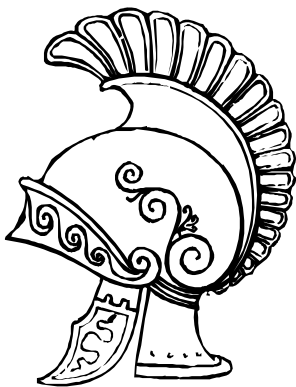


The Bible and Homosexuality

Scholarship & Diversity Study

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."
John 16:33



“Adam and Eve”

“But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.” Genesis 2:8-10

*“So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.” Genesis 1:27*

The Story of Adam and Eve is an explanation, not a prescription. Leading Jewish Scholar Rabbi Joseph Telushkin maintains:

“Genesis central assertion is that all humankind descended from one couple to simply show the basis of the biblical view that all people of all races and religions are brothers and sisters.”

Notice that nowhere does Jewish understanding make Genesis a reference to being a heterosexual mandate.

Quickfacts:

1. Eve was not created as purely a sex partner, or child bearer. Eve was created as a “helpmate” – a companion. This is certainly the basis of love in all relationships, hetero and homosexual.
2. Adam and Eve certainly seem to be God’s idea, but there is no reason to believe they were God’s ONLY idea. A God who can make 300 types of mushroom, can certainly make more than 2 types of people.
3. To conclude that Adam and Eve are the model for who we should be leaves us with more questions than answers. If this one couple populated the earth without God creating “others” then we are all the product of incest. Surely that is not the biblical message. Who was Mrs. Cain? An “other” created by God, just as we all are.
4. The logic that we should all be exactly like the first couple is specious at best. What if Adam had brown eyes? Should all men have brown eyes?

Clearly the Hebrew creation narrative from thousands of years ago was given in oral tradition as an explanation of who we began as, and how we should act knowing that we are all “related” as God’s children. No argument against same-sex orientation is present, or presented.

The Good News: “God saw all that God had made, and it was very good.”

Genesis 1:31

“Leviticus”

*“Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.”
Leviticus 18:22*

*“If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.”
Leviticus 20:13*

Leviticus seems to make things pretty clear. God doesn't like gay male sexuality activity. But look again, Levitical laws (found from Exodus – Deuteronomy) make other things equally clear:

- “For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh day shall be your holy day, a Sabbath of rest to the LORD. Whoever does any work on it must be put to death.” Exodus 35:2
- “Your male and female slaves are to come from the nations around you; from them you may buy slaves.... You can will them to your children as inherited property and can make them slaves for life, but you must not rule over your fellow Israelites ruthlessly.” Leviticus 25:44-46.
- “If a man sells his daughter as a servant, she is not to go free as menservants do.” Exodus 21:7

Quickfacts:

1. The fact is the Levitical Laws are part of the “Holiness Code” of Israel, a set of laws designed to set the nation of Israel apart from other religions and maintain a standard of holiness that showed allegiance Yahweh (God). Even Jewish people no longer follow the holiness code, but understand it as a book of ritual laws from a bygone age. They do not apply to Christians, Jews, or anyone anymore – except for the spirit of the law, which is that we must be conscious of the lives we lead. Both heterosexual and homosexual people are capability of relating to God in a conscious, righteous way.
2. It is highly unfair to hold one group of people (Gays and Lesbians) up to this standard when the rest of the laws of Judaism are not applied to Christians. Leviticus also prohibits eating of pork, lobster, shrimp, oysters, or rare meat; intercourse during the menstrual period, and using two types of cloth in one garment. We don't separate people from ministry or church because they wear polyester pants.
3. The purpose of sexuality has changed for us as well. In this time women had no sexual rights, and sex was for procreation. We understand now there is a whole spiritual component of intimacy that is not procreation based and does not exclude homosexual sex.

The Good News: *“We have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.” Romans 7:6*

“Sexuality without spirituality is boring, addictive and even cynical. Spirituality without sexuality is disengaged, diseased and disincarnated.”

Ordained Priest & Theologian Matthew Fox

“Sodom and Gomorrah”

“Now before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both old and young, all the people from every quarter, surrounded the house. And they called to Lot and said to him, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them carnally.”

