

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE

REALLY
SAY ABOUT

HOMOSEXUALITY



AND THE CONVERSATION BEGINS

This booklet is intended for you to have a theological conversation with yourself, with your neighbour and with an arm of the Christian tradition that has systematically and routinely used the bible to establish a posture of animosity and exclusion of the LGBTQ2S community. Theology is a conversation about God and our primary conversation partner is the bible.

The bible is an intergenerational argument for God and engages the questions: who is God; what is God doing; how do we approach God.? That's the bible's purpose, over generations. We use it as a tool to have a conversation about God, to draw ourselves into relationship with God. Loving God is the reason we study theology. Theology doesn't simply satisfy a curiosity. Theology grows faith that leads to commitment, that leads to the great work of loving the world that God loves, and ultimately healing the world that God loves.

A LENS FOR INTERPRETING THE BIBLE

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And so, our work begins and ends in the world, with an operating assumption that God is in the world.

God's action is always on behalf of the world that God made. God's agency is for the benefit of the world. However we look on the world, the great work of love is to see God and the world in a single sustained gaze. Our capacity to see the world the way it is, the goodness and the horrors, and our ability to sustain our gaze (to not look away) is exactly the measure of our capacity for God.

My hope in preparing this conversation starter is that you will understand the context of six texts which have been used to clobber others with a particular perspective. My hope is that you will learn new ways of interpreting these texts, as well as other readings, so that we might fulfill God given commission to renew our minds

**"I CAME THAT YOU MIGHT HAVE LIFE
AND HAVE IT ABUNDANTLY"**

In Romans 12, Paul writes: *"I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect."* (Romans 12:1-2, NRSV)

Interpretive Principles

I read the bible through a particular set of lenses. This might be referred to as my paradigm, or in fancier language my hermeneutical approach to interpreting the bible.

All knowledge is a revelation of God. When we learn something new, we are learning something about God. If God is in the world, then all knowledge is a revelation of the incarnational God.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. (Deuteronomy 6:5 NRSV) To learn new things, is to love God with all your mind.

You are the beloved child of God. The psalmist writes “*For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.*” (Psalm 139:13, 14 – NRSV). When Jesus says “*I came that you might have life and have it abundantly,*” in John 10, the abundant life is that you will come into the fullness of how you have been made as the beloved child.

In his book, *Reading the Bible with Heart and Mind*, Peter Gomes writes that when it comes to biblical interpretation there are three things we need to avoid:

Worshipping the bible as if it’s the fourth person of the Godhead. “The bible is not God, nor is it a substitute for God, and to treat it as if it were God or a surrogate of God is to treat it in the very way that it itself condemns over and over.” It becomes an idol.

Taking the bible literally. The bible is poetry, prophesy, liturgical form, historical narrative, mythology and apocalyptic. Literalism doesn’t want to be held hostage to these literary devices, but literalism itself is hostage to the 18th century illusion that truth and meaning are the same thing.”

Culturism. This is a term that Gomes uses in describing how the bible is used to support the status quo, no matter what the

status quo. This is getting the bible to support our position on any number of positions. Culturism was at the heart of the conflict between abolitionists and slave owners - both arguing their position with the use of particular biblical texts.

The church has sinned in all three accounts in its use of **the seven clobber texts** to abuse and justify the abuse of LGBTQ2S people.

Summary Assumptions

If all knowledge is a revelation of God, and Paul calls us to the renewing of our minds, and Jesus named one of the two most important laws as loving God with our mind, then we have learned many things since the scriptures were written about the topic at hand. If meaning is to be found in biblical study, it has to be held up in conversation with other disciplines that have provided new knowledge and a previously unseen revelation of God.

WE DON’T WORSHIP THE BIBLE, WE DON’T TAKE IT LITERALLY, AND WE DON’T TRY TO GET IT TO SAY ANYTHING WE WANT IN SUPPORT OF OUR STATUS QUO.

HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE BIBLE

When we say homosexual in the 2020 context, and we read about same sex behaviour in the bible, are we talking about the same things? The word homosexual did not appear in our understanding until the mid to late 1800's when a German psychologist Karl Westphal used it in an article discussing characteristics of humanity. He was discussing identity, and inherent qualities that made people unique – personality, spirituality, sexual identity.

You will not find the word homosexual in any bible translation prior to the Revised Standard Version, published in 1946.

Same sex activity was not understood to grow out of a person's innate genetic make up. It was described as behaviours, and mostly excessive behaviours that took people away from a relationship with God.

Same-sex gender orientation as normative, as a created way of being, especially in committed, consensual same sex relationships are not what the bible is talking about in the texts we're talking about today. Sexual orientation as we understand it, to be part of a person's innate human make up was an unknown reality in biblical times. Same sex behaviour was just that, and according to Matthew Vines in his book *God and the Gay Christian*, it was usually associated with general luxury and self-indulgence. Vines quotes Richard Hays "sexual orientation is a modern idea of which there is no trace either in the New Testament or in any other Jewish or Christian writings in the ancient world. The usual supposition of writers (at the time) was that homosexual behaviour was the result of insatiable lust seeking novel and more challenging forms of self-gratification."

This is the ground zero in our exploration of these things. What the bible is talking about, and what we talk about relative to sexual orientation and gender identity are not the same things.

THE WORD HOMOSEXUAL DID NOT APPEAR IN OUR UNDERSTANDING UNTIL THE MID TO LATE 1800'S

4 VERSES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

**EACH OF US IS MADE MALE AND FEMALE.
THIS IS THE DIVINE IMAGE OF GOD, WE ARE
BLESSED AND WE ARE VERY GOOD.**

1 The First Creation Story – Genesis 1:26-27

Then God said, “Let us make humankind[c] in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

So God created humankind[e] in God’s image, in the image of God they were created;[f]male and female they were created.

God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

The first clobber text comes from the first story of creation on the sixth day. However, if we read the words that are on the page, in the way they are intended, it becomes an ally in the conversation. On the sixth day of creation God created humankind in God’s image. Male and Female God made them. And blessed them. And they were indeed good, very good. The pronouns are they and them. We begin to read this with the eyes of the non-binary transgender community. Here is a non-binary God, creating humankind in God’s image. Each of us is made male and female. This is the divine image of God, we are blessed and we are very good.

2 THE STORY OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH

is perhaps the most famous instance in scripture where homosexuality is seen to be condemned. From the name of the destroyed city of Sodom came the term sodomy. Gomes quotes historian James Boswell “Throughout the Middle Ages the closest word to homosexual in Latin or in any vernacular was sodomita” pointing out that in various times and places the word meant everything from ordinary heterosexual intercourse in an atypical position to oral sexual contact with animals. At some points in history *sodomita* has referred almost exclusively to male homosexuality and at other times almost exclusively to heterosexual excess. In every instance in the King James Bible where the term sodomite is used, the reference is to male prostitutes associated with places of worship.

Genesis 19:1-9

The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and bowed down with his face to the ground. 2 He said, “Please, my lords, turn aside to your servant’s house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you can rise early and go on your way.” They said, “No; we will spend the night in the square.” 3 But he urged them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and

he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. 4 But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; 5 and they called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them.” 6 Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, 7 and said, “I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. 8 Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof.” 9 But they replied, “Stand back!” And they said, “This fellow came here as an alien, and he would play the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them.” Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and came near the door to break it down.

Here we have the two most condemned cities in all of history (according to the bible) about to be wiped out by God’s powerful hand. Two male angels have come to warn Lot against God’s pending judgment. These are the same two male angels who told Sarah she would have a baby. The men of Sodom come pounding on the door demanding that the angels come out so they can know them; not that “knowing them” means anything sexual. This idea (to know someone) appears 943 times in the bible, and in only ten of them does this have to do with sexual behaviour..

Lot pleads with these men, *you can rape my two virgin daughters...leave these men alone.* Its incredulous that the church doesn't seem to be as worried about the offering up of the daughters, as they do when two men are having close encounters. The angels rescue Lot, and his daughters, and pronounce judgment on the city.

