

CARE to Explore: **How The Bible is for sexual minorities too!**



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Forward

I am so excited to bring this discussion to the atmosphere of small groups. As much truth as these words hold, I feel they will be more powerful in the context of the many lives that will read and discuss them, adding their own experiences, their own stories, and their own natural revelation of the Word of God.

Unless otherwise stated the scriptures will be quoted from the King James Version of the Bible. I did this primarily because of the previous experiences I have had in debating scripture with other individuals dead-set on proving condemnation of homosexuality. They have wanted to use the “tried and true” version of the Bible, the King James Version. I have no problem with that because, in every version used, God’s word remains consistent.

I have purposefully not inclusified any Bible passages, to avoid the accusation that I have changed scripture in any way. Although I am entirely aware that God’s word does not change by referencing the gender of God as masculine, feminine or asexual, I believe that inclusification can become a stumbling block in the defense of true scriptural interpretation. In other text and discussion, however, I have made it a consideration to use inclusive language as encouraged by MCC churches. If I have overlooked the use of any noninclusive language, please accept my apology. I pray this does not distract you from the true purpose and meaning of this study.

Finally, this study has not been written with the intent of being an exhaustive study of the Bible and homosexuality. This is a scratch on the surface of God’s amazing diversity and unending love. I pray that this beginning will spur others on to deeper study and greater understanding of the incomprehensible love of God.

I pray that God be with your groups as you explore!

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Introductory Session

Prayer requests and praises:

Why Study Homosexuality and the Bible

According to the CARE Group survey, the majority of those who completed the survey hold this to be the most desired study.

? For those who feel comfortable to share, why is this an important topic to you?

1. It is important to understand who we are, and who God made us to be. Only when we truly understand God, our own self and the wonderful relationship possible between the two can we understand the person God wants us to be.
2. It is equally essential that we understand Scripture in such a way that we can enlighten those who are seeking the truth and silence those who are spewing hatred and lies using the Bible as their source for such contention.
3. If we understand how scripture can be used both to find the truth and to purport a lie, we may be able to stop further acts of prejudice, bigotry and injustice certain to come.

From the beginning of time humanity has used the motivation of God to hurt. Cain killed Able because God liked the sacrifice of Able more. The disciples were hunted because they were promoting Christ as the authority rather than the religious leaders. Hitler hated the Jews because they killed Jesus. The radical Islamists kill Christians because Christian theology

conflicts with their own. And throughout the history of the fundamentalist Christian church different groups of people have been targeted and condemned because they are different. Prejudice has been promoted in God's name and bigotry has been spread for the same.

- ? Have you ever been uncomfortable talking about your belief in God, even to other Christians, because you have been afraid of being insulted, slandered, or threatened? Would you be willing to share a particular incident with the group?
- ? How does it make you feel to hear the Bible used to condemn you and/or your friends?
- ? Do you have any reservations or fears about digging deeper into the specific texts that have been used by so many to condemn you and/or your friends? If yes, please elaborate.

Scripture is the Word of God. The Bible tells God's story through the eyes of humans and humanities story through the eyes of God. It is made up of history, poetry, allegories, biographies, letters and prophecies of the future. It was written in two different languages, by 30 different authors over a period of almost 1500 years. 900 years later it was first translated to English. Since that time there have been more than 25 different translations and numerous transliterations (translations are written directly as an interpretation of the original Aramaic or Greek; transliterations are written as interpretations of translations).

There are multiple understandings of scripture, and to claim that your understanding is, without a doubt, right – and, furthermore, that right understanding allows you to persecute others for their beliefs is preposterous. It is our goal, (using basic principles of interpretation and Biblical study tools) to seek a deep understanding of the Scripture in relation to homosexuality, our general and natural revelation of God, and the love of God as exemplified through the life of Jesus Christ. I pray that, as we move in this direction, bondages are broken, perspectives are enlightened, and our spirits and spiritual lives are nurtured.

Close in prayer and, if time, fellowship/discussion.

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Session 1

Prayer requests and praises:

Introduction

Studying any theme in the Bible can involve a lot of time and effort sifting through context, relevancy, and literal translation. A subject as controversial as homosexuality and the Bible requires even more perspective and purposeful study. Someone may read a scripture and feel entitled to spiritually and emotionally batter others, while another may read the same scripture and feel obligated to stand in line with those who are being condemned. Through the spans of history the Bible has been used to condone slavery and simultaneously condemn interracial marriage. Jewish people have been persecuted for their place in history and Scripture. American's have found a way to feel superior in context of their foundational relationship with God. Earthquakes, monsoons, and terrorist attacks have been attributed to those deemed sinful or rebellious. And yet, in the middle of it all we read "Let us love each other, for God is love" (I John 4:8) and "Whoever believes in Jesus should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Isn't it time we bring some realistic perspective to God's love for creation – all creation? And yes, that includes heterosexuals, homosexuals, bisexuals, transsexuals, and nonsexuals alike.

To make this study as simple as possible we'll break it down into several sections:

- Tradition vs. Truth
- Biblical Interpretation and Study for the Lay Person
- Looking at Scripture
 - Scriptures which condemn loving same-sex relationships
 - The major or "clobber" passages

- Biblically narrated relationships between sexual minorities
- Christ as the ultimate example

Throughout these sessions I want to encourage discussion and I encourage you all to share your perspectives. I can't promise to have the answer to every question – but I will promise to find the answers if you are willing to ask them.

Because the discussions of these sessions could easily be personal, I wanted to remind everyone that what is spoken in this group stays in this group. There is a copy of the Confidentiality and Limits at the end of this document.

Tradition vs. Truth

(Instructions to leader: Cut Worksheet I into sections (one for each quote) and pass them out (you may have to give more than one piece to some people. Then have people read their sections one at a time).

The phrases “this type of marriage” and “such a marriage” were used interchangeably throughout these quotes. This type of marriage... was interracial marriage. All that to say, just because the church promotes it, or its agendas are pushed through in the name of God, certainly does not make it right – it just makes it a terrible tradition.

- ? *What are some church traditions you know of that, to your knowledge and understanding, are not necessarily based in Scripture? (can be as simple as Communion is to be taken only on the first Sunday of the month – as was the tradition in the church in which I [Sharon] grew up)*
- ? *How do you feel about allowing yourself to question traditions that you may have always believed to be Biblical?*
- ? *If you were taught that homosexuality is a sin, whether you believe it or not, do you think those teachings still affect you emotionally or spiritually? How?*

If we don't allow ourselves to question Scripture, we should probably stop reading it all together. Because to take it absolutely literally is to degrade women, support slavery, kill adulterers, and a myriad of other things we as people seeking relationship with a loving God have no business doing. So, let us jump in, giving ourselves permission to ask ‘why?’ or ‘can this really be?’ even if it contradicts deeply ingrained taboos. “We must not concede the Bible to those who are more interested in perpetuating modern culture than really looking at the Bible and saying, “What does it teach us?”¹⁶

Biblical Interpretation and Study for the lay person

“But,” you say, “I am not an interpreter.” Technically, we all interpret the Bible to one extent or another. “... Every reader is at the same time an interpreter. That is, most of us assume as we read that we also understand what we read. We also tend to think that *our understanding* is the same thing as the Holy Spirit's or human author's *intent*.” (Fee, S., How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth). We understand who we are through the eyes and understanding that God gave us. We have every right to interpret the Word's of God through the experience and identity of who

we are. It is not only appropriate for us to take seriously the task of interpreting Scripture, but it is irresponsible not to.

Shakespeare once wrote, “Even the devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.” Perhaps he knew what so many refuse to admit. The Bible, through egregious misinterpretation, can be and has been used to speak and teach mistruths. Here’s a couple of interpretations of Scripture (taken from Mel White’s pamphlet, ‘What the Bible says – and does not say – about homosexuality) (1 p. 5) that we must be willing and equipped to stand against:

- “On September 22, 2000, a 55-year-old man named Ronald E. Gay, angry for being teased about his last name, entered the Back Street Café in Roanoke, Virginia, a gathering place for lesbians and gays just a few miles from Lynchburg. Confident that God’s Word supported his tragic plan of action, Mr. Gay shouted, “I am a Christian soldier, working for my Lord.” Claiming that “Jesus does not want these people in his heaven,” he shot seven innocent gay and lesbian people. One man, Danny Overstreet, died instantly. Others still suffer from their physical and psychological wounds.”
- “In July 1999, Matthew Williams and his brother, Tyler, murdered a gay couple, Gary Matson and Winfield Mowder, in their home near Sacramento, California. Speaking to his mother from the Shasta County jail, Matthew explained his actions in this way: ‘I had to obey God’s law rather than man’s law,’ he said. “I didn’t want to do this. I felt I was supposed to. I have followed a higher law...I just plan to defend myself from the Scriptures.’”
- “After Matthew Shepard was killed in 1998, a pastor in North Carolina published an open letter regarding the trial of Aaron McKinney that read: ‘Gays are under the death penalty. His blood is guilty before God (Lev. 20:13). If a person kills a gay, the gay’s blood is upon the gay and not upon the hands of the person doing the killing. The acts of gays are so abominable to God. His Word is there and we can’t change it.’”

