

In the first part of this series, I concluded that the debate over homosexual behaviour may be framed as either a question of justice or of ethics. If people who identify as gay are born that way, then justice would demand that they are allowed to live that way, even perhaps be married. But if they are not born that way, and could change their orientation, then we have an ethical issue rather than a justice issue. I then introduced my understanding of the science on homosexuality. If you haven't heard that message you can hear it and all four parts of this series on human sexuality from our website. I probably shocked many, and angered some with my conclusions that sexual orientation is not genetic, it is not innate, and it is not fixed. I also asserted that orientation can be changed, but it is very hard to do so successfully. These conclusions run against mainstream belief but are soundly based. A good source to see for yourself is the website www.mygenes.co.nz.

The Bible has no concept of sexual orientation, but it does comment on same sex activity. Let us look now at the five well known, but uncomfortable readings, or what some have called "texts of terror." There are others also which, while not making direct reference to homosexuality, can be brought to bear on our study.

I want to make reference to four books which I have found helpful in navigating through this issue.

Robert Gagnon, The Bible and Homosexual Practice. Abingdon, 2001.

Gagnon is the heavy weight author on this subject. He has his own website and many video clips on YouTube.

Nigel Wright, Ed. Five Uneasy Pieces: Essays on Scripture and Sexuality. 2011. This was produced by Australian Anglicans in an attempt to make a biblical case for same sex activity.

Michael Bird & Gordon Preece Eds. Sexegesis: An Evangelical Response to Five uneasy Pieces on Homosexuality. Anglican Press Australia, 2012.

Tobias Stanislas Haller, Reasonable and Holy: Engaging Same-Sexuality. Seabury Books, 2009. This is an in depth engagement again attempting to make a biblical case for same sex activity.

We start with the Sodom and Gomorrah story in Genesis 19 verse 1. Here two angels that had been representing the Lord to Abraham and Sarah were also sent to bring judgement upon the town of Sodom and Gomorrah. In chapter 18:20 The LORD says, *how great is the outcry against them; I must go down and see*. When the angels arrive in chapter 19, Abraham's brother Lot meets them in the gateway of Sodom and takes them to his home for a meal and a bed. In verse 4 the men of the city come at night, surround the house saying *bring them out to us that we may know (yada) them*.

The Hebrew word **yada** has a great range of meaning from “to acknowledge,” through to “to have sex with.” **Yada** is used 1058 times in the Hebrew Bible, of which only 15 refer to sexually knowing, the traditional interpretation. Some have argued that here **yada** simply means to “get to know them” as new people.

So what was the sin of Sodom that had reached the LORD’s ears? Some say it was rape – the lack of consent, others that it was a lack of hospitality – a serious issue in the Ancient world. Another possibility is that it was the prospect of humans having sex with angels that offended God, as with the Nephilim in Genesis 6. All of these were indeed present and are serious issues.

To answer the question we have to look at the context. In verse 7 Lot begs them, “not to act so wickedly.” This rules out the interpretation that the main offence was the ill treatment of guests. In verse 8 Lot does a terrible thing by offering his two virgin daughters for sex as a lesser evil. To offer his, presumably, non-consenting daughters to the marauding men rules out the case for rape. The only sin that could have reached the ear of God before the angel’s visit was a culture of men having sex with men. We also need to have regard for what the author or editor of the text would regard as appropriate sexual relations. That is set out clearly in Genesis chapter 2:24, *therefore, a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh*. In case you don’t know the ending of the story, the angels escaped with Lot and his family then the LORD destroyed the two towns by raining sulphur and fire onto them.

Next, we turn to the Holiness Code in Leviticus chapters 18 to 20.

It is very important to understand the context of these lists of proscribed behaviours and punishments. These instructions are given to Israel after they have escaped from Egypt and are about to enter the Promised Land. What God is doing is very clear in verses 3 and 24, *You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan v 3; and v 24 do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, for by all these practices the nations I am casting out before you have defiled themselves*.

This is about Yahweh forming a nation for himself. These people are being separated out to be a holy nation that will live differently to other people. The holiness code of Leviticus lays out how their behaviour will differ. Here YHWH is forming a people who will live according to the order that God has built into the world, and not against it. The acts of creation and subsequent ordering in Genesis chapter one, involve a lot of separating out, and this order is to be maintained by YHWH’s separated-out people. That is why it was so important that the pure animals be kept separate from the impure. To live one’s life sexually against the order of God’s creation is, in essence, an act of rebellion against God. This is why the sexual sins are treated so seriously, and called abominations, or depravity etc.