If we were to take out all references to sexuality, this story would not lose its power. The city is already wicked for all sorts of reasons. The Old Testament tells us what was wrong in this story...in Ezekiel 16, without any reference to same-sex relationships:

"This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy."

In his book Peter Gomes writes: "Homosexual rape is never to be condoned; it is indeed, like heterosexual rape, an abomination before God." He quotes Jeffrey Siker from an article in *Theology Today*: "David's sin of adultery with Bathsheba does not make all heterosexual expressions sinful!"

THE STORY OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH HOW IT HAS BEEN USED. THE ANGELS WERE ABOUT TO PRONOUNCE GOD'S JUDGMENT ON THE CITY FOR ITS WICKED WAYS. THE MEN OF THE TOWN WANTED TO STOP THEM BY RAPING THEM, IN A DISPLAY OF MALE DOMINANCE. WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON IS THAT SODOM IS CONDEMNED FOR ITS LACK OF GENEROUS HOSPITALITY TO THE POOREST AND LOWLIEST.

THE LEVITICAL HOLINESS CODE

3

Leviticus 18:22 *"You shall not lie with a male as with a woman: it is an abomination"*

4

Leviticus 20:13 *"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."*

The holiness code of ancient Israel was a set of rules designed for a very particular purpose and in a very particular setting. Their purpose is nation building; their setting is that nation's entry into a promised but very foreign land. These are fundamental laws for the formation of a frontier community. Honouring one's parents, keeping the Sabbath, showing appropriate hospitality and abstaining from idol worship, ... all applied equally. These and many other actions are condemned because they defy purity and weaken the cultural identification of the children of Israel. This is so important that to violate ritual and ethnic purity in most cases warrants the sentence of death.

Since the word homosexual did not appear in any language until it was coined in the mid-1800's; Leviticus is NOT

talking about homosexuality in the way we understand it today. Scholars are divided whether these two verses referred to sexual acts performed as religious cultic acts by surrounding pagan nations, or other forms of cultic or temple prostitution that was commonplace in the Ancient Near East.

**LEVITICUS IS NOT TALKING ABOUT
HOMOSEXUALITY IN THE WAY WE
UNDERSTAND IT TODAY.**

3 VERSES OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

PAUL IS NOT WRITING ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY IN ROMANS, OR HOW HE WOULD HAVE UNDERSTOOD IT, OR EVEN HOW WE UNDERSTAND IT. HE IS WRITING ABOUT THE FALLEN NATURE OF HUMANKIND.

Let's turn to Paul

In all of his writing, Paul takes for granted the natural ordering of things in which the body and its sexual desires have their place and their honour; but the sexual acts he writes about, dishonour the body. He is speaking about passions out of control that become an end in and of themselves – idolatrous. The worship of sexual pleasure is an excess to be condemned with all other excesses

Romans 1:18-28

1 *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.*

For this reason, God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done.

According to Peter Gomes, Paul is not writing about homosexuality in Romans, or how he would have understood it, or even how we understand it. He is writing about the fallen nature of humankind. It is this corrupted will that has caused both Gentile and Jew to suppress the truth by their wickedness. The natural relations exchanged for unnatural among women and among men, does not describe the conduct of homosexuals, but rather of heterosexual people who performed homosexual acts. His discussion of what is natural has to do with the social construct of his time.

Paul is writing within the Roman Empire.

This is Caesar Gaius' Rome, Caligula's Rome. For the most part, when Paul is discussing same-sex behaviour, Paul is protesting the abuse of power. One of those is the practice of pederasty (Older men, mentoring young, pre-teen boys which commonly included sexual behaviour.)

It was commonly practiced. However, in Caligula's Rome, the most common known examples of pederasty were Roman

officers and officials who purchased boy slaves for sexual intercourse. These boys were often procured through temple prostitution, and the officials kept them as personal sex slaves, somewhat like sex trafficking today. Paul is discussing power abuses, not loving relationships; that and heterosexual people performing homosexual acts.