Although most people who believe homosexuality to be unbiblical do not condone these kinds of actions, many do readily voice their condemnation at the expense of the sexual minorities. And they do so without choosing to seek the true meaning of Scripture. Most are not aware of the context of the few passages to which they refer, nor do they know:

- Jesus said **nothing** about same-sex behavior
- The Jewish prophets are also silent about homosexuality
- Of the more than 31,000 verses in the Bible only 6 (7 if you really stretch it) refer to same-sex behavior in any way. None of which refer to homosexual orientation as it is understood today.
- There are many more verses in the Bible that impose limitations and condemnations for heterosexual sex. Using the same interpretive logic with these verses as is often used for the verses referring to same-sex relations, one could make an equally clear case condemning heterosexuality.

A few foundational rules

1. Allow yourself to question the Bible

I remember as a child listening to a woman in my church speak of the audacity of reading anything but the King James Version of the Bible in church. “If it’s good enough for Jesus,” she reasoned, “it’s good enough for me.” Even as a child I knew the absurdity of what she was saying. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew and Aramaic and the New Testament in Greek. The Canon, or the accepted body of writings that now make up our Bible, was not agreed upon until nearly 400 years after the death of Christ. 1200 years after that King James I of England commissioned an English interpretation of the Bible to be completed in an attempt to replace the previous interpretation, the Bishop’s Bible.

To go by the notion that a version has been around for so long and, therefore, must be entirely correct is to welcome ignorance and complacency into your Spiritual quest. “Even when we believe the Scriptures are “infallible” or “without error,” it’s terribly dangerous to think that our understanding of every biblical text is also without error. We are human. We are fallible. And we can misunderstand and misinterpret these ancient words—with tragic results”. (1 p. 7)

2. Read everything in context

Before we can really understand the intent of a passage we must first understand the context of that passage. This is a foundational principle of Biblical interpretation. We must know what it meant then before we can possibly understand what it means now.

A good example of this can be seen in I Corinthians 14:33-35: “...women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission... it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in church.” When read out of context we can assume that not only are women not allowed to teach or preach – but they must not even utter one word. And sadly enough many people use this today to justify the disallowance of women ministers in their denominations and congregations. Now look at I Corinthians 11:5 – in the very same letter Paul refers to women prophesying and praying in church and does not rebuke or condemn it. Looking at the contextual reference of this scripture we know that the Corinthian church was known for its chaos more than anything else. We also know in historical times that women were uneducated in general and, therefore, prohibited from studying scripture. Finally, the church assembly was structured in a way that men sat in the general assembly and women in the back or outer sections. This combination of circumstances led to women yelling out to their husbands, asking for explanations and disrupting the entire service. This scripture has been used, out of context, to suppress many voices gifted by God. When read in context, however, the understanding brings about an entirely different meaning.

3. Seek the Spirit

The Scripture is divinely inspired. This inspiration was with the authors as they penned the words, and is equally with us as we seek to understand. “(John) Calvin promised that the ‘inner testimony of the Holy Spirit,’ which persuades us of the authority of Scripture, also assists us in interpreting Scripture” (2 p. 59). Although the words may not be new, the Holy Spirit can give us new revelations and understandings. Perhaps this is why Paul was willing to change his mind about persecuting Christians, Peter was willing to break tradition regarding laws about ‘clean and unclean’ foods, and even Jerry Fallwell was willing to stop using the Bible to support

segregation. The Holy Spirit can tear down our imposed rules, our need for guilt, and our misunderstandings. So, above all, let the wisdom of God guide you through this study.

Interpretive Tools

There will be some study guides and interpretive aids mentioned throughout this study. Here is a quick synopsis of what they are and how you can reference them should you choose.

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance:

What it is: Strong's is both an index of every English Word used in the King James Version of the Bible, as well as a dictionary of the original Greek and Hebrew words used.

Find it on the Web:

- Word index <http://www.blueletterbible.org/search.cfm>



To search by word, scroll down the page to 'Bible Word/Phrase Search Tool' and make sure " Show Strong's" is checked.

To search by word reference number scroll down the page to 'Strong's Search Tool', type in the number and select the language as identified in the parenthesis after the number (G) = Greek; (H) = Hebrew.

To search by verse scroll down the page to 'Verse Retrieval Tool', select the Scripture passage you are looking up and make sure " Show Strong's Numbers" is checked.

- Word dictionary <http://www.elijah.com/lexicon.html>

Vine's Dictionary of New Testament Words

What it is: An expositor's dictionary of New Testament Words

Find it on the Web: <http://www2.mf.no/bibel/vines.html>

Liddell and Scott Greek Dictionaries

What it is: A commonly used Greek > English dictionary

Find it on the Web: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/resolveform>

Many different versions of the Bible

Find it on the Web: <http://www.biblegateway.com>; <http://www.biblos.com/>

These are the very sources of scholarship used by fundamentalist groups who consistently voice condemnation to sexual minorities. These are the very sources of scholarship that clearly show we are not condemned in the Bible. In fact, the more "Conservative" the approach to the Bible,

the more one leans on "Conservative" resources such as those named above, the more clearly one will see the Bible makes no condemnation of us. For the sake of consistency, all scriptures are from the New International Version unless otherwise specified.

Next week we will begin to study the specific passages that have been used to "Biblically bash" sexual minorities.

Open Discussion if time allows

Close in prayer

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Session 2

Prayer requests and praises:

Introduction

Last week we agreed on the following:

- Tradition does not equal Truth
- We have the tools, the skills, and the inspiration from the Holy Spirit to seek the truth through our own exercises of interpretation
- And we will do so by
 - Allowing what we understand as truth to be questioned
 - Seeking to understand the Biblical passages in their historical and social context
 - Asking the Holy Spirit to guide our hearts and minds as we explore the truths of Scripture

So with these commitments we will begin by referring to the passages in the Bible that condemn loving same-sex relationships.

Scriptures that condemn Loving Same-Sex Relationships

Ok, we're done with that section. But before we move on, I think it is important to elaborate just a bit. The Bible does clearly mention same-sex acts and, in fact, condemns them. But to stop right there is breaking the rule of contextual interpretation. These acts are condemned when they are in the context of ritual cult prostitution, idolatry, engaged in by married heterosexual men, and general 'free sex' usually referred to as "fornication" (which the Bible just as clearly reprimands in the context of heterosexual sex).

The Major “Clobber” Passages

There are the six passages often referred to as the “Texts of terror” or the “clobber passages.” As we study them in detail, we will see that there is nothing to fear. The major passages generally used to justify prejudice against sexual minorities are:

- Genesis 19 (The story of Sodom and Gomorrah)
- Leviticus 18:22 & 20:13
- Romans 1:21-27
- I Corinthians 6:9-10
- I Timothy 1: 9-10

In the next few weeks we will be studying each of these passages in depth. Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:16 - 19: 16)

Genesis 18:16-19:16 (Sodom and Gomorrah)

¹⁶ When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. ¹⁷ Then the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? ¹⁸ Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. ¹⁹ For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."

²⁰ Then the LORD said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous ²¹ that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know."

²² The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD. ²³ Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴ What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? ²⁵ Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous

with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

²⁶ The LORD said, "If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake."

²⁷ Then Abraham spoke up again: "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord,

though I am nothing but dust and ashes, ²⁸ what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city because of five people?"

"If I find forty-five there," he said, "I will not destroy it."

²⁹ Once again he spoke to him, "What if only forty are found there?"

He said, "For the sake of forty, I will not do it."

³⁰ Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?"

He answered, "I will not do it if I find thirty there."

³¹ Abraham said, "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?"

He said, "For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it."

³² Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?"

He answered, "For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it."

³³ When the LORD had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.

¹ The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. ² "My lords," he said, "please turn aside to your servant's house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning."

"No," they answered, "we will spend the night in the square."

³ But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate. ⁴ Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. ⁵ They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them."

⁶ Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him ⁷ and said, "No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing. ⁸ Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don't do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof."

