

Welcome...our nights together over the scriptures are March 16, 23, and 30 from 630-730pm

Covenant=who we agree to be together...

- Everyone present today is created in the image of God. What we would do to Jesus the Christ, let us do to the other.
- We aim to listen while others are speaking so all can hear...and leave blessed by our respect.
- We agree in the gift of differing perspectives. Maybe your greatest gift to me is your difference from me.
- We feel free to process verbally or non-verbally, but sharing the time so many can contribute.
- We will speak well of each other here and after we have gone. Personal details are not yours to tell, what you are learning is your gift to share...
- Speak personally—"I believe...," or, "in my opinion," or, "I feel..."
- Avoid universal phrases such as, "everyone knows..." or, "no intelligent person believes..." or "all good Christians accept..."
- Be careful not to insult, belittle, mock, or shock the people you are speaking to and with.
- Share why what you believe matters to you, if you can, rather, than just stating what you believe.
- Your question is welcome.
- Let's take a few seconds to look at those...Anything else needed for our covenant?

Overview: We have set aside time to look at the scripture often used by people to understand what the Bible says about homosexuality. We will look at history and context. We cannot reduce our overview of scripture to 6 or 8 texts, so hopefully you will learn more about context, and decide for yourself after the three weeks, if you want to study more, need more information, or have a general idea of what the scriptures teach about homosexuality. We aim to identify who was the text written to, what was its context, and what might it say to us now?

- **Biblical interpretation: Word of God or Words of God?**
 - * About 30% of U.S. citizens believe the Bible is the "actual" words of God, dictated to humans
 - * About 60% believe the Bible is "inspired" by God, written by humans
 - * About 10% believe the Bible is a book of fables, legends, history and moral principles

- **Lenses of Interpretation: 4 possible approaches**

- * **Literal:**

- * Scripture is directly & literally inspired by God and represents God's words for all times and places
 - * Bible is infallible (incapable of error)
 - * Bible is trustworthy witness to the exact actions/events of God's work
 - * Bible is sufficient to bring us to faith & salvation in Jesus Christ

- * **Historical-Critical:**

- * Scripture is the Word of God but not the words of God
 - * Bible witnesses to God's Word and actions but was written by humans who have an evolving understanding and make errors and that is reflected in the words
 - * Scripture was written in a particular time and culture and meaning can be found in understanding the context
 - * Study of a text should incorporate: historical setting, language development, identity of original audience & writer, how audience would likely have understood the language of the text
 - * Scripture has ongoing authority & influence when it is interpreted with the context in mind

- * **Socio-Cultural:**

- * Emerges from marginalized/oppressed groups in 20th cent.
 - * Scripture & interpretation of scripture reflects the dominant social, cultural, political view of the time in which it was written
 - * Marginalized/oppressed people are usually misrepresented or ignored in Bible as it is the writing of the dominant people/groups
 - * Invitation is to stand within our own "social locations" to interpret scripture
 - * Asks: how does this passage speak to my/our experience? Who's invisible here? What's not being said? Who is powerless? Why is something so important in early Hebrew or Christian communities?

- * **Unitive-Devotional:**

- * Bible has message for people of faith today about daily living and can provide guidance
 - * Scripture can serve as a reminder that we are not alone and can provide comfort and strength
 - * What provides the greatest meaning in scripture will depend on our personal situation
 - * Each time we approach scripture, we come from a new/different place as our lives evolve

Tonight we anticipate a look at one of the Hebrew Scriptures, our Old Testament.

Some passages once seen as speaking to the issue of same-sex love are not pertinent. Let's start with **Genesis 19.1-11** (-29). (There is a similar account in Judges 19-21.) Let's read it...and offer some background. Genesis comes to us through many layers of oral history, ninth and 8th century BCE sources, and then these stories take their final shape after the exile, in the 5th century BCE.