So Lot went out to them through the doorway, shut the door behind him, and said, “Please, my brethren, do not do so wickedly! See now, I have two daughters who have not known a man; please, let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you wish; only do nothing to these men, since this is the reason they have come under the shadow of my roof.”

Genesis 19:4-8

“‘Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen.”

Ezekiel 16:49-50

Long thought to be punished for the rampant homosexual population, Sodom and Gomorrah have been used as an argument that God punishes gay people. The sad thing about that assertion is that the story of Sodom and Gomorrah has nothing to do with homosexuality whatsoever.

Quickfacts:

4. Sodom was a city that was using and abusing travelers. A desert town people had to stop there for nourishment. However the people of Sodom would rape them, beat them and take their things upon their death. The great sin of Sodom wasn't gay sex, it was violations of the “hospitality code” – and the abuse of a stranger.
5. There was no “sexual orientation” identifier in the days of Sodom. People didn't understand themselves as “gay” or seek out only “same-sex” attractions. It wasn't a city for of gay men. It was a city full of evil men who abused others.
6. The sex demanded by the men of Sodom was rape – a crime of power (not sexual orientation). The sexuality homosexual couples share is based on intimacy not power. Rape is always wrong. Intimacy is not the issue here.
7. The story of Sodom and Gomorrah was used to show two things – the punishment of the evil (notice in Ezekiel the “sins of Sodom” say nothing about being homosexual) and the rescue of the righteous. Lot offers his virgin daughters to the mob (a strange act if they were a group of gay men), because Jewish law makes him put the lives of his guests above his own. He (and they) are rescued because he follows the right path.

The Good News: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart;” Jeremiah 1:5

“To suggest that Sodom and Gomorrah is about homosexual sex is about as worthless as suggesting the story of Jonah and the Whale is a book about fishing.”

American Baptist Peter Gomes,
Plummer Professor of Christian Morals at Harvard Divinity School

“Peter’s Vision”

“He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”

“Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.” The voice spoke to him a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.” This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.”
Acts 10:11-16

“Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.”
Acts 10:34-35

Cornelius was a righteous and good man, who was not Jewish to begin with. Peter, until his vision had been preaching that Christianity was for Jews. He required that anyone who wanted to become a Christian must first become a Jew. His vision prepares him for Cornelius, and changes the way the whole church looked at Christianity. It is for everyone.

Quickfacts:

5. Notice that God talked to Cornelius without “official approval”. God’s relationship with each of us is personal and unique. God doesn’t need church approval, official acceptance or even permission to love us or draw us.
6. God’s desire for us as a humanity is NOT separation, but relationship. Peter realizes that God does not show favoritism, in other words – in our faith there are no “chosen” people – we are all created, chosen and loved by God.
7. God has called us clean through the blood of Christ, just like all others. Peter’s rejection of the animals is based in his interpretation of the law. God reminds Peter that there is a new law and now no one is rejected. God has embraced all of humanity.
8. While speaking to Cornelius, the gift of the Spirit is poured out on the entire room, Jew and Gentile alike. God’s spirit pours out on all willing vessels without regard to our distinction or sexual orientation.

The Good News: *“Then Peter said, “Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.””*

Acts 10:47

“If there is any distinguishing characteristic to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, it is his ability to break through and dissolve barriers.”

Methodist Theologian Dr. George Allen

“Romans”

“Because 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.”

Romans 1:26-27

“Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator--who is forever praised. Amen.

Romans 1:22-25

Romans is an excellent example of how a verse, out of context, can make anything seem like Biblical reality. Looking at verses 26-27 – it would certainly appear God has a problem with same-sex sexual behavior – but look again at 22 – 25 – This isn’t a passage about homosexuality at all.