⁹ "Get out of our way," they replied. And they said, "This fellow came here as an alien, and now he wants to play the judge! We'll treat you worse than them." They kept bringing pressure on Lot and moved forward to break down the door.

¹⁰ But the men inside reached out and pulled Lot back into the house and shut the door. ¹¹ Then they struck the men who were at the door of the house, young and old, with blindness so that they could not find the door.

¹² The two men said to Lot, "Do you have anyone else here—sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here, ¹³ because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the LORD against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it."

¹⁴ So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were pledged to marry his daughters. He said, "Hurry and get out of this place, because the LORD is about to destroy the city!" But his sons-in-law thought he was joking.

¹⁵ With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished."

¹⁶ When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them. ¹⁷ As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, "Flee for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!"

? Having read the entire passage in its context, what are your initial impressions of this Biblical narrative?

There is some debate on the actual intent of the Hebrew word translated by the New International Version as 'have sex with' (underlined above) in verse 5. Other versions translate the word as 'know'. Here's a break-down of several different translations:

- **King James Version:** "...bring them out unto us, that we may know them."
- **New American Standard Bible:** "...Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them."
- **The Amplified Bible:** "...Bring them out to us, that we may know (be intimate with) them."
- **The Message Bible:** "...Bring them out so we can have our sport with them!"
- **Young's Literal Translation; English Standard Version; & Contemporary English Version:** "...bring them out unto us, and we know them."

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance [3045 (H)]

יָדָע yaw-dah' a primitive root; to know (properly, to ascertain by seeing); used in a great variety of senses, figuratively, literally, euphemistically and inferentially (including observation, care, recognition; and causatively, instruction, designation, punishment, etc.) (as follow):--acknowledge, acquaintance(-ted with), advise, answer, appoint, assuredly, be aware, (un-)awares, can(-not), certainly, comprehend, consider, X could they, cunning, declare, be diligent, (can, cause to) discern, discover, endued with, familiar friend, famous, feel, can have, be (ig-)norant, instruct, kinsfolk, kinsman, (cause to let, make) know, (come to give, have, take) knowledge, have (knowledge), (be, make, make to be, make self) known, + be learned, + lie by man, mark, perceive, privy to, X prognosticator, regard, have respect, skilful, shew, can (man of) skill, be sure, of a surety, teach, (can) tell, understand, have (understanding), X will be, wist, wit, wot.

If we look this word up in the Strong's Concordance you will find the original word to be yada (yä-dah') [3045 (H)]. Yada: to know, to be acquainted; to know (properly, to ascertain by seeing); used in a great variety of senses, figuratively, literally, euphemistically and inferentially (including observation, care, recognition; and causatively, instruction, designation, punishment, etc.).

This seems to be a very thorough definition of our English word, "To know". I'm sure we have all heard the phrase "to know... in the Biblical sense." In actuality, this word was used over 900 times in the Bible and only ten times is it (possibly errantly) translated as sexual relations. The Hebrew word typically used to refer to sexual relations is "shakab" [7901 (H)]: "*to lie down (for rest, sexual connection, decease or any other purpose):-- cast down, ((lover-))lay (self) (down), (make to) lie (down, down to sleep, still with), lodge, ravish, take rest, sleep, stay.*" It can be used in sexual connotation heterosexually, homosexually, in bestiality, or to ravish, to seize, to carry away and to rape; to lie down (for rest, sexual connection, decease for any other purpose)."

It would be more likely that the author who wanted to make known the intention of a homosexual mob obsessed with raping the town visitors would use the obvious word, "Shakab". But he did not. Still, let's assume that the intent of the town's people was to rape Lot's visitors. This still does not give us an open door to blame homosexuality for God's wrath on Sodom.

- ? Well before the “attempted rape” God had judged Sodom as evil and had further determined to destroy the city. Abraham bargained with God hoping to save the city in verse 18. Should we assume that God did this because God knew that the men would attempt to rape the angels, or should we assume that their depravity had already displayed itself, having nothing to do with what was to come?
- ? Lot obviously knew these men to be heterosexual men. If they were not, why would he have offered his daughters to them?
- ? Many people espouse the view that “unbiblical homosexuality” has to do with the act of sex, not the sexuality. In other words, “It is ok to be gay as long as you stay celibate.” Using that reasoning, and further assuming that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed due to homosexuals obsessing in their lust, why were they punished at all, considering the act of homosexual intercourse never occurred in this story?

Contextually, it is also important to understand sexuality in the time of Sodom and Gomorrah. Rev. Mona West, PhD explains, “The single most important concept that defines sexuality in the ancient Mediterranean world, whether we are talking about the kingdoms of Egypt or of Assyria or whether we are talking about the later kingdoms of Greece and Rome, is that approved sexual acts never occurred between social equals. Sexuality, by definition, in ancient Mediterranean societies required the combination of dominance and submission. This crucial social and political root metaphor of dominance and submission as the definition of sexuality rested upon a physical basis that assumed every sex act required a penetrator and someone who was penetrated. Needless to say, this definition of sexuality was entirely male—not surprising in the heavily patriarchal societies of the Mediterranean.

“In these societies sexual acts between men did happen, but they happened in order to show dominance of one group of men or a man over another, especially during times of war. It was not uncommon for men who had conquered a foreign army to rape them in order to show they were dominant and of a higher status.”

- ? If these angels would have presented as women, would we be able to make the case that God does not like heterosexuality? Why or why not?

It seems much more appropriate (and frankly understandable) to infer that God was displeased by the aggression, hostility, violence, and inhospitality of the Sodomites (that is, people from Sodom) and “Gomorrahites.” Having gone through all that, the most simple way to determine what God’s ‘beef’ was with the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are to read on in the Bible.

Isaiah 13:19: “Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, the glory of the Babylonians’ pride, will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah.”

Jeremiah 23:14” And among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen something horrible: They commit adultery and live a lie. They strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from his wickedness. They are all like Sodom to me; the people of Jerusalem are like Gomorrah.”

Ezekiel 16:48–49: “This is the sin of Sodom; she and her suburbs had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not help or encourage the poor and needy. They were arrogant and this was abominable in God’s eyes.”

Jesus, too, referenced Sodom and Gomorrah:

Matthew 10:11-14: "Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave. As you enter the home, give it your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town.”

Luke 10:8-12: “Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you. And heal the sick there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whatever city you enter, and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, 'the very dust of your city which clings to us we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near you. But I say to you that it will be more tolerable in that Day for Sodom than for that city.”

He refers to Sodom and Gomorrah only in the context of sending his own disciples out to preach the Gospel and likens those who reject or do not welcome the disciples to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.

If homosexuality was the egregious offense of Sodom and Gomorrah, why didn’t Jesus make mention of it in, at the very least, one of these two references?

In fact, Jude is the only book in the Bible that refers to the offenses of Sodom and Gomorrah being of sexual immorality. And even Jude does not reference same-sex relations, but the desire of men to have sex with angels and the desire of angels to have sex with men (most likely from Genesis 6:1-4). In any case, it is not difficult to agree that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were acting in sexual immorality by the mere fact that they wanted to commit rape.

I think we can sum up the story of Sodom and Gomorrah with some more realistic conclusions:

- God does not like rape
- God does not like people sent by God to be rejected, turned away, and certainly not attacked

- Wickedness comes in many forms – rape, be it heterosexual rape or homosexual rape, is certainly a level of depravity that can come about through blatant and obviously rejection of God or godliness.

Open Discussion if Time Allows

Close in Prayer

CARE to Explore:

How The Bible is for sexual minorities too!



Session 3

Prayer requests and praises:

Introduction

Last week we covered one of the most widely accepted Biblical condemnations of homosexuality, Sodom and Gomorrah. This week we will begin again in the Old Testament by discussing two verses in Leviticus and then proceed to the New Testament texts.

Leviticus 18:22; 20:13 (the Priestly Code)

First, let's consider the context of Leviticus. Leviticus was commonly referred to as *Torat*

“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.” (18:22)

“If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them.” (20:13)

Kohanim (The Priest's Manual). It was given the Greek translation '*Levitikos*' in reference to Levite, also commutated as priests in the Hellenistic era. This book gives detailed instructions regarding proper feasts, sacrifices, and expectations of holiness. Specifically, chapters 17 – 27 are known as the “holiness code”. These rules are generally addressed to the Israelites and, more specifically, the Levites, or the Israelite priests.

