

# The Bible and Homosexuality

This is the outline of the material presented at the Adult Forum of Foundry United Methodist Church by David Bissette in January, 2004. It is not meant to be a scholarly presentation in terms of footnotes, etc. Books used as background material for this presentation include:

- Atkinson, David. Homosexuals in the Christian Fellowship. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. 1979.
- Freedman, David Noel (Editor), Meyers, Allen C. (Editor), Beck, Astrid B. (Editor). Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2000.
- Helminiak, Daniel A. What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality. San Francisco: Alamo Square Press. 1994.
- McNeill, John. The Church and the Homosexual, Third Edition. Boston: Beacon Press. 1988.
- Scanzoni, Letha and Mollenkott, Virginia Ramey. Is the Homosexual Really My Neighbor? San Francisco: Harper. 1978
- Wink, Walter. Homosexuality and Christian Faith. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 1999.

## **I. Why the intensity of emotion around homosexuality all about?**

- A. It's about gender and fear of change in social order. Homosexuality says that the traditional understanding of what it means to be male and female is not complete. Men aren't always attracted to women, and vice versa.
- B. It's about how one looks at the Bible...how one sees the Bible being used by God to mature a world in values through the centuries
- C. It's about the character of God. How could God condemn someone to death for a behavior if it isn't intrinsically wrong? If homosexuality was "ok" why did God abandon the gay people of that day?
- D. Frankly, it's also probably about neurology

## **II. Gender and fear of change in social order**

- A. People react to anyone or any idea that will upset or change the order of the world as we know it.
- B. Even as late as the 1600's it was believed that the sun revolved around the earth. (Galileo was finally removed from the list of heretics by the Catholic church in 1992, and he was not allowed a Christian burial until 100 years after his death.)
- C. Look how left-handedness used to be treated as late as the 1900's...people were made to work with their right hand because this was "normal" and left-handedness was considered "abnormal" and to be avoided.
- D. Women's rights in general have caused much upset
- E. Role of women in church has been a source of very strong emotion
- F. Fear of letting go of slavery, racism, or interracial marriage--all have stirred up great amounts of prejudice and fear

## **III. It's about how we look at the Bible**

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- A. Simple, literal application vs. a more historical, critical method
- B. Dealing with the limitations of a book written over such a long time.
- C. It's about what the Bible records...is it a prescription of truths in final form from the first day?
  - 1. Clearly not...the "rules" change over time...the Mosaic Law was abolished, Gentiles were brought into the church (some of whom were supposed to have been annihilated centuries earlier when Israel entered the promised land.)
- D. How do we address the variations between the social values and mores contained in the Bible and those we hold today?
  - 1. Why isn't slavery ok now if it used to be?
  - 2. What's wrong with polygamy? II Samuel 12:7-8 *Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul. 'I also gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these!'"* NASB
  - 3. How can things be right at that point in history, but not later?
  - 4. Slaves - Jesus never condemned the practice of slavery, and slaves were took frequent roles in his parables. Slavery was assumed in scripture as a daily practice. Limits were placed on slavery within Israel, but the practice was not stopped. Why not? How can we justify the silence of scripture?
  - 5. In current culture, if God got Mary pregnant at the age of 14 or 15 God would be charged with child abuse.
- E. To me God seems to have adopted a strategy of limited objectives throughout history...not attempting to right all wrongs at once.
  - 1. It's not so much about God changing God's mind over time, and presenting different truths, but about what truths mankind was ready to hear
  - 2. There is also a line of thought that says some Old Testament material never should have been included in the first place...that reflections of the current culture overshadowed the entries. In terms of inspiration of scripture I'm not yet at this point in my own thinking, but I can understand how those who think this way may have gotten there. Most often we will simply ignore these passages when they don't fit with our current outlooks. We view them as weird and try not to think about them. Psa 137:8-9: "*O daughter of Babylon, whose fate is destruction; happy is the man who does to you what you have done to us. Happy is the man who takes your little ones, crushing them against the rocks.*" These are harsh words.
- F. Homosexuality as a sexual orientation is not likely to have been a Biblical concept (Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible - see excerpt at bottom of this outline) and God did not correct it
  - 1. Term homosexuality came about in 1800's.
  - 2. "Homogenital" activity in the Bible was typically thought of as done by heterosexual men

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3. Even today heterosexual men have sex with other men when women are not available for circumstantial or societal reasons (Rape in prison is more accurately called heterosexual rape of men, because it is often done by men who are heterosexual, but in the absence of possible female partners. In the Muslim world a distinction is made between having sex with men and being gay, and there are numerous anecdotal accounts of men having sex with men prior to marriage due to the danger of premarital sex with women.)

