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Sexual Ethics and the Jesus of the Gospels

John Nolland examines claims which are often made regarding the relative unimportance of sexual ethics to Jesus and his apparent silence in relation to same-sex sexual activity. He presents a helpful survey of the Gospels' witness to Jesus' teaching in this area and explores the New Testament's terminology in both the gospels and some of the relevant Pauline material. As a result he argues that sexual ethics have a place of considerable importance for the Jesus of the Gospels and that where he is silent he is affirming earlier scriptural teaching.

The idea that sexual morality was not a major focus of Jesus' teaching has featured prominently in recent contributions to the debate within the church about a proper Christian attitude to same-sex sexual activity. Frequent repetition seems to have lent authority to such statements. And if Jesus did not talk much about sexual morality, perhaps he did not consider this area to be of major importance. He did not, we are often reminded, mention same-sex sexual practice even once. Perhaps to make a lot of sexual morality is merely to fall prey to Western culture's present obsession with sex. Are there not more important things to give our attention to? My aim here is to reflect on this line of thinking from a number of angles in relation to present day consideration of sexual ethics within the church.

The focus here will be on the Gospel Jesus and not the historical Jesus, as such. There are important and much disputed matters involved in getting from the Gospel Jesus to the historical Jesus. Nevertheless, there is quite a bit of hubris involved in thinking that from our distance we can access the significance of the historical Jesus more successfully than the early church managed to, despite the fact that they, in virtue of the presence of the earliest disciples of Jesus among them, represent the living continuity from the historical ministry of Jesus.

Jesus' teaching on love and the poor

It is clear that, compared to the attention which he gave to various other matters, Jesus did not talk much about sexual morality. The thrust of his mission certainly was not to clean up the sexual ethics of his people. But before we make too much of this, we need to see it in relation to the scale of investment in other aspects of morality in Jesus' teaching.

Mutual love has been identified as having a fundamental place in Jesus' approach, and surely that is right.¹ But the importance of this approach is for the most part marked by a relatively small number of texts that talk of the place of mutual love. The use of *agape* and the cognate *agapao*, noun and verb respectively for 'love', are the words used to press the claims of mutual love. I can find in the Gospels fourteen uses of these words in relation to mutual love or something related. There is love of enemies (Mt 5:44; Lk 6:27, 35), love of neighbour as oneself (Mt 19:19; 22:39; Mk 12:31, 33; Lk 10:27) and the call to love one another (Jn 13:34-35; 15:17).

Concern for the poor has also been identified as a key motif for Jesus. The Greek term involved here is *ptochos*. There are thirteen places where this word is used in one way or another to mark a concern for the poor and their needs. There is good news to the poor (Mt 11:5; Lk 4:18; 7:22; cf. Mt 5:3; Lk 6:20), giving to the poor (Mt 19:21; Mk 10:21; Lk 18:22; 19:8), Lazarus as poor (Lk 16:20, 22) and a banquet for the poor as a directive and in a parable (Lk 14:13, 21). We should also add the material in the parable in Mt 25:31-46 that identifies care of the needy as a key priority and also the reference to the hungry being filled in Lk 6:21.²

Jesus' references to sexual morality

With this data in place as a guide to the frequency with which the gospels record Jesus speaking of issues we generally accept as important in his ethical teaching we turn to the language in which Jesus talks about sexual morality. The key terms that are used to speak about sexual immorality are firstly those that relate to adultery, which make use of the *moich-* root. There are the two forms of the verb 'commit adultery', *moicheuo* and *moichao*, which are pretty much interchangeable; there is *moicheia* for adultery; and there is *moichalis* which means adulteress, but is also used adjectivally to mean adulterous.³ This family of words is used nineteen times in the Gospels, though three of these relate to the phrase 'sinful and adulterous generation', where the usage might be metaphorical (but which would nonetheless still indirectly reflect disapproval of adultery). There is adultery of the eye and heart (Mt 5:27, 28), divorce as adultery (Mt 5:32 (x2); 19:9; Mk 10:11, 12; Lk 16:18 (x2)), the adulterous generation (Mt 12:39; 16:4; Mk 8:38), adultery as a sin from the heart (Mt 15:19; Mk 7:22), adultery as forbidden by one of the Ten Commandments (Mt 19:18; Mk 10:19; Lk 18:20) and adultery as sin, but to be forgiven (Jn 8:3, 4).