- Genesis 19 follows 18, a section on hospitality as entertaining the sacred. Both Abraham & Lot wait at an entrance. Lot is waiting in the city gate, where justice is debated, and when night falls—a time when no one would be safe alone on the street.
- Two messengers/angels come to Sodom to visit. Lot saw them in the gate and welcomed them to his home.
- After dinner the men of Sodom pressed Lot to give up the strangers to rape (unaware of their connection to the sacred, or that they arrived as a message). The issue of whether love can be expressed between same-sex people is not the topic, it is to what extent can we practice hospitality? Lot addresses the gang (v.7) as 'brothers,'/kinsmen. The story silently suggests the human cannot see the stranger as one with sacred connection & power.
- Lot, to keep the honor of hospitality, offers his daughters to be raped. In this culture, the host/guest bond and hospitality took preference over all other obligations. The story is not about homosexual love but rape, power, justice, and hospitality. In v. 9, the gang addresses Lot with the word meaning, 'sojourner,' an 'alien,' suggesting he has no power/rights, that he cannot play the 'judge.' The cultural assumptions about the value of women and men are exposed in the story.
- **See Ezekiel 16.48, & 49.** The prophets do not see Gen. 19 as about same-sex or heterosexual love, but the treatment of the poor and needy as a feature of hospitality.
- This text is troubling and complex, where might God be speaking to us?

A preview of next week...

The use of the law for condemnation: Leviticus 18.22; 20.13. The 'law' is the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures. These texts take their *final* shape after the exile (6th century BCE). The ethos for the Israelites derives from the feeling that exile was the consequence of not keeping the law, and losing their distinct heritage and witness as Jews. So they return to practice with strict obedience.

The law takes its final shape as 213 laws, including a law and penalty for everything from washing your dishes to not sleeping with a woman during her menstrual cycle, to stoning someone who was not a virgin before marriage, to stoning someone who committed adultery. Two, possibly three references of the 213 condemn same-sex sexual behavior. A literal interpretation would require the death penalty for the circumstances above. The law would only allow men to divorce women, not women to divorce men. How do Christians live with these laws? What might Galatians 3.10-11, 24-25 suggest? What does Galatians 3.26-28 suggest?

What should we hold in prayer tonight?

Uncommon Look @ Common Scriptures: Homosexuality Class 2: 3/23/11

First United Methodist Church: Waukesha, WI

Welcome & Review of Class Covenant

Overview for tonight: We'll study the Holiness Code in Leviticus 17-26 and look at the verses of law most often used today for condemnation of homosexuality: Leviticus 18:22, 20:13. In addition to the Holiness Code, we'll explore the power dynamics at play for ancient Israel. We'll read everything that Jesus said about homosexuality and we'll begin a study of 1st century understandings of the law for the early Christian community.

Holiness Code: Leviticus 17-26 is the Holiness Code and is a part of a larger Priestly Code that runs Exodus 19:1 – Numbers 10:10 which lays out the moral and ritual laws.

- The main purpose of the Holiness Code (Leviticus 18: 1-4): to establish the distinctiveness of the Israelites over against the other religious cults/traditions of the time (Egyptians, Canaanites).
- Keeping categories of creation distinct keeps them pure – this applies to humans, food, fibers...
- This code gives the picture of Israel's ideal relationship with God. The laws set out to distance humans from the imperfections of the world so that they could assume a measure of God's holiness.
- Clean = pure = holy = like God. "defiled" or "unclean" is not a moral distinction as much as a physical distinction. An "unclean" person must wash him/herself before being able to approach temple
- The Holiness Code creates a holiness continuum that is power based and brokers the relationship between humans and God. It looks like this:
 1. God (in temple, in tabernacle's Holy of Holies)
 2. High Priest (in temple, in tabernacle's Holy of Holies)
 3. Priests (in temple, in tabernacle's outer sanctuary)
 4. Israelite men who are "clean" (in temple's inner court)
 5. Israelite women who are "clean" (in temple's outer court)
 6. Gentiles (in temple's colonnade)
 7. Israelites who are "unclean" (out of temple, in/out of camps depending on level of impurity)
- "Abomination" = towebah, meaning: 'something abhorred' or 'something disgusting' (aka: defiled/unclean/impure). A breach of the purity laws.

Power Dynamics: Power comes from one's ability to be close to God.

- Females are considered subordinate to males. Their value comes from their necessity in the biological continuation of the race. Children had a high mortality rate.
- Women were the property of men and were acquired through betrothal & marriage. The role of wives = bear legitimate children.
- The confinement of women was seen as necessary to prevent suspicion about the legitimacy of children.
- The right of divorce belonged to men only; women were not allowed to take action against men for infidelity.
- Women were unable to fulfill all the commands of the law, which was the highest privilege recognized by rabbinic Judaism.

Leviticus 18:22, 20:13: remember, this text is written & revised during & after Babylonian exile when there is a need to separate Israel from gentile/foreign/pagan nations.