Quickfacts:

9. Its very clear from the previous verses that pagan temple worship is what is being described in the passage. God reacts to trading the “truth” for a lie, and the tendency of the Roman citizenry toward pagan temple worship and prostitution.
10. The key here is the word “unnatural” – Roman sexuality did not see same-sex practice as “unnatural” – in fact to the roman world it was very very natural. Even a part of growing up. What the faith and paul saw as unnatural was forced sexuality, slavery, and prostitution. This abuse of sexuality and religion is as wrong today as it always was.
11. The word “unnatural” in verse 26 is the greek word “Phusis” means natural production or extension (i.e. having children) and is likely Paul’s concern that these temple prostitutes who were female were not getting pregnant (due to bodily damage, and syphilis). Many people in the world have sex without the ability to re-produce. We no longer see that as unnatural or a result of sin. The word “natural” (referring to men) is the word “Phisukos” and refers to instinct. Paul saws both slavery and sexual abuse of males non instinctual. But what about Gay men and Lesbians? Same-Sex fulfillment is natural, and instinctual.

The Good News: *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. Romans 8:1-2*

We know many things people [like Paul] did not know at that time. One should read the Bible with some kind of reason.”

Rev. Krister Stendhall, Former Dean of Harvard Divinity School

“Corinthians and Timothy”

“Do 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, nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”

1 Corinthians 6:9-10

“We 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, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers--and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me..” 1 Timothy 1:9-10

Two of the most highly debated translations in the New Testament – both use a Greek word and word set that has been translated since 1947 as “homosexual” (or “perverts”). However, the word (**malakoi**) and its setting (**malakoi arsenokoitai**) have long been understood to mean “soft” or “refined” as opposed to meaning homosexual people.

Quickfacts:

12. It is terrible unlikely that Paul or any other Bible writer could be referring to homosexual people – because that simply wasn’t the world Paul lived in. There were homosexual acts (forbidden by ancient Jewish law) but not people in Paul’s mind. The thought of loving, gay relationships certainly would have been a mystery to the letter writer.
13. Malakoi has been translated two other times in the New Testament – both referring to the word “soft”. It is unlikely that the meaning suddenly shifted to men Gays and Lesbians. Its is much more likely that it meant people of low character who did not make a stand or have rules and morals.
14. The phrase “Arsenokoitai” in Timothy means literally “ Men (arsen) and Beds (koitai)” –Who are these “men beds?” – Most likely in the context of the passage this refers to Male Temple Prostitutes (known mainly has men who worked in bed). The Bible is clear about its views of prostitution and sexual slavery.

These passages with their list of bad folks do nothing but remind us to use caution when we translate a bible passage. The years of history and language have changed how we interpret things. With so many new Bibles on the market these days – be sure you know where your Bible comes from and how it was translated.

The Good News: *“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” 1 Corinthians 13:13*

"Sexual orientation does not itself determine a person's capacity for love, beauty, and joy. Sexual orientation does not itself define one's relationship to God. A homosexuality that issues in faithful, tender, respectful, hopeful, and mutually fulfilling acts is an instrument of love, beauty, and joy. As such it is moral."

Statement of the Presbyterian
UPC Task Force on Sexuality.

“Eunuchs”

“Jesus replied, “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.”

Matthew 19:11-13

“As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?” And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.”

Acts 8:38

The word and idea of a Eunuch in the time of Christ was any man who did not marry, have children or relate to women. Pharisees called Eunuchs “race traders” because they didn’t follow the law to “be fruitful and multiply” – they were despised, usually servants of some kind, and were not allowed to worship in the temple proper. Yet Jesus shows acceptance and embrace of Eunuchs.

Quickfacts:

15. Strong’s Greek Dictionary identifies “Eunuch” as coming from the root words “Eune” (bed) and “echo” (possession or ability) – a word used to define sexual behavior. Strong’s also lists defines the word as “a male who has been castrated or is impotent, unmarried or a chamber servant.
16. Jesus identifies some of the same issues that we deal with in our time – mainly – how does one become gay? He touches on all three possibilities – some are “born that way” (we know he doesn’t mean men are born castrated – he means born with sexual diversity), some are made that way (referring to castrated males) and some do so in the name of religion (referring mainly the choice of celibacy). But Jesus affirms all three possibilities and says “accept it.” That is about as far from the condemnation of diversity as you can get.
17. Phillip encounters a Eunuch on the road who shows great capacity of faith and belief and commitment (baptism). Gays, Lesbians, Bisexual and Transgendered folks also have the capacity to believe, receive and commit to God.

