



The Genesis creation accounts

These accounts are authoritative in God’s creation of humankind, in the image of God, as male and female (Genesis 1:27). They affirm the equality of women, being created in the image of God. We are created to be in relationship with the earth, animals, other human beings and God. Marriage is upheld, though at the time it was common for males to have more than one wife. The Church has never taught that marriage or procreation is essential for human fulfillment.

What is the question now?

It may be that none of the Bible writers were inspired by God to address the question the Church is wrestling with now. The writers probably addressed homosexual behaviour, without any knowledge of psychosexual orientation, in the contexts of rape, prostitution, war and paedophilia. The Church is currently addressing the question of supporting a loving relationship between two people, whose natural sexual orientation is towards persons of the same sex. As the Uniting Church (Dicker Report) concluded in 1984, many of these people are committed and faithful Christians, not individuals rebelling against God (“The Church and Homosexuality”, Uniting Church Press, 1985).

Jesus and homosexuality

The Gospels have no record of Jesus ever saying anything about homosexuality. Jesus did uphold the marriage of women and men. Interestingly most church members support divorce and remarriage as being justified at times, despite a specific prohibition from Jesus (Luke 16:18). We can learn from Jesus’s actions and teachings:

Jesus welcomed and ate with all (Matthew 9:10-13)

Jesus gives priority to human needs (the hungry and thirsty) not dogma or religious rules (Matthew 25: 35ff)

Jesus warns against judging others (Matthew 7:1-5)

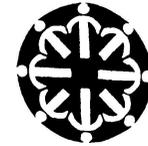
Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan, prompting us to ask: “Who is my neighbour?” (Luke 10:29-37)

Jesus teaches, “By their fruits you will know them”(Matt 7:15-20).

Prepared by Warren Talbot for the Uniting Network NSW/ACT to facilitate discussion concerning the Bible and homosexuality from the perspective of lesbian and gay Christians.

“A place at the table...” Luke 13:29

The Bible and Homosexuality: Understanding the Word of God



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Why talk about the Bible and homosexuality?

As outlined in the Basis of Union 1977, members of the Uniting Church in Australia accept the authority of the Bible as applying to decisions about living as Christians. As with other members of the UCA, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) Christians are committed to the biblical witness, but become distressed when a small number of verses are used to condemn loving relationships as contrary to God's will.

Do Bible writers address homosexuality?

Generally, the answer is no.

There are six isolated texts that appear to condemn homosexual behaviour. In contrast there are hundreds of texts and passages that condemn materialism and wealthy people who neglect the concerns of poor people.

The Bible and decision making

When we make decisions about the Christian life we accept the authority of the Bible. We also consider the traditions of the church, people's experience, and insights from contemporary knowledge. The questions then can be considered from these three perspectives.

Tradition

Professor John Boswell has demonstrated that, historically, the Church has at times been tolerant towards homosexual people. (See "Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality", Yale, 1981.) Many of our partner churches in the reformed and evangelical traditions support equality for LGBT people.

Experience

We need to listen to those faith communities who actively include LGBT people in their ministry and mission.

Science

What might God be teaching us through contemporary insights, especially the medical and scientific knowledge of sexual orientation as a deep seated and unchosen part of a person?

What do the Bible verses mean?

The Sodom story (Genesis 19:1-29)

The sin in this story concerns the inhospitality of the men of Sodom, including their intention to gang rape the angels disguised as men. Just as offensively, Lot offers his daughters as a substitute. The writer of Ezekiel identifies not helping the "poor and needy" as the "sin of Sodom" (Ezekiel 16:49).

Unclean acts (Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13)

In a listing of unclean acts covering diet, clothing and sexual relations, male homosexual behaviour is condemned as detestable, with death as the punishment. The same punishment

is given for adultery (Lev 20:10). The condemnation reflects the pagan practice of temple prostitution, the practice of male-to-male rape as a spoil of war, and the Israelites' need for procreation.

St Paul (Romans 1:18-32)

This passage places homosexual behaviour in a theological context. St Paul is writing about human sin (the refusal to honor God), and uses male and female homosexual behaviour as an example of human rebellion for which God's punishment is death. The context may have been prostitution, paedophilia, or heterosexual people who "give up" their natural orientation for something else. Helmut Thielicke states that this is an illustration from a particular culture, and not the main point in this passage or Romans in general (see "The Ethics of Sex", Eerdmans, 1959). Paul's intention is not to write a code of sexual ethics. As the Letter unfolds, it is clear that all stand in need of God's mercy (2:1, 3:23), and that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ (8:38).

St Paul (I Cor 6:9, I Timothy 1:8-11)

In these verses St Paul lists people who will not inherit the realm of God. There are two Greek words used, which are much debated by scholars. If you compare different English Bible translations, options vary among "soft", "effeminate", "sexual offender", "homosexual offender", "male prostitute" and "homosexual".