- The only place where the law specifically prohibits same sex intercourse
- Hebrew pre-scientific understanding: semen = whole/seed of life. Women = incubation space, not contributing to the creation/life of the baby.
- Continuation of legitimate Israelite tribe necessitates prohibitions of non-procreative sex: male-male, male masturbation, abortion, male adultery (legitimate children cannot be born from adultery). Female-female sex is not mentioned in Old Testament.
- See how "abomination" is closely tied to "defiled" indicating a breach of the purity laws. Leviticus 20:25-26
- 20:13 is the only biblical text that names death as the punishment for male-male sex. Note that Chp. 20 names all of the following as punishable by death:
 1. v.2 offering your child as a sacrifice to the Ammonite god, Molech
 2. v.9 cursing your father or mother
 3. v.10 a man committing adultery with his neighbor's wife
 4. v.11 a man having sex with his step-mother
 5. v.12 a man having sex with his daughter-in-law
 6. v.13 a man having sex with another man
 7. v.14 a man having sex with his wife AND his mother-in-law
 8. v.15 a man having sex with an animal
 9. v.16 a woman having sex with an animal
 10. Other sexual acts are listed with varying punishments

What did Jesus have to say?

- (nothing)
- Read the Gospels to find what Jesus has to say about the need of religious people to include the outcast.
 1. Jesus overturns religious & social traditions that have the purpose of condemning people (Matthew 5, Sermon on the Mount)
 2. Jesus refuses to accept traditions that exclude whole groups of people (Luke 10:29-37, Good Samaritan)
 3. Jesus calls into question the catalog of sin (John 8:1-11, let the one without sin cast the first stone)
- Matthew 19:16-19. Where did the idea come from? Leviticus 19:18!

Early Christian View of the Law

- Galatians 3:10-11, 23-26
- How might God be speaking to us in these texts?

Preview of next week: we'll look at the Pauline texts: Romans 1:18-26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 1 Timothy 1:9-10 as well as the Greco-Roman influence on the understanding of homosexuality at the time these texts were written (and how it compares to our understanding today.)

What do you lift up in prayer tonight?

Welcome

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Overview:

Dr. Vic Furnish who retired recently from Perkins School of Theology at SMU, says the three filters for understanding the letters of Paul are:

- **soteriology** (matters related to what does salvation mean for us),
- **Christology** (matters related to how Jesus is understood as Christ and Lord of all), and
- **ecclesiology** (matters related to how the church should live.
- These are the major themes, and as such, there is no completed sexual ethic. We are piecing together ideas across letters written to deal with different questions.

Sin vs. sins:

- The word '**sins**' appears 7 times in the letters scholars accept as Paul's. Those seven times are all describing collective experience, ie., 'our sins,' Gal.1:4.
- The word '**sin**' appears 53 times in Paul's letters, describing a collective condition we share. North American Christians seem to see sin as individual sins, and not *a condition and reality we all experience in different ways*.
- Likewise, to be 'in Christ,' (2Cor.5:17), is a shared condition. This condition involves the ever-constant transformation of becoming a new creation, being of one body (of Christ), in a shared baptism and shared trajectory through time, in a new community.

Romans: (1:26-27)

So one of the scriptures often used to describe Paul's condemnation of same-sex love, is first about soteriology, second, about Christology, and about 'sin' that all share. Paul names every human, every practice, in rhetoric that comes to this aim, noting, 'all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (3:23). Roman rhetoric, the making of arguments, started with what was the weakest reason, culminating in your best argument.

- Paul aims to show all have sinned by starting with those who worship idols across the ages, noting God's nature can be understood in creation, and has been across time, so 'they are without excuse.' (Ro. 1:20). Argument number one, remember, is the weakest.
- So Paul moves his argument along—with the aim to show all have sinned--using conventional wisdom, 'what everybody knows.' For Romans, this was 'natural law.' When Paul says, 'their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural...and likewise the men,' he is arguing that same-sex love is not natural. He is not using the law/Torah to look at same-sex love, just passing on what everyone seems to know. This argument does not understand biological origins for homosexuality, but interestingly argues, that we should do what is natural and not live against nature. (If we would use, 'do what is natural' as a sexual ethic, would we apply that to heterosexual behavior? Adults and teens?)
- Then in v.28, 'those' become us: 'every kind of wickedness, evil covetousness, malice, envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, and gossips, etc., to 2:1, "you have no excuse whoever you are," and then he moves to the Jews under the law...to 3:9, "are we any better off? No..." to 3:20, "through the law comes knowledge of sin."
- All of Romans, from chapter 1 to chapter 3 is making one point, we all share the condition of sin. Not sins, but that we live in a shared condition of sin, equally. The hinge of Romans turns on 3:23 and 24, "since all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Jesus."