1 Burridge 2007: 54 has recently criticised Richard Hays' failure to make love one of the integrating foci for his exploration of New Testament ethics (see Hays 1997: 200-205).

2 We might want to add the use of *praus* in Mt 5:5 to our count here. The traditional translation is 'meek' but, as I have argued elsewhere (Nolland 2005: 201-202), the thought is probably better caught by 'lowly', with socioeconomic overtones. Though various other Greek words could be used to speak of poverty, none of them is used in

the Gospels by Jesus. In Mary's song Luke exploits other vocabulary to celebrate the reversal that is coming for the humble and the hungry. References to wealth and riches might be considered to contribute indirectly, but their primary focus is not concern for the poor.

3 There is also *moichos* which refers to a male adulterer, but which can generically include the female partner as well. However, in the Gospels this is only used in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector (Lk 18:11).

Second, and less precise than adultery language and differently focussed, there is the *porn-* word group (which comes through into English in words like *pornography*). The *porn* group of words relates to any form of unsanctioned sexual intercourse.⁴ There is just a chance that it might at times be applied to inappropriate erotic activity not directly involving intercourse.⁵

Whereas the *moich-* word group focuses on the breach of relationship involved, the *porn-* word group focuses on the illicit erotic act as such. There is *porneia*, the noun that identifies the act⁶ and *porne* used of a prostitute.⁷ The Gospels have Jesus using this word group seven times. There is *porneia* in the exception clause in the divorce materials (Mt 5:32; 19:9) and in the list of sins from the heart (Mt 15:19; Mk 7:21); and there is *porne* uses with negative overtones of prostitutes (Mt 21:31, 32; Lk 15:30).

So, while Jesus commends the virtue of mutual love with fourteen uses of the *agap-* word group and commends or models concern for the poor with about the same number of uses of *ptochos* and a few times in other ways, he speaks against adultery and other sexual immorality, explicitly or implicitly, with no less than twenty three uses of the key terms, and somewhat more indirectly another three times.⁸

Sometimes it is claimed not only that Jesus did not speak much about sexual ethics, but also that, when he did, it was generally in response to questions (implying that this indicates that this whole area was not particularly on his agenda). How does this stack up with the evidence we have just reviewed? Strikingly, only in the case of the women caught in adultery (Jn 7:53-8:11), does anyone other than Jesus himself put sex on the agenda!⁹

Did sexual ethics really matter to Jesus?

We cannot, of course, establish importance only by counting up references. (And I am not suggesting, in any case, that we rank sexual ethics above mutual love or care for the poor!) But there are other reasons as well for considering that sexual ethics mattered to the Gospel Jesus.

4 For example, in connection with rape in Gen 34:31; in relation to prostitution in Deut 23:18 (ET v 17); of a betrothed woman being sexually unfaithful to her intended in Gen 38:24; of adultery in Jer 3:1-2; of homosexual intercourse in Testament of Reuben 1:6; of incest in Sir 23:17 (ET v 16). Illicit sex between singles will be embraced in, e.g., Mt 15:19; 1 Cor 7:2.

5 This is not certain, but might explain some of the choices of the *porn-* root where a violation of marriage faithfulness is clearly involved (otherwise why is the reference not to adultery?).

6 Unusually, *porneia* seems to mean 'lust' in Tobit 8:7, though the standard meaning might fit if the point is that Tobias is not marrying because he has already had sex with his intended.

7 There is also the verb form *porneuo* and there is *pornos* used of the one who is engaged in *porneia* (of the male, but generic use can also relate to the female). These are not used in the Gospels.

8 One could include divorce language (*apولو* is used in the Gospels). This would add some extra references, but Gospel discussion of divorce always involves use of the *moich-* root and/or the *porn-* root in the context. (The exception is Mt 1:19, where Joseph contemplates divorce from Mary, but this is not part of the Gospel presentation of Jesus' teaching.)

9 One might want also to include the divorce discussion (Mt. 19:3-9; Mk 10:2-12). Depending on how we take this element in the parable of the prodigal son, we might also want to note that it is the elder son who puts sex on the agenda in Lk 15:30.

Within the Gospel of Matthew the antitheses in chapter 5 (vv 21-48) have a strong claim to be putting forward matters that are of particular importance to Jesus: here he defines his vision of goodness over against alternative options. Two of the six antitheses are devoted to matters of sexual ethics (vv 27-32). Concern for the poor does not feature, and love (of enemies) turns up in one, admittedly in the final and climactic antithesis.

