

St. John's Lutheran Church Winter Bible Study
"The Bible and Homosexuality"
Session One - Introduction

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

"Ground Rules for Conversation"

Outline and Bibliography

Defining Sexual Orientation

The APA (American Psychological Association) defines "sexual orientation" as

"...an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to men, women, or both sexes... [that] ranges along a continuum, from exclusive attraction to the other sex to exclusive attraction to the same sex. However, sexual orientation is usually discussed in terms of three categories:" heterosexual, gay/lesbian [homosexual], and bisexual...

...sexual orientation is defined in terms of relationships with others...[it] is closely tied to the intimate personal relationships that meet deeply felt needs for love, attachment, and intimacy. In addition to sexual behaviors, these bonds include nonsexual physical affection between partners, shared goals and values, mutual support, and ongoing commitment."

(<http://www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/orientation.aspx>)

In a 2016 Gallup Poll, 4.1% of Adult Americans, approx 10 million people, identified as LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender). (<http://www.gallup.com/poll/201731/lgbt-identification-rises.aspx>)

The 2015 Supreme Court Decision

On June 26, 2015, the United States Supreme Court held, "The Fourteenth Amendment requires a state to license a marriage between two people of the same sex and to recognize a marriage between two people of the same sex when their marriage was lawfully licensed and performed out-of-state." (<http://www.scotusblog.com/case-files/cases/obergefell-v-hodges/>)

The Fourteenth Amendment states: "...nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."

Same-sex marriage became legal in the state of California following the California Supreme Court ruling “In re Marriage Cases” on May 15, 2008.

The ELCA Statement on Human Sexuality

St. John’s is a member of the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America).

At the Churchwide Assembly in August 2009, the ELCA adopted the social statement, “Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust” (<http://www.elca.org/en/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Human-Sexuality>), along with 15 implementing resolutions, which included:

Resolution 1: “Resolved, that the ELCA commit itself to finding ways to allow congregations that choose to do so to recognize, support and hold publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships.”

Resolution 2: “Resolved, that the ELCA commit itself to finding a way for people in such publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships to serve as rostered leaders of this church.”

Resolution 3: “Resolved, that in the implementation of any resolutions on ministry policies, the ELCA commit itself to bear one another's burdens, love the neighbor, and respect the bound consciences of all.”

The social statement allows for persons who are in a “publically accountable, lifelong, monogamous” same-sex relationship to be ordained, and to be in a covenanted relationship, in the ELCA – the same expectation for heterosexual persons.

The social statement affirms that sexual relations outside of a “publically accountable, lifelong, monogamous” relationship are sinful: “Promiscuity and sexual activity without a spirit of mutuality and commitment are sinful because of their destructive consequences for individuals, relationships, and the community.” (page 8)

The social statement recognizes that “on the basis of conscience bound belief”

- ~ some are “convinced that same-gender sexual behavior is sinful”
- ~ some are convinced that “homosexual relationships reflect a broken world,” but may be “lived out with mutuality and care”
- ~ some are convinced that communities “are best served when same-gender relationships are honored and held to high standards and public accountability, but they do not equate these relationships with marriage”

~ some are convinced that “the scriptural witness does not address the context of sexual orientation and committed relationships that we experience today. They believe that the neighbor and community are best served when same-gender relationships are lived out with lifelong and monogamous commitments that are held to the same rigorous standards, sexual ethics, and status as heterosexual marriage.” (pages 20-21)

Christ & the Moral Vision of Scripture

The Word within the Word – what is the Bible?

“A cradle that holds the infant Jesus. Baby blankets that clothe the newborn Christ. Lutherans often use these well-known metaphors from Martin Luther to describe the Christian Scriptures and their importance. These simple metaphors clearly and profoundly describe both what the Scriptures are and what is their purpose. Simply stated, the Scriptures tell about Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit uses the Scriptures to present Jesus to all who listen to or read them. That is why Lutheran Christians say that the Scriptures are the ‘source and norm’ of their teaching and practice. As the Gospel writer John wrote, ‘these things are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name’ (John 20:31).”

(<https://www.elca.org/en/Faith/ELCA-Teaching/Scripture-Creeds-Confessions>)

Scripture communicates the Gospel of Jesus Christ – it tells the story of God’s redemptive love throughout human history – it expresses the words of eternal and abundant life

Scripture communicates

- ~ God is a loving relationship of Three Persons – Father, Son, Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14)
- ~ God created the world and everyone in it (Gen 1)
- ~ God loves the world and everyone in it (1 John 4:10)
- ~ Jesus Christ came to save the world (John 3:16)
- ~ Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, lived, died on the cross, rose again to life, ascended into heaven, and will come again (Luke 24:46-47)
- ~ Jesus is the source of life now and forever, life abundant and eternal (John 11:25-26)
- ~ The Spirit is at work in this broken world and will one day restore creation (Rev 21:3-4)
- ~ We are saved by grace through faith in Christ (Eph 2:8-9)

Scripture is the living word speaking into our lives and transforming us – it tells us who God is and who we are – it shows us how to live.