The word *qadash* (set apart or holy) occurs 152 times in Leviticus (that's 20% of all occurrences in the Hebrew Scripture). The book was not written as a law for all, rather a set of rules to be used for the purpose of being separate. “The Israelites has been slaves in Egypt; they had wandered in the desert, subject to attacks from other tribes, starvation, and infectious diseases. They needed cohesiveness, cleanliness, and order in

every aspect of their lives... Failure to form a tight knit community could threaten their long-term survival.” (2 p. 71) Leviticus was written after the fall of Jerusalem, the exile of the Israelites to Babylon and the subsequent return of the exiles to Israel. It was given to protect the Israelites from idolatry and to distinguish them from pagan cultures. “Leviticus is about defining a separate community by establishing its superior differences from others.” (3 p. 64) The obvious question, then, would be how much of this code applies to those reading it today? Some would say all, others tend to pick and choose, while still others dismiss the book in its entirety.

Letter of the Law

If every single rule in the book of Leviticus applies to the 21st century Christians, then we must take account the onslaught of disobedience, not only by each of us, but also by most every person who claims to be a Christian today:

- Rabbits, pigs and shellfish are unclean and cannot be eaten or even touched (so much for football). The animals that chew their cud and have split hoofs are unclean and the living creatures in the water with no scales or fins are an abomination (11:1-12). Oh and, by the way, you have a green light with insects... eat away! (20:25).
- After a woman has a child she is unclean for 33 days if she gives birth to a boy and 66 days if she gives birth to a girl. I’m not sure if Justine was technically clean again after 66 days, serving her two unclean sentences simultaneously, or if she needed to count them back to back before returning to church. In either case, she should have brought a lamb AND a young pigeon or turtle dove (for each child) to offer as a burnt offering in order to be clean. Fortunately the law is not too legalistic, if she was unable to find a lamb she could bring two turtles instead (12:1-8).
- If a man has sexual relationship with a woman who is engaged to someone else, the woman shall be put to death and the man will be forgiven after he brings a Ram to the tabernacle (19:20).
- Mullets are out and full beards are in (19:27).
- Two kinds of seeds don’t belong in the same field (that’s why I’m ripping up my neighbors’ flowerbeds tonight), and clothing woven with two kinds of material is also not acceptable. (19:19)

Picking and Choosing

Obviously the book of Leviticus is not followed to the exact letter of the law. I think we can safely dismiss some of these rules as a practice no longer relevant to us today. But I’m not sure we should throw the baby out with the bath water either. But, how does

one know which laws apply and which laws can be dismissed? As much as some people want to accuse Christian sexual minorities of selecting which scriptures work for them and which do not, this is exactly what they are doing if they choose to dismiss some laws for themselves and hold others to the strictest of account.

Keep the Baby, Toss the Bath Water

At the same time, it is not appropriate to completely dismiss sections of the Bible that don't fit with your expectations of Scripture. Leviticus is just as much a part of Scripture as any other book of the Bible. But it must be read and understood in the context of the entire Word of God. In other words, the texts of the Old Testament must be weighed against those of the New Testament.

Paul rejected the absolute commands of Leviticus in Colossians 2:8-23, where he said, "If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 'Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!' (Which all refer to things destined to perish with the using) in accordance with human commandments and teachings? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against human indulgence." (2:20-23). Paul declared in 2:14 that Jesus has "canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us which was hostile to us; and Jesus has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross."

? *Why, do you think, people so readily take these two passages so seriously and completely ignore the other verses surrounding them?*

“But it’s an abomination”

The word “abomination” seems to carry some significant weight with those who want to insult someone in the name of God. It literally means “that which God found detestable because it was unclean, disloyal, or unjust. Several Hebrew words were so translated, and the one found in Leviticus, toevah, is usually associated with idolatry, as in Ezekiel, where it occurs numerous times.” (4 p. 2)

Knowing that ‘toevah’ was often used to reference idolatry, it is most likely appropriate to refer to the constant tension between the monotheistic Hebrews and their neighboring Canaanites who not only worshiped many gods, but did so in the form of idol worship featuring both female and male temple prostitution (mentioned in Deuteronomy 23:17). It is highly plausible and contextually probable that the abomination of one man having sexual relations with another was referring to the idolatry of shrine prostitutes rather than two individuals who have entered loving and committed relationships.

Other abominations in the Old Testament include:

- Having sexual intercourse with a woman while she is on her menstrual period
 - Dietary violations (i.e. eating shellfish, snakes, pigs, etc.)
 - Going back your word/Dishonesty
 - Idolatry
 - Oppressing the poor and needy
 - Eating with foreigners
 - Carving images or making statues
 - A proud look
 - One who stirs up dissention within the church
 - Defending the wicked/condemning the innocent
 - A person who prays and has ignored the law
 - Offerings, incense, and assemblies from a nation who has innocent blood on its hands
- ? This is just a sampling of abominations listed throughout the Old Testament. Do we see these ‘abominations’ committed by people today? Which ones stand out most to you?
- ? Are there any questions or comments for discussion before we move on to the New Testament Scriptures?

Romans 1:21-27 (Natural vs. Unnatural)

Reading it in context

“They exchanged the glory or the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.” “...They worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator...” Once again we see this condemnation rooted in the context

²¹For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

²²Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

²⁴**Therefore** God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵They exchanged the truth of

God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

²⁶Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

of idolatry. And we surely cannot dismiss these phrases as irrelevant – for the word “therefore” in verse 24 means what came before ties to what is now to come.

We must keep in mind that the Jews and early Christians were surrounded by other cultures and religions. They were surrounded by religions that focused on idol worship – and that even included males and females becoming human objects of worship to the gods (particularly in the religions of Bacchus and Aphrodite). Having sexual intercourse with a temple prostitute was thought to bring favor with the gods, particularly to bring a good harvest. “Paul was addressing the Christians in Rome and teaching about the pagans in Rome. After declaring the power of Christ's gospel to save all, he pointed out that the religious people of Rome had refused to even acknowledge GOD as one of their many gods. They had turned their backs on the one true living God and worshiped handmade idols.”⁽⁵⁾ It is made clear in the 10 commandments that God does not want anything or anyone to be worshiped in place of God.

And so, once again, we see that this was not a condemnation of committed homosexual relationships – but against sex being used as a form of idolatry. For, as we’ve already covered, sexual idolatry is an abomination.

What is natural?

In Matthew 13:32 Jesus speaks of a mustard seed as being the smallest of all seeds. Even those who do not have a passion for botany can understand that a mustard seed is visible and many seeds can only be seen through the lens of a microscope. The mustard seed: about 1/20th of an inch in size. The orchid seed, however, requires a 10 to 30 power microscope. And even much smaller than an orchid seed are the seeds of mushrooms and molds.

? So, was Jesus wrong – and even more within the context of this study, is every word and statement of the Bible a foundational principle for science?

Jesus was speaking to a group of people who knew nothing of the orchid seed, or the spores of mushrooms. He used information that conformed to the knowledge of the time in which he lived. Paul, likewise, spoke according to the knowledge he had. With this in mind, it is appropriate to say that Paul did not have a grasp on the scientific perspectives of nature vs. nurture. He wasn’t making a blatant scientific statement to prove the one is not born a homosexual. He was referring to what was customary and what was socially accepted. It is ludicrous to use this scripture as a foundation for scientific discovery. Paul was not a scientist, he was a theologian. So let’s take a look at what he was declaring theologically.

Let’s look to Paul’s use of the word “natural” to determine his context for using such a word. Paul uses the word physis [5449 (G)] in Romans 11:13-24 Paul asserts that God acted “contrary to nature” by pruning the pruning the Gentiles from the wild olive tree. Did God do something perverse? Did God sin? Did God do something out of the ordinary? The later is the only possible answer.

Nevertheless, let's talk about the "natural" way of things as adopted by many historical religious patriarchs, based principally upon this scripture:

- Philo, a leading Jewish scholar between 20 B.C. and 50 A.D. taught that "any use of human sexuality, potential or actual, which did not produce legitimate offspring violated "nature": all moral issues were subordinate to the primary duty of males to procreate. Celibacy was as unnatural as homosexuality, failure to divorce a barren wife was "unnatural" as was masturbation." ⁽⁶⁾
 - In the third century Clement of Alexandria asserted that "to have sex for any purpose other than to produce children is to violate nature."
 - Jerome stated that sexual intercourse was not approved unless it led to the procreation of children.
- ? *With this guidelines in mind, how do we reconcile what is natural for the eunuch (a man with non-functioning testis), or a sterile person? What about a person born multi-sexed (with both male and female organs)? What about a couple too old to procreate?*

Even the Rev. Jerry Falwell chimed in saying, "I think it's unthinkable that we're debating what a family is, a man married to a woman. They've got that right in the barnyard. We've had that for 6,000 years and to think that we're trying to redefine families." ⁽⁷⁾ Let's consider that. Bruce Bagemihl, a biologist, linguist, and author best known for his critically acclaimed book *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity*, documented homosexual relations in 450 species of the animal world. These activities were not just limited to copulation, but also included courtship and parental activities.