Furthermore, when Jesus wants to make the point that evil proceeds from the heart, two of the six items on the Matthean list (Mt 15:19) have to do with sexual behaviour: 'For out of the heart come evil inclinations, murder, *adultery, fornication*, theft, false witness, slander'.¹⁰ Matthew has abbreviated and reordered the Markan material to correlate with the Ten Commandments. All his items relate to the Ten Commandments and are dealt with in Ten Commandment order from murder to false witness (the preceding commandment of the Ten has been dealt with earlier in vv 3-6).¹¹ Making a clear link with the Ten Commandments underlines the importance of these matters. Mark has a longer list of twelve items (Mk 7:21-22). The first four are concrete acts ('fornication, theft, murder, adultery') and the following eight are orientations of the heart ('avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly')—which no doubt are seen as producing specific acts of wickedness. Among the concrete acts Mark's version highlights the sexual by placing *porneia* at the beginning of the list of four and *moicheia* at its end. In Mark's version fully half of the list of concrete acts (two of the four) are sexual acts.

The link with the Ten Commandments is again important in the accounts of the rich young ruler. Jesus tells him to keep the commandments and highlights some of them (Mt 19:17-19; Mk 10:19; Lk 18:20). The place of the immediately-God-directed commandments has been marked with an allusion to the Shema in the previous verse.¹² There then comes a listing of all but the last of the Commandments among the Ten addressing human interaction. To underline the link, they basically come in Ten Commandment order, though honouring of parents has moved from the front to the end of the list.¹³

In the light of these observations it seems hard to deny to the Gospel Jesus a profound concern for sexual ethics. Such a concern did not define his ministry, but to move sexual ethics to the sidelines is hardly in line with the values of the Jesus of the Gospels.

Jesus and homosexuality

But what of the fact that in none of these sayings on sexual ethics does Jesus ever explicitly address the question of homosexual practice? There are two angles from

10 Despite the difference from Mk 7:21, 'evil inclinations' in Mt 15:19 is still best taken as foundational for each of the evil acts that follow.

11 Matthew has expanded the scope of the adultery commandment to cover other forms of illicit sex, much as he has expanded the false witness commandment to embrace acts of slander. A similar phenomenon can be noted in Mk 10:19

where the false witness command is broadened to include 'you shall not defraud'.

12 The allusion to Deut 6:4 ('the LORD is one') is prominent in Mt 19:17 ('the good is one'), present but more muted in Mk 10:18; Lk 18:19.

13 Though various suggestions have been offered, the reason for this ordering remains unclear. It works well for Matthew who slips in love of neighbour at the end of the list.

which I want to address this claim, one at some length and the other briefly. First I want to suggest that, at least indirectly, the Gospel Jesus did address the question. Second, I want to note there are other important areas which Jesus never explicitly addresses in his ethical teaching.

The meaning of *porneia* in the New Testament

As indicated above, the *porn* group of words relates to any form of unsanctioned sexual intercourse. *Porneia* is normally translated as ‘fornication’.¹⁴ But this translation obscures a simple fact. In the Jewish context of Jesus’ day, and in the Christian context that grew out of it, homosexual coitus would have been automatically embraced within the scope of *porneia*.

The most common form of *porneia* would be heterosexual intercourse, whether this involved married people with a partner other than their spouse, including with a prostitute, or those who were not married.¹⁵ When one or both parties were married to somebody else *porneia* was also adultery. If *porneia* involved an unmarried man and unmarried woman then the prospect of having the illicit sexual activity retrospectively regularised was offered: the man was obliged to marry the woman, unless (given the prevailing patriarchal framework) the woman’s father was absolutely opposed to the match (Ex 22:16-17).

Incest would also be *porneia*, indeed *porneia* of a particularly serious kind (Lev 18:6-18; 20:11-12, 14, 17, 19-21).¹⁶ There appear to be two orders of incest in Lev 20. The death penalty is involved for the first order (vv 10-16, which covers sex with one’s father’s wife, one’s daughter-in-law, both a woman and her mother) Such *porneia* is put on the same level as adultery. Lesser or unspecified punishment is involved for the second order of *porneia* (vv 17-22, which covers sex with a step-sister, an aunt, the wife of an uncle or the wife of a brother).¹⁷

Male homosexual sex belongs here as well, actually being treated (Lev 20:13) in the middle of a set of kinds of first order incest (vv 10-16)). In Lev 18:20-23 male homosexual sex is preceded by incestual sex and child sacrifice and followed by sex with animals.¹⁸ Sexual engagement with an animal would also be *porneia* (Lev 20:15-16).

