

## *Making Sense of the Bible*

### *“LGBTQ+ Lives Through the Bible”*

[Leviticus 20:13](#), [Romans 1:26-27](#)

Over the last several weeks we have examined some of the more perplexing, confusing, and disturbing parts of the Bible including women in the Bible last week. Today, we continue our sermon series based on Adam Hamilton’s book *Making Sense of the Bible* while considering various passages that have been a source of conflict within our church and used to malign my LGBTQ+ siblings in Christ. It’s my deepest hope and desire that our time together today might give everyone greater insight into not only how some have used the Bible to harm LGBTQ+ people and divide our church but also how we invite our LGBTQ+ family, and friends into a deeper relationship with God through a more welcoming Bible; and finally, how we might build a more vibrant reconciling congregation. That sounds like a lot and it is but what is even more amazing is that all of it can be accomplished through a more critical look at six short passages in the Bible.

Before we begin, however, I’d like to introduce a few terms that I’ll be using and that some may not ever of heard or understood. For example, I’ve already started using the acronym LGBTQ+ which many here are probably familiar with but some may not be so let me review it with you; starting with the letter ‘L’ we have Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and the plus (+) represents a list of other non-normative sexual and gender identities that fall under the queer umbrella. In other words, LGBTQ+ is the same as being queer.

Until fairly recently life as a LGBTQ+ person has been generally improving. In the last thirty years acceptance for queer people has more than doubled and is at the highest level ever. And while progress can be seen through such things as anti-discrimination laws and marriage equality, progress has slowed and, in some cases, even reversed as our country becomes ever more divided by such social issues. The damaging consequences can be seen through statistics suggesting that nearly 40% of the 1.6 million homeless youth today are LGBTQ+. As you consider that fact realize that LGBTQ folks make up only five percent of the general population. If we could end LGBTQ oppression there could be something like four hundred thousand less homeless youth!

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth are nearly three times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers and nearly one in every two transgender persons has attempted suicide. Substance abuse among LGBTQ youth is two to three times greater than their heterosexual peers. These numbers go on and on and on with a trail of tears in their wake. The universal catholic church has been a chief contributor in promoting shame, fear, and hate for LGBTQ people. It is my prayer that we will continue as individuals and a church to bring an end to this assault on God’s creation and reconcile with our LGBTQ+ siblings in Christ. Today, we know that homosexuality is a core aspect of personality that is probably fixed by early childhood, biologically based, and effecting a significant proportion of the population in virtually every known culture. There is no convincing evidence that sexual orientation or gender identity can be changed, and there is absolutely no evidence, whatsoever, that homosexuality is in any way pathological.

There are approximately six “clobber” passages found within the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. A “clobber” passage is so named by LGBTQ folks for the way it is used to metaphorically clobber

them. It is a passage that more conservative and orthodox readers of the Bible point to while declaring homosexuality an abomination and sin. These passages are the source of the conflict actively ripping apart The United Methodist Church today, and that has left frayed edges on so many other faith traditions. Worse yet, they are all too frequently the source of psychological and spiritual trauma for families who are torn between their religious beliefs and their LGBTQ+ children. These same clobber passages have been used to popularize the phrase “love the sinner, hate the sin. Finally, they have been used to justify something called an “ex-gay movement” including a now debunked, illegal, and harmful practice of trying to change an individual's sexual orientation from homosexual or bisexual to heterosexual using psychological or spiritual interventions.

This morning, Joshua, read two of the six LGBTQ “clobber” passages. There won't be enough time to talk in detail about the others, so I'll quickly mention them here. Genesis 19, the familiar story of Sodom and Gomorrah where a man called Lot meets two angels just outside the town of Sodom and invites them into his home for the evening. Before settling in for the night, however, all the males of Sodom come to Lots house demanding to have their way with the two strangers. Lot strongly resists their man-date and even offers the clamoring males his two daughters instead, which they in turn reject. When we covered this scripture in last month's Bible study the group agreed with many scholars who suggest that this story isn't about the sin of homosexuality but instead primarily about radical hospitality. It isn't about loving same-gender sexual relationships but inhospitality manifested through gang rape and domination.

I Corinthians 6:9 & I Timothy 1:10: Are typically lumped together because of their close similarity. These passages make reference to two words that are widely considered very difficult to translate. When we read Timothy 1:10 that says “fornicators, sodomites, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching” we find the word being translated into “sodomite,” and inviting us to consider its relationship with the gang rape story of Sodom. It would also likely be an oversight to not notice the dominating and devaluing nature in the sound teaching list given by Paul. Once again, we see that this passage is not about committed, loving, same-gender relationships but instead a rebuke for those who dominate and devalue others.

Let us take a deep collective breath together and begin looking at the one-two punch that Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 seem to offer. Leviticus 18:22 says “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination,” and a few chapters later, in Leviticus 20:13 announcing that “If a man lies with a male as with a woman both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death.” These passages seem to require little interpretation. In fact, the seeming clarity of these verses helps to explain their broad and frequent application by more conservative and orthodox folks against same-gender sexual relationships. Some scholars highlight the fact that neither of these verses mention female-to-female sexual behavior. Through that observation they suggest that these two prohibitions against men having sex with men is more a critique on compromising the social order of the time that valued men above all others. As a matter of fact, it is important to recognize that declaring something an abomination does not make it a sin in relation to God. All uses of the abomination within the Bible are in the context of social and cultural values of the time. If we resist the temptation to follow the “bible says it, I believe it, that settles it” attitude and examine these passages more carefully many interesting things begin to emerge. Let us begin by looking at the noun “abomination” labeling male-male sexual behavior. Before considering how this word has been translated and used in the Bible I'd like to invite all of us to consider what it might be like to hear that you're vile, wicked, detestable, and loathsome as queer folks are told routinely by some Christians, including members of their community, church, and even family. [silence] In my work as a mental health provider this would be classified as emotional

abuse. A little bit earlier I described some of the very real and all too frequent life-threatening consequences that arise from abuses like this.