Under the assumption that being gay is a choice, we would have to assume that being bi-sexual or heterosexual must also be a choice.

- ? *If you are comfortable enough to share, how would you define your sexuality? When did you "make the choice" to be defined as such (homosexual, bisexual, transsexual, heterosexual, etc.)? Do you feel it was a choice for you? If so, why did you make that choice?*

Breaking from research, study tools, and interpretation I feel it appropriate to add a personal note here. I remember being labeled a “Tom boy” in elementary school, my aunt attempting to teach me to walk “like a lady” in high school, and my grandma telling me, shortly after I came out as a lesbian, that all my life, she defended me when people told her I was gay. I once listened to a mom tell me of how her gay son went to a wedding when he was five. Afterwards, on a daily basis, he wanted to dress up like the bride and carry flowers down the hallway while his mom hummed “Here comes the Bride”.

I know for many of my gay and lesbian friends, as well as for myself, that to be in a relationship with someone of the opposite sex is nothing more than “playing house” – and is certainly not “natural”. Because I never thought to question or research the concept of a Christian homosexual, I married a man when I was 23. Convinced I could make myself “straight” I exchanged what was natural to me for what was anything but. This, I am certain, was not God’s perfect plan for my life. I now understand what I could not at that time. God made me to be me – and to be me is natural, normal, and wonderful!

Open Discussion if Time Allows

Close in Prayer

CARE to Explore:

How The Bible is for sexual minorities too!



Session 4

I Corinthians 6:9

⁹Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders

The term homosexual was not actually coined until the late 1900s. There is no Greek or Hebrew word for homosexual and the first version of the Bible to use the word was published in 1946 (The Revised Standard Version).

This verse, I Corinthians 6:9, has evolved in the King James Version of the Bible to read “...effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind” in 1970; “...homosexuals, nor sodomites” in 1982; and “...male prostitutes, or men who have sexual relations with other men” in 2001. It is evident that one needs to take a look at Paul’s words before jumping to a conclusion of what this passage truly means.

Paul uses two words in this scripture. The first, *malakos* [3120 (G)], is translated above as male prostitutes and second, *arsenokoites* [733 (G)], as homosexual offenders. It is interesting to read the wide variety of translations of these words. Here are a few:

Version	<i>malakos</i>	<i>arsenokoites</i>
King James Version	Effeminate	Abusers of themselves with mankind
New International Version	Male prostitutes	Homosexual offenders
New American Standard Bible	Effeminate	Homosexuals
New King James Version	Homosexuals	Sodomites
Amplified	Those who participate in homosexuality	
English Standard Version	Men who practice homosexuality	
Darby Translation	Those who make women of themselves	Those who abuse themselves with men
New Century Version	Male prostitutes	Men who have sexual relations with other men
The Message Bible	Those who use and abuse each other, use and abuse sex, use and abuse the earth and everything in it	
Young’s Literal Translation	Effeminate	Sodomites

You can see that in some versions the two terms, although Paul is making a list of different offenses or offenders, are translated together as one. In other versions *malakos* means homosexuals and still others do not translate to the word homosexual until they get to *arsenokoites*.

Malakos

Malakos is defined in Strong's Concordance as "of uncertain affinity; soft, i.e. fine (clothing); figuratively, a catamite: --effeminate, soft." It is used only three times in the New Testament. The first two referred to clothing and unquestionably meant 'soft'. In the Corinthian passage, not only did the meaning change, but the structure of the word changed from an adjective to a noun. Significantly, no sexual connotation was assigned to this word for hundreds of years. In the context of soft, a better translation might imply one who is morally soft or who fails to stand up for what is right and godly.

Dr. Ralph Blair, founder of Evangelicals Concerned, explains the common practice of pederasty (sexual activity between two males when one is a minor) in Paul's time through the use of slave boy prostitutes. Blair tells of "...the slave 'pet boys' who were sexually exploited by adult male owners. The desired boys were prepubescent or at least without beards so that they seemed like females."⁽⁸⁾ If, in fact, Paul intended this word to label a sexual agent, the most likely correlation would be these "soft" young "pet" boys. A footnote in the New American Bible reads, "The Greek word translated as boy prostitutes may refer to catamites, i.e. boys or young men who were kept for the purposes of prostitution, a practice not uncommon in the Greco-Roman world. In Greek mythology this was the function of Ganymede, the "cupbearer of the gods," whose Latin name was Catamus."

Arsenokoites

Recently I found a recipe for vegetarian enchiladas, modified it a bit, and put it in casserole form. My two sons loved it so much that they thought it worthy of a name, so we put the two main descriptors together to come up with "Vegilada." It was our very own word that seemed to make a lot of sense at the time. *Arsenokoites* seems to be Paul's very own word similarly made from two other words: *arsen* [730 (G)], which means "male (as in stronger for lifting)"; and *koite* [2749 (G)], which means "bed or couch".

Martti Nissinen, author and historian, notes that Paul's use of *Arsenokoites* is the first in Greek and Jewish literature, which makes it very difficult to interpret. Some scholars have combined the translation of the two words that make up this compound word and drawn the conclusion that male + bed must mean "men that have sex with men." Dale Martin, professor of religious studies at Yale University, objects to this approach, asserting it "to be linguistically invalid."^(2 p. 74) This same strategy in translating the word 'understand,' for example, would lead us to believe one is positioned under a table of some sort, or perhaps is standing on one's head (up-side-down). Neither the word 'under' nor 'stand' have anything to do with comprehending something. Or perhaps an even more relevant illustration would be the common slang term "lady killer." We know this to be a man to whom women are irresistibly attracted to. Someone reading this word in today's literature several thousand years from now may interpret it to mean

one who kills women. Let's be honest, man + bed could have several logical interpretations and we should not even rely on the fact that the interpretation is logical. "The only reliable way," according to Martin, "to define a word is to analyze its use in as many different contexts as possible." (2 p. 74) Unfortunately, we only see this word used twice in Scripture (both by Paul) and nowhere else in other Greek literature of that period. We will, therefore, further discuss this word as we move on to the final major passage (I Timothy 1:9-10).

I Timothy 1:9-10

Reading the New International Version alone does not necessarily evoke homosexual condemnation from this passage, so let's take a look at some other interpretations of

⁹We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, ¹⁰for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine

verse 10.

Version	<i> pornos </i>	<i> arsenokoitai </i>	<i> andrapodistai </i>
King James Version	Whoremongers	Them that defile themselves with mankind	Menstealers
New International Version	Adulterers	Perverts	Slave traders
New American Standard Bible	Immoral men	Homosexuals	Kidnappers
New King James Version	Fornicators	Sodomites	Kidnappers
Amplified	Impure and immoral persons	Those who abuse themselves with men	Kidnappers
English Standard Version	Sexually immoral	Men who practice homosexuality	Enslavers
Darby Translation	Fornicators	Sodomites	Kidnappers
New Century Version	Who take part in sexual sins	Who have sexual relations with people of the same sex	Who sell slaves
Young's Literal Translation	Whoremongers	Sodomites	Men-stealers

? Before we move on, did anyone notice that the NIV's translations of *arsenokoitai* (in I Cor 6:9 and in I Tim. 9:10) are completely different? Why do you think that is?

Before we get into the specific Greek words, it is important to note a pattern in Paul's writing in this text. Note that Paul records the lists of sins in groupings of synonyms or, at the very least, related terms.

	King James Version	New International Version	New American Standard Bible
9a	Lawless & disobedient	Lawbreakers & rebels	Lawless & rebellious
9b	Ungodly & sinners	Ungodly & sinful	Ungodly & sinners
9c	Unholy & profane	Unholy & irreligious	Unholy & profane
9d	Murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers & manslayers	Those who kill their fathers or mothers & murderers	Those who kill their fathers or mothers & murderers
10a	Whoremongers & Them that defile themselves with mankind	Adulterers & perverts	Immoral men & homosexuals
10b	Menstealers & ???	Slave traders & ???	Kidnappers & ???
10c	Liars & perjured persons	Liars & perjurers	Liars & perjurers

You will see similar groupings of words in every instance except for row 10b. It is logical to assume that row 10b should be grouped with the words in row 10a or in 10c. But to make that determinate, we need to take a look at the words and how they do or do not relate.

The Greek words in lines 10a are *pornos* [4205 (G)], and *arsenokoites* [733 (G)]; line 10b is *andrapodistes* [405 (G)]; and line 10c is *pseustes* [5583 (G)] and *epiorkos* [1965 (G)]. *Pseustes* occurs ten times in the New Testament, every time to mean 'liar.' Although *epiorkos* is only used once, there is no debate that it is defined as "false swearer; perjurer," which is consistent with it being paired with *epiorkos*.

Andraposistes is defined as "one who kidnaps and enslaves." It is not written in any other instance of the Bible. In the context of the slave "pet boys" mentioned earlier, it would be entirely appropriate to group *andrapodistes* (one who enslaves) with and *pornos* (prostitute/sexual slave). In the context mentioned above, slave traders and kidnappers further support the point that Paul is condemning sexual slavery both in context of those who are engaging in sexual relations with these child prostitutes and those who are enslaving them.

Still some may question, by looking at the wide variety of interpretations above, whether this verse is making reference to prostitution at all. In fact, only two versions of the nine listed above refer to prostitution (whoremongers). Strong's definition of the word *pornos* leaves little room for anything else, "a (male) prostitute (as venal), i.e. (by analogy) a debauchee (libertine):--fornicator, whoremonger. " Thayer's Greek Lexicon defines the word as "a man who prostitutes his body to another's lust for hire, a male prostitute; univ. a man who indulges in unlawful sexual intercourse, a fornicator."

The same word in the feminine usage, *porne* [4204 (G)] is seen 12 times throughout the New Testament. Every single time this word is seen it is interpreted as a female prostitute. The masculine word is used 10 different times in the New Testament, but it is interpreted to mean "fornicator" five times and "whoremonger" the other five.

? Why do you think this word is so inconsistently interpreted?

So let's revisit the word *arsenokoites*. As previously indicated, this word is made up of the Greek words for male and bed. In Greek this word "literally meaning 'beds', is commonly used as a euphemism for one who has sex. *Arseno-* (male) is an adjectival prefix, thus literally we could translate this as "a man who has sex" or "male bedder."⁽⁹⁾

Reading *arsenokoites* the only two times it appears in the Bible we see the following: in I Corinthians, male prostitutes and **male bedders**; and in I Timothy, male prostitutes, **male bedders**, and enslavers. This contextual dynamic leads one to understand *arsenokoitai* to reference the one who sleeps with the prostitute — the man who literally lies on the bed with him. It is as if Paul were saying, "male prostitutes, males who lie [with them], and slave dealers [who procure them]."⁽⁹⁾

Analysis of later Christian and secular Greek writings led Professor Dale Martin to conclude that *arsenokoites* most likely refers to "some kind of economic exploitation, probably by sexual means: rape or sex by economic coercion, prostitution, pimping, or something of the sort." (2 p. 74) Later in his writing Martin responds to the irresponsible interpretations of this word by saying, "No one should be allowed to get away with claiming that 'of course' the term refers to 'men who have sex with other men.'" (2 p. 74)

So there you have it. The six texts that have led people to spew hatred, picket causes for justice and equality, and continue spreading prejudice and violent rhetoric towards the sexual minorities. A story of certain mob-spawned violent actions; a priestly code that the Christian church, by in large, dismisses; a passionate plea against idolatry, and Paul's certain disapproval of the practice of child prostitution. These are the accusations that have turned into mobs of hatred and scorn. These are the misinterpretations that have led to diminished rights and augmented persecution. These make up the Biblical precedents for accusing people who love each other, as God created them to do, of perversion, abomination, and disgrace. These certainly do not reference people born with a homosexual orientation, loving others of the same.

Open Discussion if Time Allows

Close in Prayer

CARE to Explore:

How The Bible is for sexual minorities too!



Session 5

Biblically narrated relationships between sexual minorities

The Bible is essentially a complicated and celebrated love story between a creator and creation. And yet, great human love stories in the Bible are hard to come by. Even more surprising, the three greatest love stories in the Bible, that is love stories that take considerable words and time to explore the emotion and commitment of love, are stories of sexual minorities, specifically: Naomi and Ruth, two women; Jonathon and David, two men; and Solomon and his concubine (a concubine is a 'secondary' wife who usually has few legal rights and low social status). (10)

Naomi and Ruth

There are two books in the Bible that take the name of a woman. Esther is the story of a Jewish woman who dared to stand up to royalty, at the risk of her life. In doing so, she saved her people from certain death. The second, this story of Ruth, celebrates the love and commitment of two women.

Before we continue, it needs to be perfectly clear that this study does not claim nor deny whether Ruth and Naomi had a sexual relationship. It does emphatically celebrate the fact that two same-sex individuals can have a life-long committed, loving relationship, and can do so under the blessing of God.

The book of Ruth begins with the tragic circumstances of Naomi. She lost her husband and both sons in battle within a period of about 10 years. As Naomi and her two widowed daughters-in-law journeyed with her back to the land of Judah, Naomi realized that these two young ladies had lives to live beyond their current circumstances. She urged them to return to the houses in which they grew up to find rest and new husbands.

In verse 14 Orpah, one of the two daughters-in-law kissed Naomi goodbye and went on her way. The second daughter-in-law, Ruth, offered one of the most recited passages for wedding commitments throughout the history of the Christian church. That's right, a commitment from one woman to another. "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whether thou goest, I will go; and whether thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" (Ruth 1:16).

Shortly before this moving plea and pledge the Bible says Ruth “clave unto (Naomi)” (1:14). This word (in other versions ‘clung’) (*dabaq*) [1692(H)] is translated as, “to cling, to cleave to; to stay with; to be joined together; to pursue closely; to overtake.” *Dabaq* was first used in another passage, also often used in many wedding ceremonies, to describe the intense bond that a married couple is to have. “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave (*dabaq*) unto his wife: and they shall become one flesh (Genesis 2:24).

? *Genesis 2:24 demonstrates the profound feelings Adam had for Eve through the use of the word dabaq. Why, then, do you think its meaning has been so diminished in the context of Ruth’s feelings for Naomi?*

Ruth’s actions of refusing to return to her family and vowing to stay with Naomi may not seem extraordinary to today’s observer, but this story takes on a whole new meaning when understood through the context of the time in which Ruth and Naomi lived. During this time in history women had two acceptable places in society: “They could be a daughter in their father’s household or a wife in their husband’s household.”⁽¹¹⁾ In any other context they would have no social standing and would be reduced, at best, to beggars on the street. Ruth had easy opportunity to return to her father’s house as she was from the land in which they currently resided. But rather than accepting this reliable security, she risked it all to commit to Naomi. The depth of Ruth’s love for Naomi was greater than the fear of a “normal” life without her.

I have heard people say that Ruth respected and admired Naomi because she was the mother of Ruth’s husband. But there is not a lot of mention of Ruth and her husband’s relationship, and certainly no mention of their love. In fact, when reading Ruth 1, it is hard to determine which of Naomi’s sons Ruth was actually married to. As far as Ruth’s feeling for Naomi, here are some succinct facts:

- Ruth gave up everything, even risking her life, to be with Naomi
- Ruth made a lifetime vow to Naomi
- Ruth adopted Naomi’s religion
- Ruth shared a home with Naomi for the rest of Naomi’s life
- Ruth adopted Naomi’s family as her own
- Ruth wanted to be buried next to Naomi
- Even after Naomi died Ruth expressed the hope and desire that she would be able to be with Naomi.

? *If this story were told, but the characters were Rudy and Naomi, how much different do you think it would be perceived by the mainstream church?*

? *If this love was a mother figure love, wouldn't Ruth have expressed a desire to be buried next to her husband rather than next to Naomi?*

The remainder of the book of Ruth celebrates Ruth and Naomi's life together.

"The biblical storyteller chronicles how Ruth cared for Naomi by taking the only job available to a husbandless woman, gleaning" (picking up extra grain in the field). "When the author tells of Ruth's eventual marriage to a much older man, the marriage is portrayed as one of convenience, contrived to help Ruth and Naomi survive the harsh conditions of widowhood. No mention is made of Ruth's love for her husband. And, when Ruth finally bears a son from her marriage, the text focuses on Naomi and her reaction to the great news, not on the father. In fact, the women of the village (and the author) ignore the father entirely, saying, 'A son has been born to Naomi.' (Ruth 4:17) They remind her that Ruth 'who loves you, is more to you than seven sons.' (Ruth 4:15) Everyone seems to understand that, for Ruth and Naomi, their most important relationship is the one they share."⁽¹¹⁾

Over the course of the last 2,000 years of Christian history, Ruth's vow to Naomi has been the ideal picture of what a marriage covenant should look like. This vow has been exchanged instinctively as the ultimate example of spousal commitment and dedication. These same people, however, will immediately and without apology insist that the same meaning is not present within Ruth and Naomi's story because they were of the same gender.