Is this passage about same-sex love? If so, how? Is it about something else? If so, what? Which of Paul's filters is this about?

Greco-Roman Culture

- Young women = picture of beauty, young men = embodiment of the ideal
 1. Noblest form of love = friendship between men, which could also include sexual relations
 2. Part of the education of young men included an older male mentor and even pederasty
- Canaanite & Babylonian worship included male & female temple prostitutes w/role of having sex to please the fertility gods. The condemnation of these prostitutes is based on their worship of alien gods. The temple of Aphrodite in Corinth was said to have had 1,000 “sacred prostitutes.”
- The only understanding of same-sex intercourse was in situations considered abusive or exploitative. Exploiting another male as you would a female was condemned. A male taking on the role of a woman (thereby suggesting they can be exploited) was one of the factors in the discussion against “unnatural” sexual behavior. There was no common understanding of loving same-sex relationships.
- There were no words in Hebrew or ancient Greek equivalent in meaning to our English words for “homosexual” or “homosexuality.” The term “homosexuality” wasn’t coined until later part of 19th century.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and 1 Timothy 1:9-10(written after Paul’s death but penned in his name)

- Examples of common “gentile sinners” lists. No two New Testament vice lists are identical and contain any number of things considered pagan behavior.
- Moichos – always translated “adulterers”
- Malakoi, arsenokoitai – translated differently in almost every version of scripture (see translation chart to track the development of the translation)
- Arsenokoitai = arsen (male), koitai (bed). Only found in these two places in scripture.
- Malakoi = soft, sometimes used in Greek lit. as slang for “effeminate” or “weak.” Is word most often used elsewhere to describe “call-boys” who offer their bodies for pay to older males.
- Shifts in translation do not occur because of new biblical work but because of shifts in the social/cultural understanding of gender/sexuality/sexual orientation
- Scholars suggest a variety of things:
 1. Suggesting KJV (effeminate) is accurate and that Paul condemns effeminacy would continue the diminishment of women that is implied in the ancient use of malakoi
 2. Accurate translation of arsenokoitai is a male (free or slave) using sexual attractiveness to ingratiate himself with a rich, elderly lover (male or female) with the hope of replacing more legitimate heirs and receiving a substantial economic legacy
 3. Text function together with Leviticus texts to extend Holiness Code to set Christians apart from the pagan practice
 4. The great variety of translations point to the lack of our current understanding of homosexuality and do not point to loving same-sex relationships

Concluding Thoughts:

- Most readers would agree with the Bible in rejecting:
 1. Incest
 2. Rape
 3. Adultery
 4. Intercourse with animals
- But we disagree with the Bible by allowing the following things the Bible condemns:
 1. Intercourse during menstruation
 2. Celibacy (some texts)
 3. Exogamy (marriage with non-Israelites)
 4. Nudity (under certain conditions)
 5. Masturbation
 6. Birth control
 7. Touching semen/menstrual blood as it makes one unclean
- Likewise, the Bible permits behaviors we condemn today:
 1. Prostitution
 2. Polygamy
 3. Levirate marriage (obligation to marry your brother's widow)
 4. Sex with slaves
 5. Concubinage
 6. Treatment of women as property
 7. Very early marriage (for girls, age 11-13)
 8. The Old Testament accepted divorce, but because women were tossed away like disposable property, Jesus forbids divorce.
- We agree with the Bible on 4 issues. We disagree on 15. If we are to keep the law, we must keep it entirely (Gal. 5:3).
- Why are we proof-texting about respectful, committed, same-sex love, and not also in step with these other condemnations?
- A century ago, biblical readers moved away from slavery despite the scriptures support of it in some places. The general tone of scriptural witness was to liberate.
- No sexual act (perhaps any act – sexual or otherwise) is ethical in and of itself without reference to the rest of a person's life, relationships, circumstances, cultural understandings and the study scripture.

What may be some steps forward in this dialogue about human sexuality and Christian practice?

Closing Prayer