“All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim 3:16-17)

Interpreting Scripture – how do we faithfully and fruitfully understand and enact the Bible?

A few principles (from a Lutheran Christian perspective)

- ~ Scripture is interpreted in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ
- ~ Scripture is interpreted *contextually* – seeking to understand the passage in its *literary* (what does it say?), *historical* (what did it say to those who first experienced it?), and *present* (what does it say to us?) context
- ~ Scripture is interpreted through *communal discernment for present application* – how do we understand biblical teaching on matters not explicitly addressed in Scripture? how does biblical teaching apply today?
- ~ Scripture is interpreted through *analogy* – how are situations today comparable to those in the biblical world?
- ~ Scripture is interpreted “in light of Scripture” – understanding individual passages of the Bible in terms of the whole biblical narrative
- ~ All Scripture is God’s Word, but some biblical points are more significant than others – Jesus spoke of the “Greatest” Commandments (*Matt 22:36-40, Mark 12:28-31, Luke 10:25-28*)
- ~ Scripture contains *law and gospel* – the law (including the OT law) maintains social order and convicts us of our sin – the gospel saves us

The Example of Christ – what would Jesus do?

“Jesus is Lord” (*Romans 10:9*)

Scripture affirms that Jesus Christ is the fullest revelation of God to us (*Col 1:15-19*), the Savior of the world (*Luke 2:10-11*), the Lord of all creation (*Phil 2:3-11*) – and is the embodiment of what is right and good and true (*John 14:6-7*), the authority, guide, and example for how we are to live in relationship with God and each other and the whole creation (*Hebrews 12:1-2*), the standard for Christian morality (*1 John 2:3-6*)

Christ calls us to follow him (*Luke 9:23*), learn from him (*Matt 11:29*), love others as he loves us (*John 15:12*) – he sends his followers into the world to share his good news (*Acts 1:8*) – in love (*John 3:16*), peace (*John 20:21*), joy (*John 15:11*)

Dallas Willard speaks of discipleship in terms of learning from Jesus “how to live our lives as he would live them if he were we” (page 58) – “If I am Jesus’ disciple that means *I am with him to learn from him how to be like him*” (page 276) – we are to have the mind and heart of Jesus Christ (Phil 2)

“God is love” (1 John 4:8)

Jesus was asked about the law; he said, “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.*’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (Matt 22:38-40)

Jesus said to his disciples, “*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*” (John 13:34-35)

John wrote, “*Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.*” (1 John 4:7-11)

Paul wrote, “*Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends...And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.*” (1 Cor 13:4-8a, 13)

Love (agape)

~ “the quality of warm regard for and interest in another, *esteem, affection, regard, love*”

(BDAG, Greek Dictionary)

~ “something of the understanding, creative, redemptive goodwill for all...It is a love that seeks nothing in return. It is an overflowing love; it’s what theologians would call the love of God working in the lives” of humans. (Martin Luther King, Jr., Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Nov 1957)

- ~ “Rather than seeking its own good, the love of God flows forth and bestows good. Therefore sinners are attractive because they are loved; they are not loved because they are attractive.”
(Martin Luther, The Heidelberg Disputation, note 28)

If love is the highest law, might sin be failure to love?

Sin (harmatia)

- ~ “to commit a wrong, to sin, to ‘miss the mark’ (BDAG, Greek Dictionary)
“But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” (Rom 3:21-24)
- ~ human nature “curved in on itself” (*incurvatus in se*), seeking “all things, even God, for its own sake” (Luther, Lectures on Romans) – instead of being curved out to God and others
- ~ “ultimately, our human failure to live in community with God, each other, and the natural environment” (Grenz, page 187)

“The Weightier Matters of the Law” (Matt 23:23)

Jesus consistently showed compassion for those excluded by religious authorities because of perceived moral and/or social inferiority – the “sinners”

- ~ Jesus shared table fellowship with “tax collectors and sinners” (Matt 9:10-13, 11:19, Mark 2:15-17, Luke 5:30-32, 7:34, 15:1-2) – and called Matthew, a “tax collector,” to be one of his apostles (Matt 9:9)
- ~ Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman (John 4:5-42), healed the son of the Roman soldier (John 4:46-54), healed the daughter of the Canaanite woman (Matt 15:21-28), forgave the “woman caught in adultery” (John 8:1-11), defended a woman called a “sinner” by a Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50) ...

Jesus consistently spoke words of judgment against religious authorities who considered themselves morally and/or socially superior to others – the “[self] righteous”

- ~ “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others.” (Matt 23:23)

- ~ *“Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”* (Mark 12:38-40)
- ~ *“Woe also to you lawyers! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not lift a finger to ease them.”* (Luke 11:46)
- ~ *“...are you angry with me because I healed a man's whole body on the Sabbath? Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.”* (John 7:23b-24) ...

Jesus did not specifically address homosexuality or same-sex relationships.

Essentials of the Faith – what is fundamental?

The Three Ecumenical Creeds (Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, and Athanasian Creed) – accepted by the global Christian church for millennia as the foundational statements of faith – do not address homosexuality or even mention human sexuality – they confess faith in the Triune God, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer

“In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, love” – Moravian Church motto