

May 26th

The Bible and Sexuality

Romans 1:18-32

John 7:37-41

We're talking about sexuality, and we've done where the world is, and we're looking at where the church is, and then we'll look at how we live with difference. And we looked at how the church comes to decisions - Scripture, Tradition and Reason. Last time we saw that tradition did not mean nothing ever changes, but it is dynamic. This week we're going to look at Scripture and next week at Reason.

So the first thing to say is No-one has sex in the Bible! No-one!

That's because there's no Hebrew word for it - there might be in modern Hebrew!

So what you find is that people 'lie' with people

People 'know' each other

Or even - they uncover someone's nakedness, or see their feet.

So, there's lots of sex in the old testament, but its not explicit.

The second thing to say is how do we weigh Scripture?

What I mean is - all Scripture is god breathed and inspired and useful for teaching

But surely - love your neighbour as you love yourself

Is more useful, means more, is worth more than

Numbers 3 -

21 To Gershon belonged the clans of the Libnites and Shimeites; these were the Gershonite clans. 22 The number of all the males a month old or more who were counted was 7,500. 23 The Gershonite clans were to camp on the west, behind the tabernacle. 24 The leader of the families of the Gershonites was Eliasaph son of Lael. 25 At the tent of meeting the Gershonites were responsible for the care of the tabernacle and tent, its coverings, the curtain at the entrance to the tent of meeting, 26 the curtains of the courtyard, the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard surrounding the tabernacle and altar, and the ropes—and everything related to their use.

The fact is that we hold some parts of the bible to be more important than others -

The 10 commandments, over the laws concerning wearing mixed fibre

The book of Genesis over the book of Nehemiah

We just get more theology - more understanding about God from some parts rather than others. Most people would value anything in the New Testament over anything in the Old Testament.

And in the New, they'd probably hold the gospels over the letters and the words of Jesus as the most important.

This is how we read the Bible. Its all good, its all inspired, but some parts are more relevant, or more profound than others.

So would it be ok if I don't look at the references to sexuality in the Old Testament? If you want I can send you some bible studies about them, but they as they are included in lists about eating shellfish and stoning your child to death, most scholars don't think they count. The story of Sodom is of course pertinent, but its important to ask whether it was the kind of sex that made it a bad place, or the rape and infidelity? That can be argued both ways.

So - homosexuality in the new testament! Hot topic! We know people are very sure - its says its wrong, its condemned... how many times do you think its mentioned?

10 verses? 5 verses? - nope - just 3 times.

1 Cor 6:9 Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men

1 Tim 1:9, 10

9 We also know that the 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, 10 for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine

Romans 1:26 - 27

26 For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, 27 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.

Now lets get into it - the word in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy is the greek word - arsenokoitai (ἀρσενokoῖται). Guess what - it doesn't occur anywhere else in the bible, or in Greek - its a compound word. - male and bed.

Philo, Jewish philosopher, 20 BC - AD 40 thought arsenokontai meant shrine prostitution
Aristides of Athens (c. 138) clearly used it not for homosexuality but for prostitution,
But Paul uses the common Greek word pornoi - to mean that.
Eusebius (d. c. 340) used it in reference to women only.

The funny thing is that Greek and Roman culture had a lot of homosexuality, and they had lots of words for it, here are some of them:

arrenomanes - meaning mad after men or boy crazy

dihetaristria - a synonym referencing lesbian sexuality,

erastes - a older man who loves a younger male

eromenos - a younger male who loves an older male

euryproktoi – men who dress as women,

hetairistria - women who are attracted to other women,

So why didn't Paul just use one of these, or indeed the word homosexual - which means - sexually attracted to the same sex?

So we have to ask - why didn't it get translated as male-bed?

In short because that's not the way translation works. The Greek word telos means end, but it can also mean goal or purpose. The word sodso means healing, but it also means salvation (a greater version of healing!). So words don't have direct translations, and in these passages they're coming in lists of bad things - adultery, idolatry, wrongdoing and ...murderers, liars, lawbreakers and ... so we know its something bad, and there are sexually immorality in that list - so - what's a sexual wrong that jewish society traditionally condemns - homosexuality.

There's more I could say and can send you if you're interested, but lets do the Romans passage to finish - because its very interesting.

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The argument of Romans is that the minority Jews should accept the majority Gentiles, as those grafted in, and the Gentiles should accept the Jews.

Here Paul sets out how the gentiles have not worshipped the true god, but nature or gods of their own creation - like Zeus - and these have led them astray and they have been given up to their passions and because of that - suffering, which unlike Christian suffering which has a purpose, is suffering without purpose or good reason.

So when he says - they are led astray to have unnatural relations - but is he talking to Roman myths and legends here -

Crete - where King Minos ruled and the legend of the Minator, and where King Minos raped a young boy Ganymede. Rather than thinking it was terrible, the Greeks made a myth up to justify the Kings behaviour, claiming it was Zeus who did it as an act of love.

So some would argue that this is not about all homosexuality, but Paul is using a culture example to speak to those in Rome - like someone referring to the twin-towers and in 400 years people may have no clue.

Some argue that this is odd language for Paul and doesn't fit - and think it might have been added in.

Others say its a prohibition of some homosexual acts but not all.

Others say - nope - this is the verse in Scripture than condemns all homosexuals.

One verse, in the whole bible. That seems a lot of weight to put on it!

Those who argue the church should be more inclusive, loving and welcoming point to the other 30,000!

Or to the ones that say - God so loved the whole world that he sent his son - not just the straights

Or the ones that say - come to me all who are weary and tired - not just the straight

Or the ones that say - it is faith in Jesus Christ that saves us, not works

Or the ones that say - teh difference between the sheep and the goats is those who showed the most love, not kept the most rules

Or the ones that say - all I once had I consider loss, compared to knowing Jesus.

It is easy to see how people have read the word homosexual in black adn white and have come to their conclusions, and I respect that. I would suggest though that investigating translations and context and weighing Scripture as a whole, it is easy to come to a different conclusion.