So, what else is declared an abomination in the Bible? The Hebrew word *toebah* and a close synonym *shiqquts* is used to describe unclean foods (Lev. 11:10, 11; Deut. 14:3), apparently, I'm an abomination after eating the shrimp I had several nights ago but thankfully I haven't sacrificed any blemished animal yet (Deut. 17:1) or remarried my former wife (Deut. 24:4), although I am wearing slacks today which makes me a twice over abomination (Deut. 22:5).

Lord, at times it is difficult to understand the words that you set upon our hearts.

We ask you for the wisdom to find your true message in them. Amen.

If we read Leviticus literally and not selectively, it would mean that not only those that have same-gender relationships should end in death but also for children who curse at their parents and challenge the social order of the patriarchy (Leviticus 20:9); for those who upset the social order by committing adultery (Leviticus 20:10); and working on the Sabbath (Numbers 15:32-36). Thankfully, these proscriptions for the death penalty have been set aside by our Lord and Savior. There were times as my two sons were growing up that they challenged me, and talked back at me, and while I might have been very frustrated with them, I didn't have them put to death. Likewise, we don't send an adulterous partner to the gallows for their indiscretion despite any possible temptation. And so, it is with a loving, committed, mutually respecting same-gender relationship today. Indeed, our social order and the values on which they rest are thankfully different today than they were two and a half millennia ago as God spoke to Moses. Before moving on to Romans I'd like to say one more thing in relation to Leviticus. While noticing how we sometimes selectively ignore or discount some of the OT laws, I found myself thinking about a time nearly a year ago. I was sitting on the observation deck of the St. Louis Convention Center witnessing our church wrestle with the issue of human sexuality. It was an extremely painful process to watch as I and my queer clergy brethren were being legislated into exile. Few moments, however, matched the point where a progressive delegate proposed an amendment to the language of the Traditionalist plan against same-gender sexual behavior by adding "AND is either living in an adulterous relationship, a polyamorous relationship or in any deviation from the civil definition of marriage. The vote to adopt that amendment failed and clearly revealed the true hypocrisy of the Traditionalist caucus. In effect they were saying that other's people's sexual activities are wrong, but I get to keep mine.

When considering the six or so "clobber" passages few are sited nearly as much against LGBTQ+ folks as Romans 1:26-27. To fully understand those two shorts versus that Joshua read to us earlier, however, we need to examine Paul's letter to the Romans from the beginning. Because we have limited time, I encourage each of you to read Romans chapters one through three sometime soon and while these thoughts might remain fresh. Through a series of steps beginning in Romans 1:18-23 Paul describes the fall of man from the Glory of God to idol worship. In the next two verse he explains man's further decay into a lustful craze of those earthly idols. That brings us to Romans 1:26-27, and the passages so often employed to declare homosexuality a sin.

Let's review it once again:

**26** For this reason God gave them up to degrading (*ἀτιμία*: *atimia* – disgraceful, dishonorable) passions (*πάθος*: *pathos* - lust). Their women exchanged natural (*φυσικός*: *phusikos* - according to nature) intercourse for unnatural, **27** 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.

Recognize that the “them” being referred to in Romans 1:26 are lust crazed men and women idol worshippers. More importantly, God “gave them up” not because of their passions but because of their sin of idol worship. It also seems clear that the behavior being described here by Paul is not that of a loving, committed, mutually respecting same-gender sexual relationship. And while there is so much more to consider and say in relation to the clobber passages in Romans time prevents us from delving into it further.

As I’ve navigated us through these “clobber” passages you might have noticed me justifying the elimination of some like Leviticus while declaring them antiquated cultural or religious traditions that don’t exemplify today’s social values. My authority for suggesting such brazen actions comes from a continuous unfolding and reevaluation of them throughout history. I initially shied away from carefully examining the “clobber” passages while seeing it as an exercise in futility. The ongoing debate between progressive and traditionalist viewpoints on those passages has produced a dense library of books on both sides and nothing resolved. Meanwhile, LGBTQ lives have been trampled upon and destroyed. While you and I must continue to do all that we can to heal those wounds, it’s also vital that we work to restore God’s image given to us through His word. That grace, given to you by faith in Christ and that offers you salve and healing has been taken away taken from my LGBTQ+ siblings in Christ through the self-righteousness of those who interpret and decry us as an abomination in the sight of God; who have taken passages like those found in Leviticus, and Romans and used them in a way that drives LGBTQ+ folks away from Christ instead of towards Him and in ever deeper love and communion with Him. The harm must end. May we each pray for the courage and strength to search our hearts for the stains of hate and allow God’s grace and love to wash over them. The true sin of taking of what is God’s and casting it out must end. Let us pray that we live in the righteousness of God as revealed through His word, and creation. A creation that is both abundant and richly diverse.

Lord Jesus Christ fill us with your Holy Spirit, that we may be less of what we used to be, and that we may become more of what you want us to be. Amen.