? *Is it difficult for you to accept this relationship as a loving and dedicated life commitment? Why or why not?*

David and Jonathon

What do we know about David? He was a shepherd boy who killed both a lion and a bear with his bare hands. He used a sling-shot to kill the giant Philistine, Goliath. He was not only the court musician but also the armor bearer for Israel's first king, Saul. David ultimately succeeded Saul to become Israel's second and inarguably most important King. David was considered by God to be a man after God's own heart. (I Samuel 13:14)

As far as his love life went, we know of David's affair with Bathsheba. He, of course married her, but not for the purpose of love, rather to cover-up the murder of her husband, Uriah, whom David sent to the front of the battle once he found out Bathsheba was pregnant. And yet, as twisted and tragic as this story is, many would rather cling to this loveless sex as proof that David was a heterosexual man, than to consider the detailed love and emotion David had for Jonathon, King Saul's son.

I Samuel 18:1 describes the first meeting between Jonathon and David. "And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.... Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle."

It is hard to reconcile this kind of 'love at first site' to be a common friendship. The Bible says Jonathon *delighted* in David. *Chaphets* [2654 (H)], translated delighted, is defined in the Strong's Concordance as "a primitive root; properly, to incline to; by implication (literally but rarely) to bend; figuratively, to be pleased with, desire:--X any at all, (have, take) delight, desire, favour, like, move, be (well) pleased, have pleasure, will, would." "The main meaning is to feel a strong positive attraction for... this word involves subjective involvement... it means to like someone... very, very much."⁽¹²⁾

Just in case the above verse and explanation are not enough set the scene, we read on into chapter 20. Saul had grown jealous of David because David basically had a bigger fan club. He had plotted to kill David, but when Jonathon warned him, David went into hiding. After two days of David not showing up for lunch, Saul asked Jonathon where David was. After a brief discussion about David, Saul became angry and said, (I Samuel 20:30 NASB) "Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman, do not I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own confusion, and unto the confusion of thy mother's nakedness?" Today the same rant might sound something like, "You pervert! This is your mother's fault and you're embarrassing yourself!"

Jonathon, now knowing that Saul's anger was not just an empty threat and that Saul really intended to kill David, met David in a preplanned location to tell him that he had to runaway. I Samuel 20:41-42: "David arose out of a place toward the south, and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times: and they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded. And Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the LORD, saying, The LORD be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed forever." Here Jonathon was referencing a covenant made between David and Jonathon in the same chapter, verse 17, "And Jonathan caused David to swear again, because he loved him: for he loved him as he loved his own soul."

David wrote, years later after hearing that Jonathon and Saul were killed in battle, a beautiful eulogy that not only expressed his love for Jonathon, but the heart-break that he was certainly experiencing. II Samuel 1:25-26 "How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thine high places. I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: ***thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.***"

Once again, if this would have been a story of David and Saul's daughter, it would certainly be celebrated by all as a beautiful love story and life covenant. Without

preconception we must believe the same of the relationship between David and Jonathon. And, just as in the case of Ruth and Naomi, the Bible makes no attempt to hide this relationship. As already mentioned, the Bible highlights this love. Why, then, does the mainstream church try to bury it?

Open Discussion if Time Allows

Close in Prayer

CARE to Explore:

How The Bible is for sexual minorities too!



Session 6

Christ as the Ultimate Example

I have often read that Jesus said absolutely nothing about homosexuality. Certainly Jesus voiced no words of condemnation about same-sex relationships. Of the 36 sermons recorded throughout Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, none of them condemned, or even warned against, homosexuality. In one conversation with an anti-gay pastor it was explained to me that homosexuality was not a social issue at that time and, therefore, Jesus had no need to condemn it. Of course, this same pastor clung to Paul's "obvious condemnation" in Romans. I've never been too sure how the two arguments reconciled themselves in his mind. Nevertheless, it is readily admitted that Jesus makes no outright or even alleged condemnations of homosexuality.

There are, however, some passages that may change your mind as to whether or not Jesus ever spoke of homosexuality. These discussions will be speculative, but will hopefully open your mind to new possibilities in the words and beliefs of Christ. We will first explore these passages, and then conclude this study with Jesus' ultimate example of unconditional love and acceptance.

Stop the Name Calling

Literary historian, Professor Paul Halsall, has previously alleged that Matthew 5:22 appears to be gay friendly in content. The scripture reads, "But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, ***Raca***, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, ***Thou fool***, shall be in danger of hell fire."

? *Has anyone here ever called someone else a 'fool'? Do you feel that, after reading this verse you are in danger of hell fire? Why or why not?*

I remember as a child being "freaked out" by this scripture. I heard someone say, "What's up fool?" to his buddy and thought, "Oh, no! He's doomed." According to Halsall, the scripture is not referring to the literal English word, "fool". It carries a significantly different meaning. We will break down the two word used by Jesus, bolded and italicized above, to explore a possibly deeper meaning.

First of all, *raca* is not a Greek word. This is its only occurrence in the New Testament and the Greek Lexicon does not define it, but only implies it to be a Hebrew word. "Most translations either ignore the word, or note it as a general term of abuse." (12 p. 102) Warren Johannssen, an author and scholar of gay theology, points out that in the

semantic languages the roots of the word *raca* (*rakha*) mean soft and carry a connotation of effeminacy or weakness. “The Akkadian word *raq* is used to denote a woman’s name or occupation, and its graphic representation in Akkadian derives from a Sumerian symbol for woman. In other words it can be argued that *Raca* [applied here to brother] is an accusation of sissy...” (12 pp. 102-103)

Halsall further argues that the word *moros*, or fool in the passage above, appreciably adds to this argument. “This word,” claims Halsall, “can mean fool, but also has the amply used connotation of sexual aggressor, or even homosexual aggressor.” (12 p. 103) If this is true, the meaning behind Jesus’ words would be quite different. Rather than saying “Don’t call names” he would be saying, “Stop calling people sissy or faggot.” At the very least, he would be saying, “stop condemning to hell those who have not been condemned.”

Jesus Reached Out to a Gay Couple

Before exploring this particular account, it is important to understand the accepted traditions of the time. Men would purchase women as wives. And by women I mean teenage girls. Remember a woman was considered property of her husband and it was not uncommon for this “property” to be purchased at the age of 14 or 15. It was not uncommon for an older man to acquire a young girl as a wife. “In that culture, if you were a gay man who wanted a male “spouse,” you achieved this, like your heterosexual counterparts, through a commercial transaction — purchasing someone to serve that purpose. A servant purchased to serve this purpose was often called a *pais*.” (13)

Having said that, the story recorded in Matthew 8:5-13 is of a man asking Jesus to heal his servant (*pais*). “In the language of the time, *pais* had three possible meanings depending upon the context in which it was used. It could mean ‘son or boy;’ it could mean ‘servant,’ or it could mean a particular type of servant — one who was ‘his master’s male lover.’” (13) This account is primarily assumed to refer to a centurion and his son, but Luke’s account of this story offers even further evidence that this may have been a male lover (Luke 7:1-10). Luke uses several words to describe this ailing boy. The first term, *doulos*, was a generic term for slave, never used to describe son. As much as the word *doulos*, rules out son, the word *entimos*, rules out common slave. *Entimos* means ‘honored.’ “This was an “honored slave” (*entimos doulos*) who was his master’s *pais*. Taken together, the three Greek words preclude the possibility the sick person was either the centurion’s son or an ordinary slave, leaving only one viable option — he was his master’s male lover.” (13)

I cannot put this story in a more eloquent narration as has already been written on the website, Would Jesus Discriminate?:

“So the centurion approaches Jesus and bows before him. ‘Rabbi, my . . . ,’ the word gets caught in his throat. This is it — the moment of truth. Either Jesus will turn away in disgust, or something wonderful will happen. So, the centurion

clears his throat and speaks again. 'Rabbi, my *pais* — yes, my *pais* lies at home sick unto death.' Then he pauses and waits for a second that must have seemed like an eternity. The crowd of good, God-fearing people surrounding Jesus probably became tense. This was like a gay man asking a televangelist to heal his lover. What would Jesus do?