**PAUL IS DISCUSSING POWER ABUSES,
NOT LOVING RELATIONSHIPS.**

According to Peter Gomes "What is patently unknown to Paul is the concept of a homosexual nature, that is, using Paul's sense of the word "nature," something that is beyond choice, something that is not characterized by lust, avarice, idolatry or exploitation, and that aspires to life under the jurisdiction of the Holy Spirit. All Paul knew about homosexuality was the debauched pagan expression of it.



2 1 Timothy 1:8-11

“Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it legitimately. This means understanding that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their father or mother, for murderers, fornicators, sodomites, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me”.

1 Timothy 1:10 addresses the same problem in Ephesus...and it sounds a lot like Paul. Power abuses. Here the word “sodomites” is used in the manner described earlier, the “male prostitutes associated with places of worship.” Neither Paul, nor the author of 1 Timothy were addressing what we understand to be homosexuality today. They’re saying, “you don’t get to buy young boys for sex.” We would likely all agree.

**THIS VERSE DOES NOT DISCUSS SAME SEX
RELATIONSHIPS BUT IS SAYING “YOU DO NOT GET
TO BUY YOUNG BOYS FOR SEX”**

3 Jude 1:6 - 7

“And the angels who did not keep their own position, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains in deepest darkness for the judgment of the great day. Likewise, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which, in the same manner as they, indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural lust, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.”

In the letter of Jude, there is an obscure reference to Sodom and Gomorrah, also used as one of the six clobber texts. But Jude is addressing unnatural sexual relationships between angels and humans, not committed same sex relationships.

**JUDE IS ADDRESSING UNNATURAL SEXUAL
RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ANGELS AND HUMANS
NOT COMMITTED SAME SEX RELATIONSHIPS**



THE REAL CONVERSATION BEGINS...

In *Theology Today*, Jeffrey Siker writes: “Thus the bible has relatively little to say that directly informs us about how to address the issue of homosexual Christians today. The bible certainly does not positively condone homosexuality as a legitimate expression of human sexuality, but neither does it expressly exclude loving monogamous homosexual adult Christian relationships from being within the realm of God’s intentions for humanity.”

In *Christianity Today*, Stanton Jones writes. “We can only change our position on homosexuality by changing our fundamental stance on biblical authority, by changing our core view of sexuality, and by changing the meaning and character of Christ’s call on our lives.”

The Hebrew Scriptures call us. *“You shall love the lord your god with all your heart, soul mind and strength, and you shall love the neighbour as yourself. When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God: Deuteronomy 6:5 NRSV.*

THE CHURCH THAT LOVES GOD AND LOVES
NEIGHBOUR IS THE CHURCH THAT CELEBRATES
THE DIVERSITY OF ALL HUMAN KIND. AS THE
LIVING BODY OF CHRIST IT CELEBRATES THE FULL
EXPRESSION OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN,
MADE IN THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD
FINDING LIFE IN ALL ITS ABUNDANCE.



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**THIS BOOKLET WAS PREPARED BY
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**LYNN VALLEY UNITED CHURCH BELIEVES THAT ALL SEXUAL
ORIENTATIONS, GENDER IDENTITIES AND GENDER EXPRESSIONS
ARE PART OF GOD'S DIVINE PLAN AND GIFT OF DIVERSITY IN
HUMANITY. IN 2019 WE BEGAN OUR PROCESS TO BECOME AN
OFFICIALLY AFFIRMING CONGREGATION OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF
CANADA. THIS INTENTIONAL PROCESS WILL LEAD US THROUGH
THOUGHTFUL DISCUSSION, STORY TELLING, EDUCATION AND
COMPASSION. LYNN VALLEY UNITED CHURCH WANTS TO BE KNOWN
FOR RADICAL INCLUSIVITY & GENEROUS HOSPITALITY SO ALL MAY
KNOW THE UNCONDITIONAL LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST.**

ALL MEANS ALL

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