including the sin of greed, which Jesus mentions ten times more than He does sexual sin. God loved the sinner so much that He came to earth to die in our place. In the cross you see both God’s hatred of sin (it was so wicked He put it to death) and His love for the sinner (He took that death into Himself).”

So this is what God says in His law, early on to His followers. This is the standard He gives for men and women to have sexual relationships only with each other. The rest of the chapter (link) also forbids incest, adultery, etc. God states why in verses 4-5:

“You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.”

He is pointing out His authority to prescribe life over and over again, and is saying “I am God, I know what’s best for you if you want life, real and true life, the way it should be lived – live it the way I created it!” When the Pentateuch speaks of “living” by keeping God’s statutes and rules, it refers to enjoying life under God’s pleasure… when the Old Testament stresses “doing,” it always sees this as the right response to God’s grace that provides both covenant relationship and moral instruction; it never presents obedience as the way of gaining that grace (ESV Study Bible notes, p. 240).

I would highly recommend reading all four posts by pastor JD, he’s much more studied than I am! (you can get to them here: http://tinyurl.com/9m4zb6f)
Lots of people claim that Jesus Himself never spoke on homosexuality and thus it can’t be proved that He says it is wrong.

Jesus said:

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:17-19 ESV)"

He didn’t say that we’ve moved past the law completely, He says He’s fulfilled it. Although some of the outward signs that were pointing to Christ are gone (sacrifices, etc.), the law still points to life as it should be lived and no one in Jesus day would question that homosexuality is sinful. In fact, no one in Christianity questioned it until the last 20 years (source link). Jesus taught during a time where everyone would agree that homosexuality was against the law of God and was wrong. Some argue that Jesus never said anything directly about the sinfulness of living a homosexual lifestyle and that’s simply because He didn’t have to.

In our culture today, homosexual practice is not assumed to be wrong, in fact is is heralded. This is why we as Christians need to go back that what God has said in His word. If we are to live for Him alone, we have to trust what He’s revealed to us more than popular opinion. If we regard the Bible as out of date and not relevant to our society, we practice what C.S. Lewis called Chronological snobbery, which he defined as “the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate of our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that count discredited.” (http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/webfm_send/596) To think that an idea is wrong simply because it has been around for a long time is about as closed minded as one can get.

On to a couple of more direct passages on homosexuality from the New Testament:

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. (Romans 1:26-27 ESV)

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11 ESV)

These passages may seem harsh, and wrestling with God is actually very Biblical and normal (Gen. 32:28). We should come to Him with questions, with things that we don’t understand and it is ok to ask why when His commands seem burdensome. But, it is because of His grace, that He’s so clear with us. He does not leave room in the Bible for us to say he might be ok with Christians living a homosexual lifestyle and that’s actually a good thing. In the same way that the Bible is definitively against murder or
anything else that hinders society from flourishing, the commands come from a God who cares for us. He is gloriously good and clear and His ways are higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8-9). AND He’s gracious. He gives grace upon grace upon grace.

So there’s a short biblical framework of homosexuality. The next step for any follower of Christ is to prayerfully study each of these passages on your own. Know what the Bible says and what it doesn’t say. Walking into conversations with a vague understanding of God’s position on homosexuality (or anything!) is refusing to use the weapon of scripture in the fight against sin.

Two cautions when considering this issue: don’t elevate homosexual struggles above other sin; and don’t forget grace in the search for truth.

What Christians have often done is elevate this particular sin struggle over others and directly or indirectly act as if this is a dirtier, more wrong sin that others. That is simply not true. All Christians need to go to God to have Him redefine our sexuality, not only if we struggle with homosexual desires. The person who struggles with lust, the unmarried couple living together, the person who cheats on their spouse, the person who is addicted to pornography... all of these people are struggling to honor God with their sexuality. The questions is not of what sins we struggle with, the question is: Is there repentance? A repentant, honest Christian who struggles in this way is no different than a repentant, honest Christian who struggles with heterosexual desires.

Don’t forget grace! We need to know truth. We need to know what the Bible says and fill our minds with the perfect law. But the law is there to show our sin and need for a savior. Christ has come and paid the penalty for all of our sins, past, present, and future. Grace is unmerited favor that we receive through Jesus. His free acceptance and the penalty paid for us on the cross are the motivations for walking out of sin and into freedom.