"Without hesitation, Jesus says, 'Then I will come and heal him.'

"It's that simple! Jesus didn't say, 'Are you kidding? I'm not going to heal your *pais* so you can go on living in sin!' Nor did he say, 'Well, it shouldn't surprise you that your *pais* is sick; this is God's judgment on your relationship.'

"Instead, Jesus' words are simple, clear, and liberating for all who have worried about what God thinks of gay relationships. 'I will come and heal him.'

- ? *Can you put yourself in the place of this centurion? Have you ever been afraid to approach Jesus because you fear you are unworthy or less than?*
- ? *In the context of this scripture, can you imagine the incredible affirmation the centurion must have felt when Jesus, without question, healed his lover?*

Jesus tempted in "every" way?

As a young teen, vehemently opposed to homosexuality (more so than most, as I was struggling even then with society's opposition to my very biological make-up), I remember a particular youth camp service. "Jesus," said Donny Moore, a prominent Assemblies of God youth evangelist, "hung on that cross and became sin. He took on your lies. He took on your sin. He became a thief. He became a murderer. He became..." then came the dramatic pause for what would be the ultimate shock, "... a homosexual!" I was repulsed. I was indignant. I was incensed! That Jesus would have to go through such a repugnant identity as that... a homosexual!

Of course, I was battling the theology in which I was raised and the identity that I rebuked every time I looked in the mirror. I was aghast that my savior had to become this thing I had learned to despise. I was ok with the fact that he became a thief, an adulterer, a coveter, or even a murderer... but a homosexual. That seemed to be bordering on blasphemy. So please know that as I pose this next theory to you, I do so after many years of consideration and study. Could it be that our savior was, what we would label today, a bisexual?

Hebrews 4:15 says that Jesus was tempted in every way known to humankind. That would mean that he was tempted to lie, to kill, to lust, to betray... he was tempted in every way. It would make sense then, to read the accounts of his obvious intimate friendship with Mary Magdalene as it would to read of the same with John the Beloved. There has recently been many speculations as to the relationship of Christ and Mary Magdalene, especially since the release of Dan Brown's 'The Divinci Code.' But

separating fact from fiction, we can at the very least surmise that Mary was Jesus' closest female disciple.

Likewise, certain passages of the Bible would indicate that an above average attraction may have existed between Jesus and his disciple, John. In John's gospel, John referred himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved on a total of 5 occasions. There was also an account of John leaning on Jesus' bosom (John 13:23). These are certainly not all out claims that Jesus had a same-sex attraction for John, but it is likewise not out of the realm of possibilities. "According to tradition, Apostle John never married unlike the other disciples. Perhaps, John was never attracted to women."⁽¹⁴⁾

? *Do your preconceptions allow you to see Jesus as a potentially bi-sexual man, or to revolt at the thought of it? If you are comfortable to do so, please share your feelings.*

I am compelled to make one final point in this section. I don't see any proof or persuasion that Jesus entered into a sexual relationship with Mary Magdalene or John the Beloved. His role on this earth did not allow for distractions or persuasions that would take his attention from what he came to do – that is serve as the ultimate sacrifice for humanity. His presumed celibacy does not insinuate that a sexual relationship with Mary or John would have been wrong – rather he was more focused on the salvation of humanity than to allow himself to surrender to a distraction of human temptation.

Whosoever vs. Religious Abuse

Above all, the most overwhelming message of Jesus Christ was salvation for all. John 3:16, a foundational scripture in the Christian faith, claims that 'whosoever' believes in Christ, God's only son, will also share in eternal life with God. Religious leaders of this current age have sought to banish those thought to be unworthy or inferior. And, really, that is not much different from the time in which Jesus walked this earth. The only recorded instance of Jesus' anger was toward the religious leaders who sought to profit from the masses and exclude those who could not satisfy their ever increasing religiously imposed levy (Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-18; John 2:13-22). Jesus' suitable anger arose at the religions leaders' attempt to exclude others. Jesus came to reach the world, not those in the world who followed the very narrow law of the self-proclaimed church.

Revisiting the Importance of Gay Theology

I have been asked by numerous people, "How can you be gay and be a Christian?" For me, that question is better posed, "How can you allow the mainstream religion that has hi-jacked Christianity, to take over the words and ministry of Jesus Christ?" I have sat ideally by, hearing stories of people tragically condemned for their sexuality in a Christian world, and others hated for their spirituality in a world of sexual freedom. It is

time for the two worlds to stop conflicting. Rev. Elder Ken Martin of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches often refers to God's love affair with diversity. It is time that people allow that diversity and the basic foundations of a godly life with Christ to coincide. Jesus Christ was not about judgment. Jesus Christ was not about condemnation. Jesus Christ was not about name calling or road-side picketing and he certainly was not about brandishing a gun in the name of spirituality. The acceptance of slavery in the context of Scripture has been revoked. The insistence of segregation on the basis of scripture has been rescinded. The dominance over women with the assumption of their lesser status has been dismissed. Isn't it time that we put aside our preconceptions and look to the foundations of Christ's unrelenting love and humanities' unquestionable multiplicity to allow others to be who God created them to be... to allow you to be who God created you to be? Isn't it time to stand up for those who have not one clue of how to stand up for themselves in the face of a "Christian" world screaming condemnation in their face? Let us live the truth! And let us boldly speak the truth!

Open Discussion if Time Allows

Close in Prayer

WORKSHEET 1

This legalization of such marriage must be forbidden, said the Republican senator from Wisconsin, ***“simply because natural instinct revolts at it as wrong.”***

An organization opposed to such marriage claimed that its legalization would result in ***“a degraded and ignoble population incapable of moral and intellectual development.”***

A U.S. representative from Georgia declared that allowing this type of marriage ***“necessarily involves (the) degradation”*** of conventional marriage, an institution that ***“deserves admiration rather than execration.”***

“The next step will be (the demand for) a law allowing them, without restraint, to ... have free and unrestrained social intercourse with your unmarried sons and daughters,” warned a Kentucky congressman. ***“It is bound to come to that. There is no disguising the fact. And the sooner the alarm is given and the people take heed, the better it will be for our civilization.”***

“When people (like this) marry, they cannot possibly have any progeny,” wrote an appeals judge in a Missouri case. ***“And such a fact sufficiently justifies those laws which forbid their marriages.”***

In denying the appeal of a couple who had tried unsuccessfully to marry, a Georgia court wrote that such unions are ***“not only unnatural, but ... always productive of deplorable results,”*** such as increased effeminate behavior in the population. ***“They are productive of evil, and evil only, without any corresponding good ... (in accordance with) the God of nature.”***

Attorneys for the state of Tennessee argued that such unions should be illegal because they are ***“distasteful to our people and unfit to produce the human race.”*** The state Supreme Court agreed, declaring these types of marriages would be ***“a calamity full of the saddest and gloomiest portent to the generations that are to come after us.”***

Lawyers for California insisted that a ban on this type of marriage is necessary to prevent ***“traditional marriage from being contaminated by the recognition of relationships that are physically and mentally inferior,”*** and entered into by ***“the dregs of society.”***

“The law concerning marriages is to be construed and understood in relation to those persons only to whom that law relates,” thundered a Virginia judge in response to a challenge to that state’s non-recognition of these types of unions. ***“And not to a class of persons clearly not within the idea of the legislature when contemplating the subject of marriage.”***

These quotes were taken from Partners Task Force for Gay & Lesbian Couples website. The entire ‘Marriage Quiz’ can be viewed at <http://www.buddybuddy.com/quiz-1.html>.

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Appendix A

Confidentiality and Limits

For group members to feel safe enough to share their thoughts and feelings with each other, they must be reassured that the group environment is safe. All groups must operate out of the belief that what is said in the group stays in the group. Group members should be informed of the necessity for confidentiality in order to promote trust.

There are three situations in which the church should require group leaders to expand confidentiality. Group members should be informed of these limitations on the first day of group and periodically thereafter. The exceptions are as follows:

1. If a group member reports a desire to harm him/herself or another person (suicidal or homicidal ideation).
2. If a group member reports abusing children or the elderly in any way (many states have laws requiring this reporting even of the citizen population).
3. If a group member shares plans to commit a felony (past felonies are protected by laws of confidentiality).

If a group member shares any of these in the group setting, it is the group leader's responsibility to report it to their CARE group minister or senior pastor immediately. One of the ways to approach this issue with a new group is to inform them that confidentiality must be maintained within the group, but, there is one member that extends beyond those present every week, the CARE Group minister and the senior pastor. There are no confidentiality limitations across accountability lines.