## IV. It's about the character of God

- A. It would be so harsh to leave out the gay people who were affected by the Old Testament and New Testament outlooks. If they were inadequate, why weren't they corrected? A very emotional issue, putting at stake the quality of God's care for those of us who are GLBT
- B. If we say that the condemnation of God still holds for the Old Testament precepts...doesn't the clear prescription of punishment also hold? Do we say that the Bible was too harsh?
- C. Who else got left out??
  1. Women - If you look at the Old Testament, particularly how women were treated and owned, there's no reason to think that they had great lives.
    - a. Women were chattel...the property of their husbands.
    - b. Men could become one flesh with as many women as they could afford to marry...and that doesn't even address the practice of having concubines. (David had many concubines and was "a man after God's own heart.")
    - c. The Bible was clearly "sexist" - women were unclean for a week after the birth of a male child, two weeks after the birth of a female child, etc.
  2. Children and the elderly - killing all of the children of the Canaanites when entering the promised land, etc. - euthanasia

## V. It's also probably about neurology

- A. Homosexuality is a strongly emotional issue for some folks because they do not make cognitive shifts of thought easily. This can involve problems in the anterior cingulate gyrus part of the brain.
- B. **Functions:** allows shifting of attention, cognitive flexibility, adaptability, helps the mind move from idea to idea, gives the ability to see options, helps you go with the flow, cooperation
- C. **Problems:** worrying, holds onto hurts from the past, stuck on thoughts (may be obsessions), stuck on behaviors (may be compulsions), oppositional behavior, argumentativeness, uncooperative, automatic tendency to say no, addictive behaviors (alcohol or drug abuse, eating disorders, chronic pain), cognitive inflexibility, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), eating disorders, road rage
- D. As a result, some really "stubborn" people who hold grudges and stick to "what has always worked in the past" actually have a neurological condition that may be helped by medication. In the same way, depression for some folks is significantly caused by problems with serotonin.

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- E. (Anxiety and Depression: The Revolutionary Brain-Based Program That Allows You to See and Heal the 7 Types of Anxiety and Depression by Daniel G. Amen, Lisa C. Routh. Putnam Pub Group)
- F. See <http://brainplace.com>

## VI. The “Clobber” passages

- A. Interpretation of the Bible and how it reflects current thinking
  - 1. Like the Supreme Court: interpretations of the constitution vary with evolving public values. The sodomy law has been declared unconstitutional because of changing views. What will happen with gay marriage?
  - 2. A good example is the words used in I Corinthians 6 and I Timothy 1.
    - a. Malakoi = effeminate, and until reformation with Protestants and 19th century with Catholics was taken to mean “masturbators.” A more recent Catholic Bible, the New American Bible, translates it to mean “practicing homosexuals” to differentiate it from non-practicing ones. The translation changes with time...radically at times. This word most likely means “wanton, lewd”
    - b. Arsenokoitai = “man-sleeper” or “man-penetrator”, probably refers to male prostitution
- B. Sodom and Gomorrah - Genesis 19: 1-11
  - 1. This story has been taught by some to be about homosexuality since the 12th century
  - 2. Not about homosexuality..certainly not about loving relationship between two same-sex people
  - 3. At the least, it’s about violence and rape - male to male anal sex in OT was thought to de-masculinize the receptive person and in many cases humiliate them
  - 4. Also, if it teaches that same sex activity is evil, does it then also teach that it is a good thing to offer up your daughter to men for rape rather than fighting to the death to protect them? Again, those who use this story to talk about homosexuality don’t really accept the story themselves in its entirety. They pick parts of it.
  - 5. Other scriptures comment on the situation: Ezekiel 16: 48-49, also Matthew 10:5-15
- C. Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13
  - 1. Here, in not adopting the practices of neighboring tribes - including incest, temple prostitution of both men and women, and other practices
  - 2. Do people really believe the death penalty is appropriate? Why was it needed then? And if it was needed then, why not now? Or if it was needed then and not now, then how about the whole commandment...maybe it’s not needed now either.
    - a. There are times in scripture when scripture seems to suggest that God definitely intended to scare his people.
    - b. When Uzzah steadied the ark of the covenant and died: II Samuel 6:6-7  
*“And when they came to the threshing-floor of Nacon, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen stumbled. And the*

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*anger of Jehovah was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God.”*

