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DON'T USE BIBLE TO DENY GAY RIGHTS
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The Bible condemns homosexuality, but did Jesus? The question is relevant because some of the most adamant opponents of equal rights for homosexuals -- including those who opposed Mayor Teresa Isaac's decision to provide insurance benefits to same sex domestic partners of city employees -- are conservative Christians.

According to Leviticus 18:22 in the New King James version of the Bible, homosexuality is immoral: "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination." The New Testament contains a number of references asserting the need to follow the rules of sexual morality set forth in the Law of Moses. These passages were written by the apostle Paul but, notably, he does not mention any teaching of Jesus regarding homosexuality or sexual morality. So what was Jesus' attitude?

In the Gospels, Jesus never mentions homosexuality. But he frequently discussed the Law of Moses and, in a number of cases, objected to harsh aspects of those laws. For example, in Matthew 5:38,39, a famous passage from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus notes that the Law of Moses says "an eye for an eye," but he rejects reciprocal punishment and says that if someone "slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also."

In a directly relevant example, Jesus objected to the Mosaic Law that allowed a man to divorce his wife if "she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her." "Uncleanness" could broadly encompass any violation of the Mosaic Law, which certainly included but was not limited to issues of sexual morality. Jesus seemed to recognize that this was unfair and said that "whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery."

In these examples, Jesus rejected the often intolerant letter of the Mosaic Law in favor of an approach that showed concern for people. And it certainly seems possible, therefore, that he would take the same approach toward homosexuality. This suggestion is bolstered by Jesus' attitude toward people accused of sexual immorality.

There are a number of examples of Jesus forgiving rather than condemning sinners. In one of his most famous encounters with a sinner, Jesus counsels compassion instead of cruelty and condemnation. When Jesus was teaching at the Temple in Jerusalem, a group of Pharisees brought to him a woman caught in adultery.

Adultery is condemned in the same section of Leviticus as homosexuality, and the punishment for both is death by stoning. The Pharisees hoped to catch Jesus in blasphemy for contradicting the Law of Moses, and so they asked him what they should do with the woman.

"He who is without sin among you," Jesus said, "let him throw a stone at her." (John 8:7) The men "being convicted by their conscience" left without punishing the woman, and Jesus told her "go and sin no more."

Clearly Jesus knew the condemnation of sexual immorality in Leviticus but refused to follow it.

So what would Jesus do about homosexuality?

I am certain he would recognize homosexuals' humanity, since he clearly recognized it in everyone, including those accused of sexual immorality. And he would reject the harsh aspects of laws that discriminate against them.

I cannot make a Biblical argument that Jesus would be as tolerant toward homosexuals as he was toward adulterers and prostitutes, but based on his clear record of compassion, I feel in my heart that he would.

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