For this new nation, God’s covenant people, sexual sin is seen a sign of spir-

itual rebellion, hence the death penalty.

Leviticus 18 from verse 6 to 24 lays out the prohibitions against acts of sexual disorder in order of increasing seriousness. Chapter 20, verses 10 to 21 lays out the associated punishments for each act.

What we see here is that the further human behaviour departs from God's created ordering, the more severe is the punishment. YHWH really cares about the ordering of his creation and is greatly offended when we act in ways contrary to it. It is in this context then that we find the prohibition in chapter 18:22, *you shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination*. The ritual offenses of Leviticus 1-7 are punished with sacrifices and purification. But with various forms of the death penalty, the sexual offenses are clearly in a different category.

The main pro-gay response to the holiness code is that it is simply intolerable and that it should be resisted in today's world. In other words, the authority of scripture is being questioned, rather than its traditional interpretation.

Now we turn to Romans Chapter 1 verses 26 and 27. In this first chapter of his letter to the church in Rome, St. Paul lays out his understanding of the connection between godlessness and sinful human behaviour. Paul tracks a process that begins with a lack of belief in God, then a loss of sensitivity in verse 21, to impurity in verse 22, through to their being given up to impurity in v 24. Verse 26 says, *for this reason, God them up to degrading passions*. Note the order here. It is because of idolatry that people lose the ability to discern proper ordering and behaviour. *For this reason, women exchange natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also their men, consumed with passion,... committed shameless acts*.

The simple interpretation is that same sex acts are regarded as shameful and an expression of godlessness. A traditional scholar, such as N.T. Wright concludes that For Paul in Romans 1:26-27 "homosexual behaviour is a distortion of the creator's design and evidence of the tendency within an entire society for humanness to fracture when gods other than the true one are being worshipped."

However, there have been many attempts to either reinterpret what Paul is saying or to simply disagree with his view and down grade the importance of his contribution. Here Paul is not trying to assert the inherent evil of homosexual acts simply assumed by his Jewish context; rather he is trying to explain how such behaviour is an expression of divine wrath.

In the book, [Five Uneasy Pieces](#), Anglican theologian, Peta Sherlock tries to explain away Paul's revulsion at homosexual acts in several ways. Firstly, by suggesting that Paul is describing greed and lust, rather than committed faithful same-sex love. The problem with that argument is that Paul doesn't actually compare said behaviour with committed and monogamous same sex re-

relationships. Secondly, she thinks that Paul is condemning heterosexual people behaving as if they had a same sex orientation. The problem with this argument is that verses 26 and 27 disapprove of female-female and male-male sexual acts regardless of the sexual preference of the partners. A third suggestion is that Paul had no experience of modern lifelong homosexual partnerships, but that is extremely unlikely as there is plenty of reference to such relationships in ancient literature and Paul was a worldly wise traveller in the Roman Empire.

This brings us to 1 Corinthians chapter 6

Chapter 6 is about the church disciplining the sexual behaviour of its own members. The background is introduced in Chapter 5 verse 1 with a church member who has been sleeping with his father's wife. Verse 9 presents a list of those who will not inherit the kingdom of God.

It includes:

*Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers,
male prostitutes (malakos – soft, effeminate)
sodomites (arseno koites) – one who lies with a male,
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 and sanctified.*

The use of the word *arsenokoites* in verse 9 is rare and unique to the New Testament, and is taken from the Greek version of the holiness code in Leviticus. We should conclude from this that St. Paul is referring to men having sex with other men, as prohibited in Leviticus and thus upholds the holiness code within the life of the early church.

Now let's be honest about this and other lists, adulterers and liars are similarly at risk of exclusion. It is serious stuff. Some may ask why we are making a big deal of all the sex stuff when these other things are just as bad. The answer to that the Bible itself emphasises sexual sin. The New Testament which was written in the sex-crazed Greco-Roman world, particularly warns believers against sexual immorality. In 1 Cor. 6:18 St. Paul warns *shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body, but the fornicator sins against the body itself. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you.* I have noticed that when Christian young people lapse into fornication they can very quickly disconnect from their church and eventually from faith itself.

Jude

The letter of Jude, the brother of James and Jesus, is written to contend for the faith against those who would pervert the grace of God into licentiousness. It seems to be addressing a first century theology of radical inclusion where any sexual ethic is acceptable. We see from the references in verse 7 to Sodom and Gomorrah, and in verse 16 to *unnatural lust*, that same sex

activity and its militant advocates were threatening to ruin the church. It is an extraordinary letter which could have been written to us, just last week.

Revelation 21:8 and 22:15

The final texts are found at the back of the book, at the end of the God's never ending story. Fornicators are listed among the idolaters, sorcerers, murderers and liars all whom will be excluded from the New Jerusalem. Although not specified, we may borrow Paul's use of the word *pornos*, translated as *fornicators*, as a category heading for the sexually immoral, under which adulterers and those engaging in same sex acts can be included.

Other Bible texts

Those are the principal texts of terror. Another text is the story of the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15. The apostles are meeting to discuss how the new gentile churches should relate to the Jewish laws, such as circumcision. After listening to Paul, Barnabas and Peter, James, the brother of Jesus declares in v 19 that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God. This was a paradigm shift for the church and advocates today appeal to this history to argue that the church today can make another paradigm shift to reach out to gays and lesbians. It sounds reasonable and well-motivated, but the problem is that in verse 20 James goes on to say, "*but we should write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood.*" What we see here is that the basic Jewish sexual ethic is to be continued in the gentile church.

Other Christians acknowledge that the above verses are against same sex activity, but then fall back on a view that because Jesus loved and accepted everyone he would accept homosexuals and their behaviour. Remember WWJD? What Would Jesus Do? Jesus would want them to be happy, and therefore so should we. In this gospel of radical inclusion what we think Jesus would do somehow trumps the rest of scripture.

The strongest pro-gay argument we can get from Jesus is in Matthew 19:10-12. Here Jesus responds to the disciple's complaint about how tough his sexual ethic was. He then goes on to distinguish between eunuchs who are born that way and those who have been made eunuchs. Jesus prefaces the distinction in v 11 with, *not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given*. The argument is that Jesus is saying that his teaching doesn't apply to all kinds of eunuchs. The eunuchs who have, "been so from birth" are supposed gay men with their genitals intact. Furthermore, they are exempt from the teaching and thus can engage in same sex activity. The problem I have with it is that it makes an assumption that the eunuchs are men who are born gay. It is also a giant leap in logic to assume that their exemption from his teaching means that Jesus is sanctioning same sex activity.

As a general rule, scripture is interpreted by other scripture and this gay interpretation is at odds with the rest of the scripture we have studied.

The problem with most appeals to WWJD is that they argue from silence. They also project onto Jesus a modern sexual ethic and assume he didn't have one of his own. It is more logical for us to assume that like every other good Jew he assumed the Levitical holiness code as the ethical baseline which he then modified. When he took a position against adultery in Matthew 19, he assumed the holiness code, which we have seen proscribes men having sex with men.

The gospel of radical inclusion is undermined further by Jesus' treatment of the woman caught in adultery in John 8. The problem with her receiving the prescribed punishment of stoning is that dead people can't repent. She can't be reclaimed for the Kingdom of God. The conversation ends with Jesus saying, "do not sin again." Those particular words are used in only one other place, John 5:14 where having healed the lame man, Jesus exhorts "him do not sin again so that nothing worse happens to you." The clear implication here is that there is something worse than being stoned. That is being excluded from God's eternal presence. And Jesus is going to give the people he meets every opportunity to be reclaimed for the kingdom. That is why Paul, who is a good disciple of Jesus, said, concerning the man living with his father's wife in 1 Cor 5, that he should be removed from the church so that he might repent. Rather than proudly tolerating such behaviour, the church should have mourned because the man's life was at stake. They should show real concern for the man by exercising the discipline of the church so that, verse 5, *his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord*.

I referred earlier to the book, Reasonable and Holy, by Tobias Stanislas Haller. Tobias is the reasonable guy you can have a respectful debate with. His argument notes that the Genesis creation accounts describe only a male female partnership. It is reasonable, he argues, that the lack of specific mention of same sex couplings, should not be taken to mean that they are outside of the ordering of creation. But the problem with this argument is that the very same book of the bible condemns such activity in chapter 19.

Haller makes a stronger argument from 1 Corinthians 7:9 that for gay people *it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion*. Paul himself prescribes marriage as the remedy for passion. Many well-meaning Christians agree that a committed same sex partnership is better than a casual homosexual lifestyle. But the problem with that argument is that the very previous chapter pours cold water on that idea.

To conclude our study of the Bible, a plain reading of scripture shows that same sex activity is strongly proscribed and unlike some other aspects of the holiness code, the New Testament does not modify the Old. The direction of scripture is clear and consistent from beginning to end. The scriptures appealed to for the case for same sex activity either require considerable stretching or rely on an argument from silence.

The Three legged stool

The final argument to cover is made by a number of Anglicans who appeal to an Anglican understanding of authority being like a three legged stool. First expressed by 16th century Anglican theologian, Richard Hooker, our authority rests upon three legs, Scripture, Tradition and Reason. Hooker never saw them as of equal, or even of competing importance. Scripture is the foundation, but tradition, the history of the church, helps us to interpret it. And finally, we use our God given capacity to reason, to come to common sense conclusions about what scripture is saying. However, some modern interpreters use the three legged stool in a very different way. If they don't like what scripture says about same sex activity, then they just choose a different leg as their final authority – reason. The post-modern mind says, "Surely it is reasonable to bless such relationships if people are born that way." In my opinion, this is sophistry and disrespectful of our theological tradition. There is now a fourth leg to the modern Anglican stool, experience. "My story" trumps every other authority.

Conclusion

This brings us to the pastoral heart of this issue. As an Anglican, I take the Bible as a revelation of God's will and how we should live. I believe the Bible shows that all humans will be held accountable for how they lived and that there will be divine judgment and punishment for those who reject God's ordering. A plain reading of the Bible reveals that their punishment will be exclusion from God's kingdom and eternal fire in hell. These are traditional and orthodox conclusions.

If these conclusions hold, then how can we bless any activity that could lead to such an outcome? To those who appeal to love and justice, I ask, *how loving is it to approve of, or even encourage an activity that leads to hell.*

So that is where I stand. I would much prefer that same sex acts not be proscribed in scripture. I would much prefer not to be labelled homophobic and bigoted, and I don't want to upset my gay friends. However, an intellectually honest study of both the science and the Bible leads me to the traditional position, albeit unpopular.

So how should we treat those who experience those who identify as gay in the church? In 1 Cor. 5:12 St. Paul says, *for what have I to do with judging those outside? It is not those who are outside that you are to judge? God will judge those outside, "Drive out the wicked person from among you."*

I take from this that we are to associate with and welcome people with all kinds of sexual arrangements, but those inside the church, who are following Jesus, should be helped to keep a high standard of sexual behaviour and that the whole church should be made aware of those standards.

We should do what Jesus did. We should welcome all people and embrace every kind of modern family. As people of the Word, we should also teach

what the scriptures say about God's loving limits.

We should embrace and support anyone struggling to live within the godly limits of human sexuality, whether attracted to the same or opposite sex. For those that want help with same-sex attraction, there is a much better understanding and more support available now than just a few years ago. There are also still a few who offer the difficult path of reversion therapy.

Homosexual people should be fully included in our life, but just as I wouldn't give pastoral responsibility to those living in an unmarried heterosexual relationship, I wouldn't entrust responsibility to those living out a homosexual lifestyle. There should be equal treatment for everyone. I would be happy to bless the home of a committed same-sex couple, but marriage is not an option in the Anglican Church.

There is one final challenge for us, and this is a big one. When I read and talk to people about this issue, I often get the feeling that many Christians take offence at the idea that God would punish people by death. A study of the Old Testament passages quickly brings us into this uncomfortable territory. "You get the death penalty for what?" Or, why did all the Canaanites, including the innocent children, have to be exterminated when Israel conquered the land? It seems to me that many of us are offended by the idea of death as a punishment. This is not the idea of God we have formed for ourselves. We like the God of love in the New Testament and try not to think about the God of holiness and judgment of the Old.

The problem I have with this thinking is that God is the same, yesterday, today and forever. The God of love we like is also holy and does not tolerate sin. The punishment for any sin is ultimately death; it is just that for serious sins in the Old Testament there was no forgiveness possible in life so death came sooner rather than later. If your idea of God doesn't allow him to punish sinners, then I would suggest that you may be constructing a designer God to act the way you think a nice God should act. Could this become idolatry? If there really is a God, then He will do things however he wants to. We may not understand God's ways, but faith invites us to believe that God is good and to place our trust in his justice. It requires a step of faith. Can you trust God enough to be just, or will you take offence?

For anyone offended by God's justice, I remind you that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But here is the good news; if we judge God's ways by human standards, we would never accept that an innocent person should die for the sins of someone else. Yet that is what Jesus has done for us at the cross. So let us kneel in fear before a holy God who will do things his own way, and let us take hold of the forgiveness and mercy that he offers.