- c. When Ananias and Sapphira lied to Peter in Acts 5:1-11
  - d. As above, how do we interpret these events in terms of God's nature?
  - 3. Why wouldn't we think that such strong prohibitions about homogenital acts in Leviticus was for the purpose of making a point at a time in history...not to adopt the sexual customs of neighboring tribes, especially those used in worship?
  - 4. When God gave such specific instructions about not making cloth from certain combinations of materials but said nothing to abolish slavery, what is one to think? Certainly not that the content of cloth is intrinsically more important than the lives of those affected by slavery.
- D. Romans 1 - describes lustful acts...not loving relationships between same sex individuals. The argument is made again that this passage is about performing the behaviors associated with idolatry. Romans 1 also talks about three "God gave them over" occasions in sequence. The final result of the third "giving over" was that people were "gossips, disobedient to parents." Homosexuality was a lesser concern, apparently.
- E. I Corinthians 6:9-10 and I Timothy 1:10 - mentioned above

## **VII. How are we as Christians to grow in maturity of understanding about how we should live with one another?**

- A. How do we continue to let ourselves be educated with truths that we have not been ready to hear earlier?
- B. Test cases - VERY IMPORTANT in understanding how we are to be flexible in our thinking
  - 1. Peter and eating with Gentiles - what was unclean was now to be considered to be clean...and circumcision was not to be required of the new Gentile converts? They had a hard time comprehending such changes.
  - 2. The Sabbath day and Jesus...accused of violating the Old Testament law by acting humanely
  - 3. These flexible ways of looking at the world blew the minds of the Jews of that time
- C. What do we do about other injustices that still occur?
  - 1. How are we to address slavery that still exists in many ways in the world?
  - 2. What do we do about racism?
  - 3. What do we do about homophobia?

## **VIII. Our job, to grow in understanding and ethical knowledge**

- A. We all need to continue to let our old ideas be replaced by new ones
- B. The church: needs to acknowledge the legitimacy of gay relationships
  - 1. Gay people have a lot to offer, and need to be healed as a community from being labeled as sick and sinful. We suffer from being told we are outside of the community of personhood.

- C. The gay community needs to understand the church's concern about the sanctity of the human body and of being sexual in responsible ways.

**The following passage is a quote from: David Noel Freedman (Editor), Allen C. Myers (Editor), Astrid B. Beck (Editor), Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000)**

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## Homosexuality

The terms “homosexuality” and “homosexual” are coinages of the 19th century c.e. and have no equivalent in ancient Hebrew or Greek. It is debatable whether the modern idea of homosexuality (an erotic attraction focused only or primarily on persons of the same gender) existed at all in antiquity. The Bible does not appear to say anything directly about homosexuality in this modern sense of the term, but a few passages do refer to same-gender genital acts. The term “homosexual” appears in some modern English translations (usually in 1Cor. 6:9; 1Tim. 1:10), but the key Greek term involved (*arsenokoítes*) is rare and of uncertain meaning.

Passages that do refer to same-gender sexual acts or life commitments may be summarized as follows: Male-male rape In the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:16-33) the men of Sodom threaten Lot's guests by saying that they want to “know” them. Since the verb “to know” would be used in Hebrew as a euphemism for the sexual act, they may mean to commit anal rape on them, thus violating their sacred duty toward strangers. The later idea that the Sodom story condemns all male-male sexual acts does not appear in the story itself or in the references to Sodom elsewhere in the Bible, but first emerged in ancient Greek-speaking Judaism. In the NT Jude interprets the sin of Sodom as the desire to have sex with angels (“strange flesh”; Jude 7).

### Same-sex intercourse as violation of purity

In Leviticus male-male sexual intercourse is condemned as an “abomination,” i.e., a serious violation of purity (Lev. 18:22; 20:13). (There is no reference to female-female sexual intercourse in the OT.) In Rom. 1:18-32 Paul treats same-sex intercourse as a prime example of the impurity characteristic of Gentiles. He regards it as unclean and dishonorable and as a punishment visited on the Gentiles for their failure to worship the true God. He does not specifically say that it is sinful.

### Same-sex commitments

Same-sex commitments sometimes take precedence over heterosexual household connections. Ruth left her people to go with Naomi (Ruth 1:15-18). David and Jonathan were bound by covenant and love (1Sam. 18:1-5; 20:1-42; 2Sam. 1:17-27). The centurion's “boy” (Gk. *país*) whom Jesus healed at a distance (Luke 7:1-10) may have been his master's *eromenos* (“beloved”). In none of these cases can we say with certainty whether the relationship had a

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genital dimension or not. Modern discussions of homosexuality take some or all of these passages into account, but their meaning and authority are interpreted differently by different interpreters. None of them appears to address modern questions directly.

## **Bibliography**

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M.L. Soards, *Scripture and Homosexuality* (Louisville, 1995).

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**End of quote from Eerdman's Dictionary of the Bible**