

Our LGBTQ Family & The Bible

A few things to point out...

- In the UCC we pride ourselves on being open to the continuing revelation of God and remembering to “never place a period where God placed a comma.” Life in the first century or when the Old Testament was written was very different from ours. To be open to the continuing revelation of God, we must look at the Bible as a book that was written in a particular time and place, and employed languages and practices that are no longer relevant to our modern world.
- The verses that are used to speak to the experiences of LGBTQ make up a very small proportion of the Bible – only 7 of the Bible’s hundreds of thousands of verses. The fact that these things come up so rarely should be an indication of the importance of it ascribed by the authors of the Bible.
- The words "homosexual," "homosexuality," “gay” or “lesbian” were invented in the 19th century. Consequently, it cannot be claimed that the Bible says anything at all about it.

Notes on some frequently discussed passages

Genesis 19: Sodom & Gomorra: In brief, two angels visited Sodom to see if they could find ten righteous men on Abraham’s behalf. Abraham knew that God would destroy the city if he couldn’t find ten righteous men. The angels failed at their task, but did find a man named Lot. Lot didn’t recognize the angels as first, and thinking that they were travelers he graciously welcomed them into his house. Things got a bit disturbing when that evening “all the men from every part of the city of Sodom – both young and old – surrounded the house. They called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we may know (have sex with) them” (Gen 19: 4-5). Frightened and upset, Lot tries to calm the crowd by offering them a deal – his virgin daughters in exchange for not doing anything to his male visitors. The men of Sodom don’t take him up on his offer. The angels step in on Lot’s behalf and save his family before Sodom is destroyed by God. There is a lot more in this story, but for our purposes the most important part is the poor behavior of the men of Sodom.

Some thoughts:

- This is not a story about sex between two men – it is a story about brutal violence and rape and how horrible those things are.
- At the time it was common for soldiers or bullies to rape a fallen enemy to assert their victory over another (this practice is not entirely a relic of the past, sadly). The act of raping an enemy is about power and revenge, not about being gay.
- Some have suggested that this story is one about hospitality and Lot’s welcome of strangers. There is some evidence to suggest that Jesus saw it this way in Luke 10: 10-12: “But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, “Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near. I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.”
- Ezekiel 16: 48-49 suggests that the sin of Sodom is selfishness and excess: "This is the sin of Sodom; she and her suburbs had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not help or encourage the poor and needy. They were arrogant and this was abominable in God's eyes."

Leviticus 18:6 & 20:13

18:6: None of you shall approach anyone near of kin to uncover nakedness: I am the LORD.

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.

Some thoughts:

- Leviticus is a holiness code written 3,000 years ago. This code includes a number of things we would not abide by today (like stoning non-virgin brides and adulterers, and couples who have sex when a woman is on her period, to name a few).

- Jesus set forth some new commandments in Mk 12, Mt 22, and Lk 10: to love God above all and to love thy neighbor. He was very clear that these were more important than every other law.
- Several of Paul's letters plainly state that as followers of Christianity we no longer observe the holiness code. For example, Gal 5:18: "If you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law."

Romans 1: 26-27: *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.*

Some thoughts:

- What Paul was likely referring to here was men having sex with children (a relatively common practice in the Roman world) and male prostitution (a number of prostitutes were children).
- The core point of Paul's letter to Rome was that Christians are saved through their faith in Jesus – not by Jewish law. Any mention of sex between people is used only to illustrate this broader point.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 & 1 Timothy 1:9-10

1 Corinthians 6:9-10: Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

1 Timothy 1:9-10: 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.

Some thoughts:

- Included in both of these passages are two Greek words that are the source of controversy: "malokois" and "arsenokoitai."
- The Greek word malaokois probably meant "effeminate call boys," or something similar, which the NRSV translates as "male prostitutes."
- The meaning of arsenokoitai is a bit fuzzy. Some scholars suggest that Paul was talking about the men who sought out these "effeminate call boys." It is understandable that these people would upset Paul because many male prostitutes were children.
- What is important in these letters is not what Paul is saying about sex, but what Paul is saying about God. We aren't to spend our time focusing on who is in and out of God's favor – that is God's job to think about. Let's love one another instead – and Jesus is very clear that loving each other will earn you God's favor.

Biblical Support for Loving Our LGBTQ Family

Some general thoughts...

- The big overarching message of the Bible is God’s unending love for all. There is no footnote excluding certain people from that love, or that certain people are loved more. Everything in the Bible we read should be filtered through the lens of love.

Scriptural support for loving all God’s people is endless! To name a few...

- **Isaiah 56.** God’s welcome of foreigners and eunuchs into God’s “house of prayer for all peoples.”
- **Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Leviticus 19:18 and Luke 10:25-28.** As other rabbis of his time would have, Jesus blended Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (“Love God”) and Leviticus 19:18 (“Love your neighbor as yourself”—note this comes between Leviticus 18 and 20!) in Matthew 22:34-40 as the greatest commandments, and the lens through which to interpret all of the law and the prophets. To confirm this was a common pairing, see Luke 10:25-28, in which Jesus solicits the same conclusion from an expert in religious law.
- **John 9.** Jesus dissociates a human condition from a sinful cause when he declares a man was not born blind because of his sin or that of his parents, but so that the glory of God may be made manifest.
- **Luke 10:25-37.** The parable of the Good Samaritan, in which the most hated person to Jesus’ listeners “loved his neighbor as himself” in helping a victim of robbers—what a priest and a lay priest failed to do.
- **Acts 10 and 11.** The full welcome of uncircumcised Gentiles into the church, whose lifestyles were repugnant to Jews.
- **Galatians 5:1,** etc. the many letters of Paul that assert freedom from law and custom in Christ, such as Galatians 5:1, “For freedom Christ has set us free.”
- **1 John 4:16b.** “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.” What follows repeats the theme emphasized throughout scripture to not be afraid, “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. ... We love because God first loved us. Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars...”
- **This list could go on and on!**