14 Countryman 1988: 73 has attempted to focus the sense of *porneia* sharply on ‘prostitution’ (‘harlotry’ is his chosen rendering), but has to admit that in the Old Testament it is used of ‘sexual offences other than prostitution’ and that Paul clearly applied the term to incest.

15 In the case of a betrothed couple sexual relations were not considered proper, but there was a realistic recognition that they did at times occur (see *Mishnah Ketuboth* 1:5; *Yebamoth* 4:10). Such occurrences would have been considered retrospectively regularised by marriage, along the lines mentioned below.

16 My use of ‘incest’ here covers both sex with and marriage to a close family member. If we may judge from the way the Leviticus lists are put together, these texts make no sharp distinction between the two. Though ‘takes’ is likely to point to marriage, while ‘lies with’ refers to a specific sexual contact, it is the sexual activity within the marriage that is problematic.

17 Sitting within this second order list in Lev 20:17-22 is having sex with a woman during her period of menstruation.

18 Sitting between the more elaborate treatment of incest in Lev 18:6-18 and the set in Lev 18:20-23 is having sex with a woman during her menstrual period.

To speak of *porneia* without further specification in the world of the Gospels would be to refer collectively to all of these kinds of illicit sexual activity.¹⁹

I believe that by turning to Paul we can also find some retrospective support for the understanding of Jesus' views on sexual morality that I have advanced here. The relationship between Paul and Jesus is a much-disputed matter. But Paul interacted with and co-operated with early Christian leaders who had been disciples of the historical Jesus, and one should at least expect a continuity in the understanding of basic Christian ethics. And for all the impact of his encounter with Christ upon him Paul was himself—as was Jesus—a first-century Jew.

When we move into Paul the same set of background assumptions is more or less still in place. The *porneia* in 1 Cor 5:1 is a form of incest, but by the time we reach vv 9-11 the scope has broadened and the *pornos* will be the one who is involved in any form of *porneia*. If we may judge from 1 Cor 6:15, the *porneia* that is mostly in view in v 13 is use of prostitutes. The use of *porneia* in v 18 is still part of the same development of thought, but is likely to be generalising and therefore broader, which is likely to be the case for the next reference as well, in 7:2.

By turning to Paul, we move outside Palestine into the larger Greco-Roman world and once we move from Jews to Gentiles (or at least to mixed Jewish and Gentile groups) the wider scope intended for *porneia* cannot be assumed to be automatically obvious. So when we get to 2 Cor 12:21, with its list of sins of which Paul feels certain people in the church in Corinth will have repented, *porneia* no longer stands alone. Paul lines up with it *akatharsia* and *aselgeia*. (*porneia* sits in the middle and the terms are connected with 'ands'). These are not three different things here for Paul; he is only talking about *porneia*.²⁰ But with the extra terms he is helping to create a perspective on *porneia*, perhaps in part to signal the wider reach he intends for the term.

akatharsia is literally 'uncleanness'. It is often claimed that the OT purity categories were discarded by the early Christians. Clearly some of them were (those dealing with food, transmission of ritual uncleanness and ritual washing). But in line with the Gospel Jesus, what we actually find in Paul and elsewhere is not a loss but a refocusing of interest in purity: sexual immorality, for example, makes one unclean, not eating with unwashed hands.

aselgeia is conduct that emerges from a lack of self-constraint. It is doing what comes naturally, when what comes naturally is inappropriate because it violates an important boundary.

These flanking terms help to create perspective on *porneia*, and to that degree help with understanding the intended scope of *porneia*. The same three terms provide the first three of the works of the flesh in Gal 5:19 but, since the order is different (*porneia*, *akatharsia*, *aselgeia*), the strategy is likely to be a little different.

¹⁹ This probably should include intercourse with a menstruating woman, but this case is the odd one out in the list in as much as it deals with a woman in a particular temporary state where all the other instances in Lev 20 deal with categories of people (and in one case with animals). As well, we are not dealing here with a form of

incest as we are with each of the other items in Lev 20:17-22.

²⁰ To the best of my knowledge this point has not been made in the scholarship, but Thrall 2000: 867 implicitly recognises that this is so when she speaks here of 'those who for some time have been guilty of sexual misconduct'.

While the sense of family likeness remains between the three terms, the second and third terms are likely now to be intended to take us into areas that *porneia* alone could not be relied upon alone to cover in the wider Greco-Roman context.

A more detailed technical discussion of these key terms and their use is illuminating here. *Akatharsia* and *aselgeia* are not interested in the action itself but rather in respectively the effect of the action (uncleanness) and the unconstrained drives standing behind the action. Because of this, the nature of the action itself is not precisely identified by either noun.

In 1 Thes 4:3-5 the alternative to *porneia* is either continence or marriage. 'Holiness and honour' take the place of purity in the discussion there, while *en pathei epithumias* ('in the passion of desire') plays an equivalent role to *aselgeia*. Col 3:5 is a little different again: *porneia* heads the list, next comes *akatharsia*, but then come uses of *pathos* and of *epithumia* – new terms that turned up together in 1 Thes 4:5 with a similar function to *aselgeia*. But now each functions independently and the negative sense to be given to *epithumia* is indicated by use of the adjective *kakos* ('evil'). Eph 5:3 is simpler: *porneia* first and then, linked with 'and' to create a pair, comes *akatharsia pasa* ('all uncleanness'). With the possible exception of 1 Thess 4:3-5, in these additional texts as well there is a consistent concern to ensure that more than what *porneia* might be taken to mean in a wider Greco-Roman context is embraced in what is identified as sexually illicit.

But this strategy of expanding with flanking terms is not fully adequate to the needs of making clear in the wider Greco-Roman world what the sexual standard required of the God of the Christians should be. So in Paul we begin to get specific and separate mention of things that would earlier have been embraced within the understanding of *porneia*. There was not a need to mention them much, because quite a lot was effectively carried forward from the Jewish roots of Christian faith. But sometimes something more needed to be said.

As already discussed, a form of incest is identified as *porneia* in 1 Cor 5:1. In 1 Cor 6:9-10 Paul provides a list of ways of behaving that exclude people from the kingdom of God. The two that emerged as important from the Gospel tradition are prominent: those who are involved in *porneia* (it is *pornos* that is used) and those involved in *moicheia* (it is *moichos* that is used). It is interesting that it is not adultery that heads the list, but the wider *porneia*. Sitting between these two is the category of idolators: sexual sin is keeping company with worship of idols at the head of the list of modes of behaviour that exclude one from the kingdom.

But Paul is not finished with sexual sin yet. The next two terms on the list target homosexual sexual activity: *malakos* and *arsenokoites*. (The list will go on with 'thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers'.)²¹ In recent times quite an effort

21 1 Tim 1:9-11 is also concerned to identify a list of main kinds of sinners (those for whom 'the law is laid down'). After more general categories ('the lawless and disobedient, the godless and sinful, the unholy and profane') more precise categories are moved on to. At the head of this list come 'those who kill their father or mother' and 'murderers' (more generally).

Then come the two sexual terms: those who are involved in *porneia* (*pornos* is used as in 1 Cor 6:9) and *arsenokoitai*. (The four sexual terms of 1 Cor 6:9 seem to have been reduced to the two that can stand for the others as well.) After these the list carries on with 'slave traders, liars, perjurers', and then concludes with a catchall 'and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching'.

has been made to restrict the scope of these two terms. With *malakos* there might be room for uncertainty, since the term has had quite a range of meanings. NRSV has ‘male prostitutes’, which is possible.²² The word relates to softness, and has in mind males who are, so to speak, taking the female role in intercourse. But *arsenokoites* is clearly related to the Greek in which Leviticus prohibits male homosexual practice. *Arsenokoites* is formed by connecting together (with a linking *o*) *arsen* which means ‘male’ and *koite* which means ‘bed’ and therefore ‘coitus’ or ‘intercourse’, and by adjusting the ending to make the word masculine (or possibly suitable for both genders). The relevant Greek phrase in Lev 20:13 is *meta arsenos koiten gunaikos*, literally ‘with a man the intercourse of a woman’. The sense of what might even be a Pauline coining is clear enough.²³ And if this is so, then *malakos* is likely to mean the male partner of one who ‘beds a man as one does a woman’(i.e. with penetrative sex).²⁴

Paul is as negative about homosexual sex in Rom 1:26-27. In Romans 1 there is no distinguishing of the two roles as the discussion is in terms of the coupling pair; and in Romans 1 there is an equivalent treatment of female homosexual practice.