These passages and the Eunuchs show us that Jesus is less concerned about the status of our sexuality, and more concerned about the capacity of our faith.

The Good News: *“¹⁴Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.””* **Matthew 19:14**

“We know that there are some things that the Bible does NOT say. We are far more concerned with those things the Bible DOES teach us about God and ourselves. There is no factual support for an anti-gay interpretation of Scripture The United Church of Canada believes that gay and lesbian people are completely loved and accepted by God”.

Statement of the United Church of Canada

“David & Jonathan, Naomi and Ruth”

“And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.”

1 Samuel 18:3

*“I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother;
you were very dear to me.*

*Your love for me was wonderful,
more wonderful than that of women.”*

2 Samuel 1:26

“But Ruth replied, “Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. ¹⁷ Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.””

Ruth 1:16-17

Two couples in the Old Testament may or may not have been gay or lesbian – but the love they reflect between each other certainly points to same-sex love and spirituality.

Quickfacts:

18. Jonathan gives David everything he had, and “loved him as himself”. In dressing David he shows a tender and personal care far beyond that of a friend.
19. In his mourning lament David clearly shows a bias toward the love (whether spiritual or personal) that he shared with Jonathan. His grief is as profound and meaningful as any partner would be.
20. The commitment Ruth makes to Naomi is one of the top scriptures read in heterosexual weddings – but it is spoken between two women! Their ability to honor and love each other is a beautiful biblical example of committed female relationship.

The Good News: “To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant- to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off” *Isaiah 56:4-5*

“Gay people cannot “repent” for being gay because there is no sin to repent for. How can you repent for true love? Our God is a God of love and sharing that love in a way that brings glory to God and uplifts God's creation has no prohibition as to the gender of the giving and or receiving of the love.”

Rev. Paul Tucker
Pastor, Gentle Spirit Christian Church

“Different People”

The Roman Centurion and his Servant

⁵When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. ⁶“Lord,” he said, “my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering.”
⁷Jesus said to him, “I will go and heal him.” Matthew 8:5

Quickfacts: 1. The word the centurion uses is “Pais” (“paheece”) which is a special relationship far beyond servant. A pais was a young man given to Roman citizens of stature for a year to learn how to be a man. It was a service, mentoring and sexual relationship. Yet Jesus doesn’t condemn the relationship – he applauds the man on his faith and heals the servant.

The Man Carrying the Water Jar

¹²On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked him, "Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?" So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him."
Mark 14:12-13

Quickfacts: 1. Jesus tells the disciples to find a man carrying a water jar. It was easier than a game of Where’s Waldo. Why? Because first century men did not carry water jars. That was a distinctly feminine act! It would be like a man walking around modern day Jerusalem in a dress and heels.
2. Notice the man crossing the boundaries of gender identity is the one who takes the to the upper room. The place of the last supper. His courage and diversity are critical to the story of our Lord.

Lydia

One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.... ⁴⁰*After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left. Acts 16*

Quickfacts: 1. Lydia is a rare woman. A business owner in a world where women weren’t allowed to own businesses. A rich woman (signified by the fact she dealt in purple cloth – a high end product) who has a house of her own (notice its “lydia’s house”, not her husband’s – leading most scholars to believe she has no current husband, and probably had never been married because she is not identified as a widow.).

2. Lydia is a believer in God who is baptized by Paul (with her household) and who supports Paul on his missionary journey. Many believe its entirely possible that Lydia lived the life of any modern day lesbian. No men, no problem – at least not to Paul.

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A Closing Prayer

Spirit of God, we thank you for all who let the light of love shine forth and those among us who are your lesbian daughters and your gay sons. O God, we are especially grateful for the brave and living witness of churches open and affirming of our lives and our gifts. God there is much justice still to be established, much pain yet to be healed, much peace that needs to be realized, and much more love to go forth. Amen.

By Ruth C. Duck

From "Touch Holiness" by Ruth C. Duck – Rev. Dr. Duck is the Associate Professor of Worship at Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary .