


What the Bible Says – and Does Not Say – About LGBTQ+ Issues



What the Bible Says... and Doesn't Say... About LGBTQ+ Issues

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There has been plenty of “fussing and fighting” over LGBTQ+ issues in recent times. Perhaps this has been true for a very long time. I want to begin with a couple of introductory comments:

- I want to name the groups of persons that are affected by this discussion, not simply relegating them to the realm of an acronym. These are people who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, and Queer/Questioning. The + indicates that these are not the only persons who are part of the discussion, so there is space left for expanding and new understandings of gender and sexuality.
- I also want to clearly state that it is not my purpose to “hammer” anybody, regardless of viewpoint. There has been enough vitriol spread for a lifetime and beyond. Don't need it, not gonna do it!
- Let me clearly state, as well, that I am not a medical expert or a professional in gender studies. Discussions of what was once known as “nature versus nurture” are beyond my ability to speak meaningfully, and simply are not my bailiwick. I am a reasonably-qualified expert in biblical studies and interpretation, so I will

limit my comments to exploring and situating biblical texts that are most often cited in the discussion/dialogue of gender issues.

I want to say some things about the Bible and how we use it; then, I will give an overview of the 6 main Bible passages that are most often cited in support of or opposition to same-sex and gender identity issues.

What Is the Bible?

The Bible, quite simply, is a library – a collection – of smaller books and letters that speak the minds of approximately 40 or so different authors representing multiple cultures of peoples who lived over a span of 2,000-4,000 years ago. The works represented in the Holy Bible accepted by Jews and Christians today were written over a period of 1,400 years – and were not accepted as final and authoritative until a much longer time period had passed.

Think for a moment about just how wide this gap in time is: as I write in 2024, we in our time and place are as far removed from the biblical character of Abraham – considered the “father” of 3 major world religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam)—as the children born in 5024 will be from us! What will they think about us? How familiar or alien will our culture be to them?

The Bible is a collection - a library

40 authors over 1,400 years

From a time far, far away

There is no THE Bible

The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold on me. – Martin Luther

The accounts of these various books in the Bible differ from each other, as they represent different times and cultures, as well. There really is no such thing as THE BIBLE when it comes to reading, quoting, and claiming something that THE BIBLE says. Rather, when someone reads a sentence or two – or even a paragraph or more (known in biblical terms as a “passage”) – that is a matter of what that particular verse or passage says. THE BIBLE is a much larger and broader subject.

Differing faith perspectives understand and believe in a variety of interpretations as to what it means for the Bible to be **inspired**. The inspiration of these texts is critically wound around the various arguments put forth for either supporting or denying particular stances toward sexuality issues. Very broadly defined, there are three major schools of thought with regard to the Bible’s inspiration:

1. **The Dictation Theory** of inspiration holds that God literally took over the minds and hands of the 40+ people who wrote the texts of scripture and put the exact words on the scroll that God wanted to put there.
2. **The Dynamic Theory** says that God inspired certain themes and thoughts in the writers and trusted them to put those thoughts and words their own way.
3. **The Illumination (or Intuition) Theory** posits that people felt inspired to write about their experiences with God (or to tell the stories of others’ experiences) in order to speak about “what God was like” in their time and place.

The Bible did not drop down out of heaven, full and complete as we have it today. It was put together by mutual agreement among religious authorities over many years, one book at a time. The books included in the Jewish scripture – what Christians often call the Old Testament – was “approved” in the year 90 AD (I use the older nomenclature throughout this presentation, as my audience is most familiar with it. I do realize that the contemporary convention would be CE for “common era” and BCE for “before the common era”.) This acceptance of the Jewish canon was by a council of rabbis, priests, and scholars in a place known as Jamnia – notably, 60 years after the time of Jesus.

Summing Up THE Bible

- The Bible did not drop down out of heaven, full and complete
- Put together by (mostly) mutual agreement over many years
- Jewish scripture (OT) finally set in 90 AD - 60 years after Jesus
- Christian scripture (NT) set by around 380-390 AD (350 years after Jesus!)



The books of Christian scripture – also known as the New Testament – were finally canonized around 382 AD, nearly 350 years after the time of Jesus. In both cases, various groups of Jews and Christians had differing lists of the books that they accepted – a distinction that continues to this day.

Given all of this variety, how a person decides to read and interpret the Bible depends almost entirely on their pre-disposition toward what is written there. We are all culturally-conditioned to read these texts in the way that we were taught – or, perhaps, as we have later learned.

[The discussion of textual origins and contextual discernment is much wider than this basic overview, but this will suffice to allow us to proceed.]

I will consider the 6 texts that I mentioned previously in 3 important ways:

1. When and in what culture the words of the texts were written
2. The texts' relationship to the overall themes or concepts contained throughout the Bible
3. How these could/should be read in our time and place – which is different, in many ways, from any other that has come before.

The Six Texts Most Cited in Sexuality Debates

The Big Six

- Genesis 1:27; 2:20-24
- Genesis 19:4-9
- Leviticus 18:2-3; 20:13
- Romans 1:18-27
- 1 Corinthians 6:9-10
- 1 Timothy 1:9-10

These passages represent 30 verses out of 31,102 in THE Bible
Approximately 0.00099, or 1/1000th of a percent (1 in 1,000)

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It should be noted that these passages total approximately **30 verses out of 31,102** in the entire Bible. That represents **0.00099%**, or 1 out of 1,000.

Genesis and the Definition of 'Biblical Marriage'

Genesis 1:27 and 2:20-24 (NRSV)

²⁷ So God created humans in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.... (³¹ God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.)

²⁰ The man gave names to all cattle and to the birds of the air and to every animal of the field, but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. ²¹ So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²² And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³ Then the man said,

"This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;
this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken."

²⁴ Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife,
and they become one flesh.

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Most proponents of a conservative definition of marriage and sexuality in 21st-century culture use this passage to promote what they term 'biblical marriage'. They especially lean on the final verse, 2:24, as a pronouncement by God as to divine intent. Let us consider what these verses actually say – not what we may feel they intend – in their original context.

Chapter 1 is a unit describing the creation of the world, continuing through what we have as chapter 2, verse 4. (There were no chapter or verse headings in the original manuscripts of the Bible; these were added later to make group reading more accessible.) It describes what God (named as *Elohim* in Hebrew) did in speaking the world into being. As God's final action, the verse says that '*adam* (from the Hebrew word for dirt or soil, '*adamah*) was created in God's own image as male and female. That's it – that's all it says.

Genesis chapter 2 is an entirely different account, beginning in verse 5; it has a different literary structure and a different name for God (YHWH) – the covenant, or personal, name for God that did not appear until much later in Jewish history. These two versions,

or sources, are considered to be “both stylistically and theologically distinct from other material” throughout the first five books of the Hebrew Scripture, or Torah.¹

Simply merging these two accounts into one unified story does a disservice to the context and nuance of Jewish culture at different times. Scholar John Van Seters notes that “there are two accounts of creation, two genealogies of Seth, two genealogies of Shem, two covenants between Abraham and his god, two revelations to Jacob at Bethel, two calls of Moses to rescue his people, two sets of laws given at Sinai, two Tents of Meeting/

Tabernacles set up at Sinai,” thus illustrating a critical point when it comes to interpreting what we read, as we are now 3,000-4,000 years from these texts: the Bible contains a creative tension between its varying accounts of similar stories and issues, a tension which should encourage us to consider carefully the ways the first hearers engaged in discussion and dialogue with the texts.²

The chapter 2 material certainly offers an expanded view of the woman’s position in creation, most often interpreted as subordinate to the man. The all-important (for the purposes of our discussion) interpolation in 2:24 becomes critical:

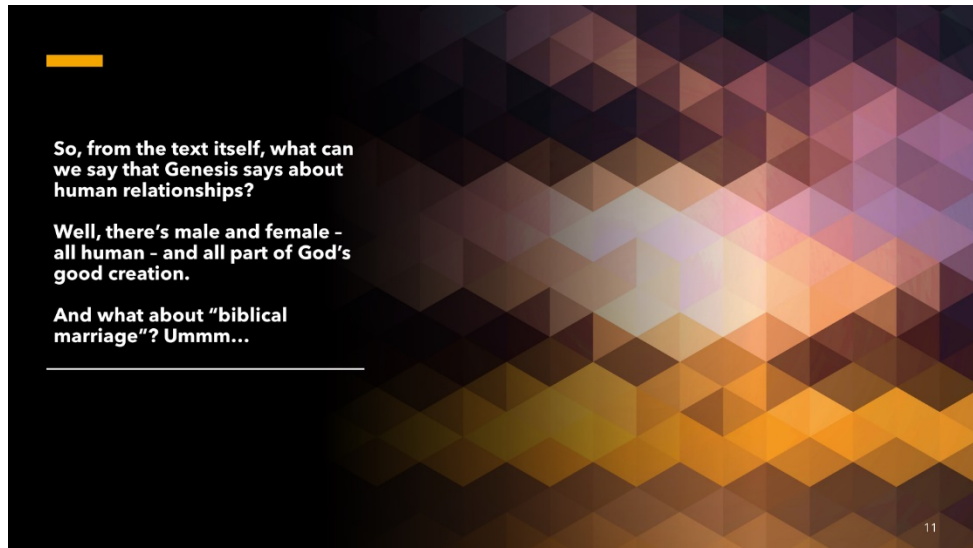
“Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.”

There is an old preacher’s pun that says, “Whenever you see a **therefore** in the text, you’d best find out what it’s **there for!**” The language indicates an insertion into the text by a later editor; this is not clearly God speaking, but rather someone who is drawing a conclusion for themselves and the community with regard to this “one flesh” union. Conservative commentators tend to make this added commentary an indication of the proper role of marriage (one man/one woman) as well as an argument that anything else is against God’s intent.

Adding strength to this viewpoint is the fact that Jesus quoted this verse in a discussion he had with religious and legal experts of his day. In Matthew 19, Jesus is asked about the Mosaic practice of allowing divorce; he responds that it is allowable because of the hardness of human hearts, but that it was not so in the beginning.

“Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’?”

Notice that the context of the quotation was regarding divorce – there is nothing indicated with regard to other sexual relationships. Certainly, no one gets into a marriage hoping that it will one day end in divorce – but it does happen. Christ, like Moses, allowed for that.



But what about this idea of a 'biblical marriage' as defined in the book of Genesis?

Certainly, we can see from Genesis 1:31 that God desires good for all of creation, including mutually beneficial human relationships. But what does Genesis say further?

- Genesis 4 details the first man to take two different wives (at the same time)
- Abraham, the father of the faith, had 3 women who bore his children: Hagar (a slave), Sarai (wife #1) and Keturah (who was first a concubine and then a wife after Sarai's death).
- Jacob, the man who would be named Israel, had at least 13 children with four different women – two of them wives and two of them concubines (servants).
- Jacob's sons – the progenitors of the 12 tribes of Israel – got up to all sorts of misbehavior as one of them slept with his daughter-in-law and produced 2 sons/ grandsons; another slept with his father's concubine and was nearly cut from the old man's will.

I believe that we can move on from the book of Genesis as a credible source for 'biblical marriage'.

Genesis 19: The Sin of Sodom and Gomorrah

The second – and perhaps most famous – Genesis story used in the discussion of sexual orientation is Genesis 19. This is the story we know as “Sodom and Gomorrah”. The verses that are selected out of the context in vv. 4-9 are the most-quoted section used to denounce gay sexual relations. Note that the women only appear in the story as the virginal daughters of Lot, who offers them to be gang raped. Later, after Lot’s escape, he will sleep with his 2 daughters in order to produce offspring. What an

Genesis 19:4-9 Sodom and Gomorrah

⁴But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house, ⁵and they called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, **so that we may know them.**” ⁶Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, ⁷and said, “I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. ⁸Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof.”

⁹But they replied, “Stand back!” And they said, “This fellow came here as an alien, and he would play the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them.” Then they pressed hard against the man Lot and came near the door to break it down.

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example!

That we may know them is a biblical euphemism for sexual intercourse. They were not speaking of shaking hands! It is from this encounter that our English word *sodomy* derives. There is no denying the action that is described here. What is lacking, however, is any word of judgment for this particular action. With more context, it becomes apparent that God did not wait until this moment to decide to bring down fire and brimstone on these two cities.

If we go back to chapter 18, verses 17 and following, we see that these two visitors (angels) had already stopped by the camp of Lot’s uncle and the progenitor of the Israelite nation- to-come, Abraham. They were in the presence of a third visitor, identified by Abraham as the Lord, who entered a rather famous discussion with Abraham. From God’s interior dialogue (i.e., his thoughts recorded in the text) we learn

A little background, please...

¹⁷The Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham **what I am about to do**, ¹⁸ seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? ¹⁹ No, for I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."



²⁰ Then the Lord said, "**How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah** and how very grave their sin! ²¹ I must go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me, and if not, I will know."

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that he and the angels are on a journey to Sodom and Gomorrah with a plan in mind to deal with/destroy the two cities for their wickedness. An outcry against them has already arisen to God's ears. (see v. 21)

Abraham then seeks to bargain with God over the fate of the cities, asking if God would spare them if 50 righteous persons could be found. God agrees. Abraham asks if there might be 40... then 30... then 20... then 10. At each stage, God agrees to spare the towns according to Abraham's conditions. The bargaining is interesting, but the key fact for our purpose is that God had already decided to punish the cities before the actions in Chapter 19 took place.

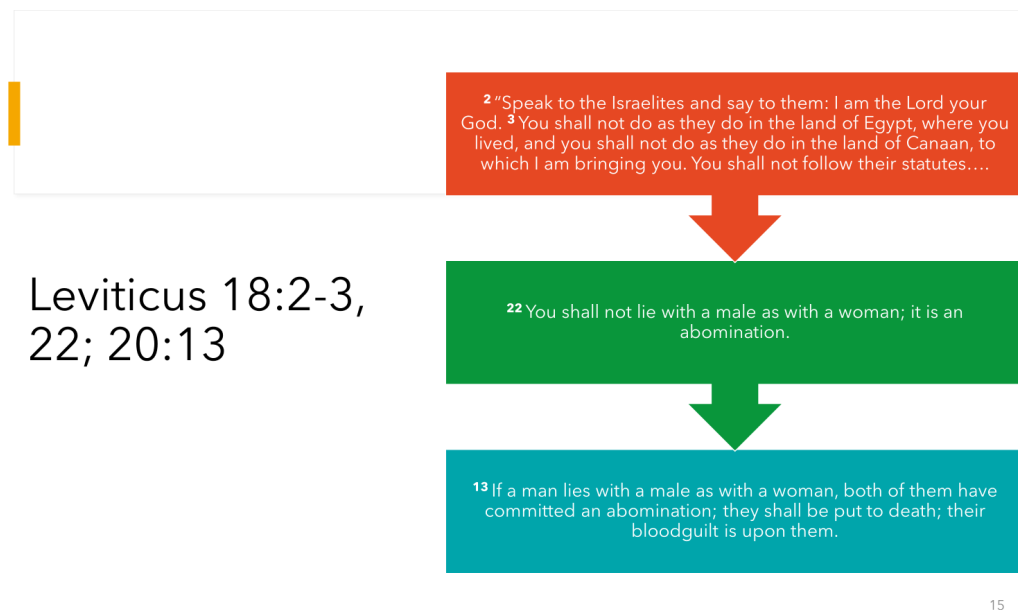
What was the sin that brought God's judgment? We hear from a later source, Ezekiel the prophet, that "this was the iniquity of Sodom...pride, fulness of bread, and careless ease; she did not strengthen the hand of the needy." (Ezekiel 16:48-50)

Isaiah and Jeremiah likewise depict Sodom and Gomorrah as shameless sinners guilty of adultery and lies. But there is nary a word about gay sex acts!

The two angels continue the journey to Sodom in Chapter 19, where they are surrounded by a violent mob threatening to "know" them (rape). This is when Lot offers his two daughters and... well, you know the rest of the story. Fire and sulfur rain down and the towns are destroyed, though Lot and his family escape (except for his

unfortunate wife, who decided to take one last look at home and came to a salty conclusion).

Did God rain down this destruction for the threatened (but not actual) rape of 2 men by other men? Was God so upset with whatever was happening in the bedrooms of Sodom that the fiery conclusion was warranted? The text simply does not say that – anywhere. This is a much later conclusion and interpretation that has been applied to the story. Speaking for myself, I find this to be a dubious interpretation.



These very plain-spoken verses come from a section of the Hebrew scripture known as **The Holiness Code** (found in chapters 17-26). There are lots of instruction and lists of things God’s people were supposed to do and not supposed to do. These are supplemental instructions to the original laws given by Moses, summarized in the 10 Commandments. They are likely written down 400-500 years after the time of Moses, written “looking back” by the priests who wanted to preserve the religious tradition of the people.

The code contains instructions for all sorts of actions and relationships – presumably things that the Israelites were struggling with. Some seem pretty major and severe, while others seem almost petty and ridiculous **from our perspective**. (We are not a wandering nation of sheep herders living in a desert 3,000 years ago.) Among the directives are these:

18:27: Do not cut the hair on the sides of your head or trim the corners of your beard.

18:34: When a foreigner resides...in your land, do not mistreat them. [They] must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself.

20:25: You must make a distinction between clean and unclean animals and between clean and unclean birds.

Jesus' apostle, Peter, had quite an issue with that last command when God told him it was okay to eat an unclean animal with a Gentile army commander in Acts 10. Peter basically told God, "But it's in the Bible!" God said, "Don't worry about that Peter – just do it!" (Well, kind of like that – you can read it.)

There are more admonitions regarding sexual practices than anything else in this section. It seems that sex was a problem, **especially for the men** in this wild, wandering, lustful wilderness culture.

Now, I need to speak very plainly in this next section – it's kind of R-rated. I'm going to be very blunt regarding the culture of the time. This was a time where men ruled and felt that they had the power and the right to do pretty much anything they wanted to do – even and especially concerning the places they put their penises! The penis was a symbol of strength and virility and equated to power in this society. (I am speaking here of the Mesopotamian culture in general, not simply the culture of the Israelites.)

These boys had a hard time (no pun intended) controlling themselves evidently, as there are many prohibitions against sex with others. These included:

- Your mother
- Your mother-in-law
- Your step-mother
- Your sister
- Your step-sister
- Your sister-in-law
- Your aunt, your granddaughter, your daughter-in-law, a woman and her daughter, any ritually unclean woman, the wife of a neighbor
- Another man
- An animal

Just to name a few!

Men, you cannot go around foisting yourselves upon anyone (or any animal) that you please. In the culture of the time, men got away with this stuff all the time!

The issue here, it seems to me, is one of domination and willful invasion of another, in the most intimate and ultimately degrading way possible. What is given by God as a good thing for enhancing relationship (sexual ability) is thus misused to demean and destroy. The generally prevailing understanding of the underlying motivation for sexual assault (whether male/female or male/male) is that the assault “is not about sexual gratification or sexual interest, but more about dominating people.” (Dr. Sherry Hamby, Research Professor, University of the South, Sewanee, TN and founding editor of the American Psychological Association's journal *Psychology of Violence*. There are other discussions about the primary motivation for sexual conquest of a non-consenting victim, as well – but again, that discussion is far beyond the scope of this presentation.)

These are texts based in a **shame/honor culture** – when you violently take from another what does not belong to you, you are bringing shame/dishonor to yourself and others. (Consider the most basic of the 10 Commandments: you shall not murder (take life); you shall not take your neighbor's ox, or ass, or servant, or wife; you shall not take another person's reputation (false witness), etc.)

In my opinion, one of the strongest purposes of this Holiness Code in the Israelite community is to protect the honor of the people – the tribes – as separate and distinct from the other peoples of the society. Do not live the way others do, in effect, as you are God's chosen and “holy” people. The focus is not so much on defining each and every instance of conduct unbecoming, so to speak, as to promote a general sense of right and wrong – the way we treat one another should be based on the way we are treated by God.

Let me continue with the next instance, this time quoting the Apostle Paul in the New Testament book of Romans. This is another reading that is often lifted from its historical context -- to our detriment.

As we needed to understand the culture of ancient Israel in its Mesopotamian context in order to situate Hebrew scripture texts, so we must shift our minds to the 1st-century AD world of Greece and Rome in order to read early Christian texts such as Paul's letters to young churches. Paul wrote during the late 50's and early 60's – twenty to thirty years after the time of Jesus. Though he never met the earthly Christ, his vision of the heavenly Jesus (as recorded in Acts, chapter 9) became a radical new center for his life.



Romans 1:18-27

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and injustice of those who by their injustice suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ Ever since the creation of the world God's eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been seen and understood through the things God has made. So they are without excuse, ²¹ for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless hearts were darkened. ²² ***Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.***

²⁴ **Therefore God gave them over** in the desires of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

²⁶ For this reason God gave them over to dishonorable passions. Their females exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, ²⁷ and in the same way also the males, giving up natural intercourse with females, were consumed with their passionate desires for one another. Males committed shameless acts with males and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

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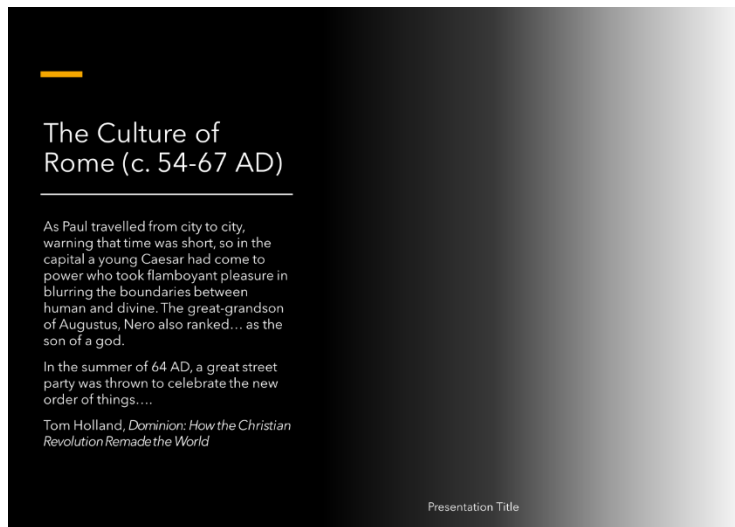
As a former Pharisee and critic of the followers of Christ, he became Christianity's staunchest public advocate.

Paul traveled widely and either established or encouraged many of the small gatherings of Jesus' followers in towns across the Roman empire. In addition to his personal presence, he wrote letters (in the form known as "epistles") to many of these churches. Though he had never visited the church in Rome itself, he wrote what many consider to be his most powerful statement of Christian spiritual formation and theology in the letter to that congregation.

These verses, from the opening chapter of the letter, are widely cited in the discussion of gay/lesbian issues. Let me give the scripture quotation, and then I'd like to do a bit of work in situating the background against which these Roman Christians may have heard and read them.

Some of this language seems, at first glance, to denounce same-sex intercourse in no uncertain terms. There is language about "those who suppress the truth" and "exchange the glory of the immortal God for images" – actions which evidently deserve the "wrath of God", causing God to "give them over to dishonorable passions." What is going on here? Is this a discourse meant to chastise and correct the actions of those within the

churches? Exactly who does the apostle have in mind as he opens his letter with these words?



For wider context, I refer to an excellent work of history by Tom Holland, a British historian, who has written ***Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World*** (Basic Books, 2019, 2019. Pp. 97-100) He describes the parallel

events in the life of the Roman emperor, Nero, whose reign overlapped Paul's own work among the Romans in approximately the years 54-68 AD.

As Paul travelled from city to city, warning that time was short [until the arrival of the true ruler of the world, the Christ], so in the capital a young Caesar had come to power who took flamboyant pleasure in blurring the boundaries between human and divine. The great-great grandson of Augustus, Nero also ranked... as the son of a god. When Nero brought his *euangelion* (the Greek word for "good news" or "gospel" which was literally posted on placards around the empire) ... he did so in the flashiest manner possible.

In the summer of AD 64, a great street party was thrown [in Rome] to celebrate the new order of things. In the very heart of the city, a lake was filled with sea-monsters. Along its edge, brothels were staffed with whores ranging from the cheapest street walkers to the most blue-blooded of aristocrats. For a single night, to the delight of the men who visited them and knew that the women were forbidden to refuse anyone, there was no slave or free.

This subversion of tradition sponsored by the emperor had manifest limits. The nobleman's daughter obliged to work as a prostitute, and serve whoever might demand to use her, was the emblem of a brute truth that most in the capital took for granted: the potency of the Roman penis. ... To be penetrated, male or female, was to be branded as inferior: to be marked as womanish, barbarian, servile. While the body of a free-born Roman was sacrosanct, those of others were fair game. 'It is accepted that every master is entitled to use his slave as he

desires.’ In Rome, men no more hesitated to use slaves and prostitutes [male and female] to relieve themselves of their sexual needs than they did to use the side of a road as a toilet.

Paul, by proclaiming the body a temple of the Holy Spirit, was not merely casting as sacrilege attitudes toward sex that most men in Rome took for granted. He was also giving to those who serviced them, the bar girls and the painted boys in brothels, the slaves used without compunction by their masters, a glimpse of salvation.

Context always matters when we read – especially scripture. Paul is speaking directly into the context of Nero’s subverting culture when he writes to these believers in Rome. Listen again to the words from Paul’s letter to the Romans, through the filter of the everyday people of Rome as they experienced the heightened mania of Nero’s rule.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth.

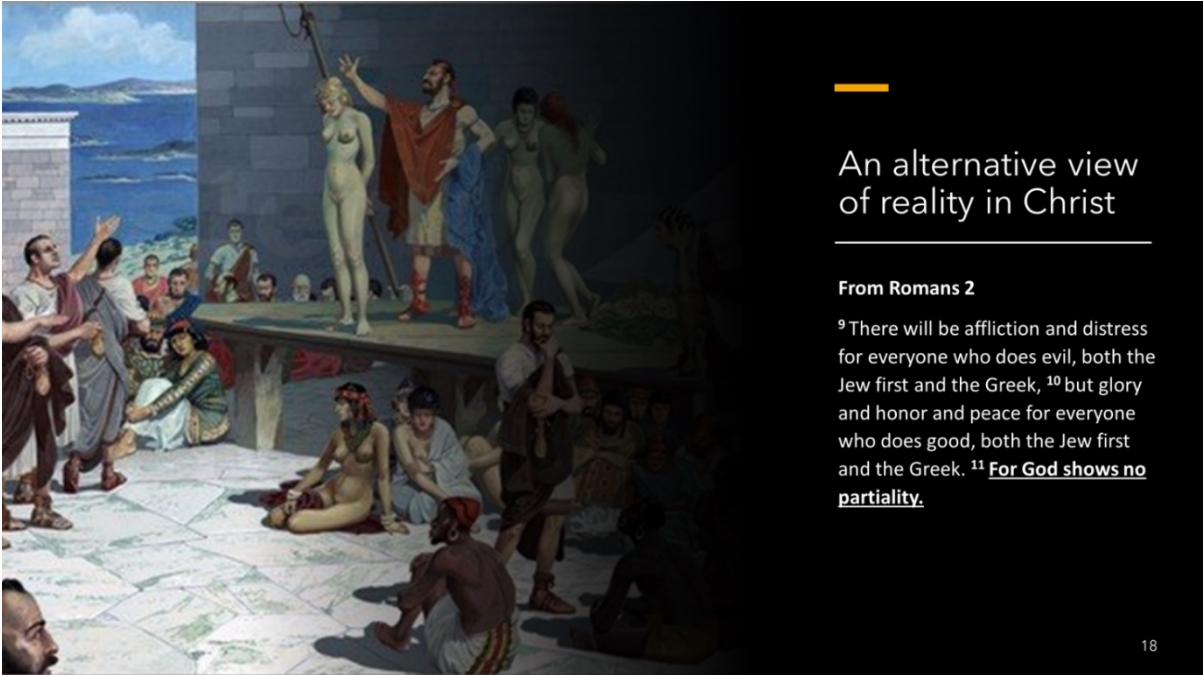
Who is Paul describing here? How does this opening statement compare with the scenes Holland describes under Nero?

For this reason, God gave them over to dishonorable passions....

And what follows is a whole list of stuff describing Nero and all who followed him (the “free-born Romans”) either explicitly or implicitly. These are the “God haters” in Paul’s terminology. In my opinion, Paul is not calling out individuals for their lifestyle choices but is rather calling out an entire society and culture with the emperor sitting at the top of the pile!

The Roman elite – the men at least – had the same issue as the warrior culture that surrounded Israel in their earlier days. If you were a free Roman man (women were not ‘citizens’ except by their association with men – husbands or fathers), you could do what you wished to do to anyone and at any time – practically with impunity. Your penis was yours to use as a means of domination and power. The only place you could not put it – without consent – was into another Roman citizen!

Do you see how the passage reads very differently in the context of the Roman society of the day? Seeking to bring its language uncritically into our own time is a terrible disservice to the text, and to the intent of the writer. The “good news” (like the *euangelion* of the emperor) Paul brings to this Roman culture is profoundly **counter-cultural**. The culture dictates that some people are better than others, and that these are the few who rule and benefit from living at the top of society. Paul says that, in Christ, this is not so; all are equal.



An alternative view of reality in Christ

From Romans 2

⁹ There will be affliction and distress for everyone who does evil, both the Jew first and the Greek, ¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, both the Jew first and the Greek. ¹¹ **For God shows no partiality.**

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Later in the letter (chapter 2, vv. 9-11) Paul continues his thought process: “There will be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil... but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good.... **For God shows no partiality.**”

That last phrase shocked and stunned the hearers – they had been told every day of their lives that they were “less than” their rulers and masters and that this was actually God’s will for them. If you were destined to be better than you were, you would not have been born a slave or a woman!

1 Corinthians 6:9-10

⁹ Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived!

The sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, men who engage in illicit sex, ¹⁰ thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, swindlers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God

Again, these verses are lifted out of their context and used to “hammer” gay and lesbian lifestyles – with the classic phrase, “See, that’s what the Bible says!” My reply: “No, that’s not the Bible – that’s just that verse.”

The culture in Corinth was akin to that of Rome; these were two of the leading cities of the day. Paul is addressing the tendency of many in the church to revert to the morals and standards of the society, rather than submitting to the higher standard of Christ, particularly with regard to how they treated one another.

When he begins to address the “wrongdoers” of the culture, he does so in terms that involve almost entirely the violation and sanctity of another person – and by extension, their bodies and being. These are terms of violence, connoting force against the will of another.

He then gives the counter-cultural standard in vv. 15ff:

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?.... Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you.

For people on the underside of society, those who could legally be abused verbally, economically, sexually, physically – this was, again, a startling concept. That my body was bought by God with a price, and that I was actually a good person – a ‘holy one’, at that – because of the Holy Spirit in me was nearly beyond comprehension.

Paul then lays out in Romans 7 the principle of mutuality in the marriage relationship. Without doubt, Paul assumed heterosexual relationships with traditional husband/wife language, but he clearly states , “This I say by concession, not by command. I say, not the Lord....”

1 Timothy 1:9-10

⁹ this means understanding that **the law is laid down not for the righteous** 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, ¹⁰ the sexually immoral, men who engage in illicit sex, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching

In my opinion, this passage cannot be read as forbidding mutually beneficial, loving, and other-honoring relationships of any kind. That idea is simply not here.

Are you tired of hearing me ask for context, please?

Please, give me some context...!!

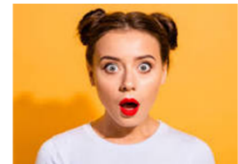
Like Romans and Corinthians, this is another list describing those who oppose the “law of God” – a phrase that invokes *Torah*, i.e., God’s way for God’s people.

V. 5: “⁵But the aim of such instruction is love that comes from a **pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith.**”

V. 8: “Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it legitimately

The list of those who violate (or misuse) this law are those who violate the trust and dignity of another – including using sex for power (where have we heard that one before?)

How is sexual intimacy used in the context of a relationship base on “purity, goodness, and sincerity”?



This law is summed up in v. 5: “The aim of the law is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith.” Paul then writes in v. 8, “Now we know that the law is good for those who use it legitimately.” He acknowledges that there are those who are lawless and disobedient... and violate the law with actions based on selfishness, greed, and violence. **Then** comes the list in v. 9, the part that is so often quoted apart from its background.

These are examples of violating what is pure, good, and sincere: murder, rape, slaving, lying, perjury, etc. All of these violate the trust and dignity of another, including forced sex with another person, whether male or female. The law Paul argues for – again, counter-culturally -- is that of purity, goodness, and sincerity.

How are these virtues to be worked out – including in sexual intimacy – in relationships in our time, whether between heterosexual or same-sex partners?

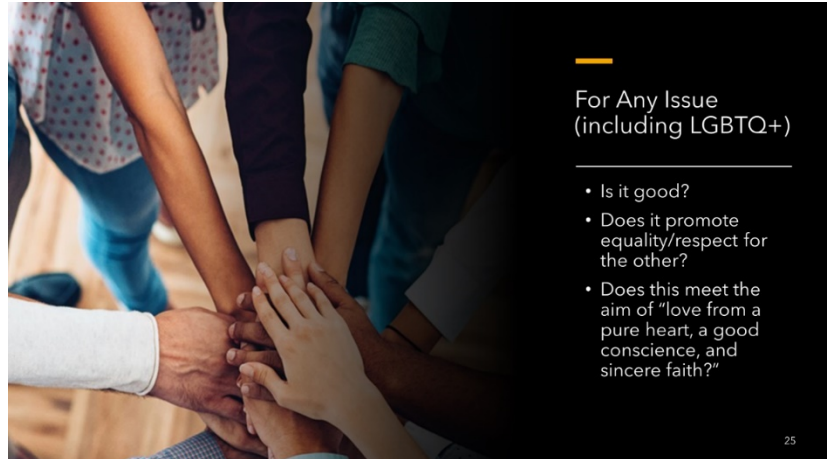
Scripture invites us to consider these questions regarding our own attitudes and action:

- Is it good?
- Does it promote respect/equality for the other?
- Does it meet the aim of love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith?

Let us live as people of wisdom, reading the texts that we hold dear **and** reading the context of our lives as we hold forth the good news – the gospel – of Jesus Christ.

Author's Note: There is so much yet to be said! We have not even broached the subject of those who identify as bisexual, asexual, non-binary, transgendered, queer/questioning, or any of the continually emerging descriptors in our society. I hope that this project will continue; more work to come!

Dr. John Fairless
Venice United Church of Christ
Spring, 2024



Endnotes

1. (Ska, Jean-Louis (2006). *Introduction to reading the Pentateuch*. Eisenbrauns. [ISBN 9781575061221](#).)
2. (Van Seters, John (1999). *The Pentateuch: A Social-Science Commentary*. A&C Black. [ISBN 978-1-84127-027-2](#).)