By speaking of *porneia* in a Jewish context the Jesus of the Gospels would have been understood to have included incest, homosexual sex and sex with animals. But in the wider Greco-Roman world the same set of concerns begins to require explicit comment on this range as in this context – outside circles that had a significant Jewish influence – the spontaneous understanding of the range of *porneia* is likely to be narrower.

The significance of silence

This now takes us to the second angle from which we might want to consider Jesus’ failure to speak explicitly of same-sex sexual activity. The Jesus who did not speak explicitly of homosexual sex also never warned people of the evils of idolatry! For all his critical engagement with the Jewish tradition of his day, Jesus depended heavily on his basic shared assumptions with that tradition. He took for granted whatever he could take for granted. Some things he reinforced. Some things he opposed. Some things he set out to modify. But failure to comment is to be taken in general as affirmation, not indifference or opposition.

22 Other modern translations render with ‘homosexuals’, ‘effeminate’ and ‘self-indulgent’ or lump the two terms together and paraphrase to get ‘men who practice homosexual perversion’, or some equivalent.

23 Concerning various attempts to restrict the sense to either ‘pederasty’ or ‘male prostitute’ or to insist that the sense can no longer be determined, see Thiselton 2000: 440-53 which has a judicious discussion and a useful bibliography (450 n 153), to which we might now add Elliott 2004 and Ivarsson 2007.

24 Martin 1995: 33 insists that in ancient ideology ‘effeminacy has no relation to homosexuality’, but he offers no discussion of *malakos* and makes no attempt to make sense of its role in 1 Cor 6:9-10. His recognition of an ancient correlation between active and passive roles and the ‘masculinization and feminization of the human body’ (p 34) is already half-way towards seeing how, when correlated with *arsenokoites* and sitting in a list of words used of sexual activity, *malakos* could have the proposed sense.

This is not to deny that for strategic reasons something may be, at least for a time, kept back.²⁵ Nor is it to deny that the significance of specific things is importantly influenced by the weighting that is accorded them (i.e. some things emerge as more important than others) and the connections that are made for them (i.e. where things sit in an overall theological and ethical system matters, as do attitudes and actions that come along with the matters in question). Prostitutes and tax collectors were drawn to Jesus not because he validated their life-style, but because his critical stance was linked with genuine concern and compassion, not with distancing and dismissal (see e.g. Mat 9:13; 21:31; Lk 15:2). In any context of communication there must be a general assumption of implied affirmation of the status quo in relation to connected matters which do not come up for specific comment. It is vital to communication that a great deal is able to remain tacit. The need to say everything is an impossible burden within any communication nexus.

For any proper understanding of Jesus it is disastrous to ignore his context and the shared assumptions with his context that made Jesus intelligible and allowed him to communicate effectively. Jesus challenged those received patterns that he wanted to change. In sexual ethics, for example, he repudiated the double standard that allowed adultery to be viewed only as an offence against a husband and not an offence against a wife. But he also provided sufficient indicators of continuity with the sexual ethics of his Jewish tradition for it to be quite proper for us to fill in the details in relation to matters on which he remained silent on the basis of agreement and affirmation.

Conclusion

So can we say that sexual morality was not a major focus of Jesus' teaching and that there is, therefore, nothing in the Gospels that should be taken as critical of homosexual sexual practice? Can we say, therefore, that concern with sexual conduct does not align one with Jesus and that in particular Christian criticism of same-sex sexual practice has no basis in the Gospels? No we cannot.

Sexual ethics are given a place of considerable importance by the Gospel Jesus; and in his context, not to speak directly of homosexual sexual practice is implicitly to affirm the negative view of such practice that was prevalent in his context and mandated by the Scriptures of that context. This is the attitude that becomes clear as we move from the Gospel Jesus to the Apostle Paul, who needed to develop ways of speaking about sexual matters that would encourage his hearers to carry forward, into the Christian context being forged in the wider Greco-Roman world, the in-this-respect Jewish values that had come to them in connection with Jesus.

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²⁵ The inclusion of *porneia* along with *moicheia* in the lists of sins which arise from the heart is inexplicable if the Gospel Jesus had considered that homosexual sexual activity was valid but a battle to be left for another day,

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