



Some folks are gay,  
what does the Bible  
say?

Hosted by  
Phoenix  
Community  
Church UCC

# Welcome!

- Recording of session & slides will be available later
- Today's agenda:
  - Opening Prayer
  - How we read the Bible (Rev. Ken Arthur)
  - The "Clobber" Passages
    - In the Hebrew Bible (Angie Willard)
    - In the New Testament (Rev. Barb Van Eck)
  - An Inclusive God (Rev. Mike Tupper)
  - Closing Prayer

## Opening Prayer

O God, prepare us for new life.

Wash away the obstacles that prevent growth.

Nourish our community, and fill us with the Spirit.

O God, prepare us for new life.

Look after us in the crucible of difficult times.

Show us what we no longer need. Let us see what might be.

Amen.

# How we read the Bible (Rev. Ken Arthur)

- What is the Bible?
  - Foundational document for Christians
  - Not “The” book, but a library of books, poetry, and letters
  - Many voices, many points of view
  - Witness of diverse peoples to **their** relationships with the Divine
  - Revelation of path to God, but requires us to discern that path

# How we read the Bible

- How do we approach the Bible?
  - Not always easy to understand
  - Serious, but not literal
    - Conditioned by and expressions of the authors' cultural contexts and times
    - Filtered through the views and experiences of its many translators and interpreters
    - Conflicting scriptures and support for immoral actions are both found in the Bible
    - Literalism attempts to lock in a single meaning, denying that God is still speaking
    - No one takes everything in the Bible literally

# How we read the Bible

- Questions we might ask as we read particular passages
  - Who really wrote what we're reading, when, and for whom?
  - What was the author's message to their intended audience?
  - Was the author speaking literally or using metaphor and/or allegory?
  - How is the author influenced by their own culture and political situation? How were they trying to influence their context?
  - What are the author's personal beliefs and biases?
  - Is the text limited by the author's scientific understanding? What is the intended message behind any inaccuracies?
  - What did the text mean to those who wrote it? What are the traditional interpretations? What does it say to us in our context?

# How we read the Bible

- A couple final points:
  - The Bible has stood the test of time as a source of revelation
  - It's all right if the Bible has inconsistencies and factual errors. The Bible is not God. The Bible is a pointer to God. At its best, it says to us: God's down this path, let me tell you a story about how you can find your way.
  - The Bible gives us a common language to talk about God and a connection to millions of Christians throughout history. It gives us a common set of stories that we can use to reflect on our own personal relationships to God, to each other, and to Creation.



# Questions & Answers



# Hebrew Bible “Clobber” Passages (Angie Willard)

- Genesis 1 & 2 – Creation Stories
- Genesis 19 – Sodom and Gomorrah
- Leviticus 18:22 & 20:13 – Men lying with men is an abomination punishable by death
- Deuteronomy 23:17-18 – abhorrent to God

# Hebrew Bible “Clobber” Passages

- Genesis 1 & 2 – Creation Stories

Despite the sometimes used slogan that “God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve,” there is nothing in the creation stories about same sex relationships. Saying God doesn’t approve of something because it isn’t mentioned isn’t logical.

# Hebrew Bible “Clobber” Passages

- Genesis 19 – Sodom & Gomorrah

Rape and inhospitality, not homosexuality, are the sins of Sodom.

# Hebrew Bible “Clobber” Passages


- Leviticus 18:22: “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.”
- Leviticus 20:13: “If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them.”

How do ancient Purity laws affect our lives now?

# Hebrew Bible “Clobber” Passages

- Deuteronomy 23:17-18: “None of the daughters of Israel shall be a temple prostitute; none of the sons of Israel shall be a temple prostitute. You shall not bring the fee of a prostitute or the wages of a male prostitute into the house of the Lord your God in payment for any vow, for both of these are abhorrent to the Lord your God.”

Sons and daughters of Israel are not to be oppressed –  
THAT is abhorrent to God



# Questions & Answers

# New Testament “Clobber” Passages (Rev. Barb Van Eck)

- Romans 1:26-27 – the evil of unnatural passions
- 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 – not welcome in Kingdom
- 1 Timothy 1:9-11 – contrary to sound teaching
- Jude 1:7 – interpretation of Sodom & Gomorrah

# New Testament “Clobber” Passages

- Romans 1:26-27: “For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, 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.”
- Paul has no understanding of homosexuality as we do today:
  - Science informs us that sexual orientation is very impacted if not largely determined by genetics as the fetus is developing in the womb;
  - These genetics express as one of several sexual orientations, primarily orientation toward same/homosexual, opposite/heterosexual or both genders/bisexual.
  - Same gender people enter relationships, including loving, committed relationships just as heterosexual people do.
  - Sexual practices considered “natural” and “unnatural” are culturally defined... by the culture at large, by the “culture” between two people, etc.
  - Sexual activity’s “purpose” is for pleasure and expressions of love as well as for bearing children.



# New Testament “Clobber” Passages

- The culture of the Near East, 2,000 years ago was heavily influenced by Greek and then Roman occupiers whose religions included female goddesses of fertility and pleasure.
  - Their cultures included ownership of male and female slaves, some of whom were used for sexual gratification.
  - A custom among some well-to-do men was to take boys into “mentoring to manhood” relationships that included sexual activity.
  - Some temple practices in these cultures included “sacred sex,” as part of fertility rites; “temple prostitutes” were sometimes slaves donated by wealthy men as “offerings” to the deity.
  - Any large city, especially a port city, had (and still has) a thriving prostitution business, i.e. sex as a commodity one could buy.
  - In none of these situations, were(are) “sex workers” acting of their own free will, nor had they much, if any, power to change their situation. They were being exploited.

# New Testament “Clobber” Passages

- Paul, a Roman citizen, a pious Jew who became a fervent apostle of Christ Jesus, was condemning practices that were not the norm and were often condemned by his own religious understandings: particular sexual practices, sexual excess, sexual violence against those without power, and sexual activity practiced in and condoned by religion. He was also condemning injustices of Greek and Roman culture, perpetrated by and for the benefit of the wealthy and powerful.
- Paul was not talking about homosexuality as we understand it today, or about loving same-gender relationships.
- If you read the verses that follow this brief passage, Paul doesn't mention sex at all.

# New Testament “Clobber” Passages

- 1 Corinthians 6:9-10: “Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, **male prostitutes, sodomites**, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.”
- 1 Timothy 1:10-11: “This means understanding that the law is laid down not for the innocent 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, fornicators, **sodomites**, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.”
- Notice first that “male prostitutes” and “sodomites” are preceded by “fornicators,” (anyone who has sex outside of marriage) and “adulterers,” (married persons who have sex with someone besides their spouse.) The two categories the church so focuses on involving male/male sex are on the same level as heterosexual sex outside of marriage.

# New Testament “Clobber” Passages

- The root of the Greek word “malakoi” means “soft;” in King James Version in 1957, it was translated “effeminate.” Ancient sources seem to have understood it to mean the passive partner in male/male sexual activity, including in prostitution, and possibly the use of boys by men for sex.
- The Greek “arsenokoitai,” translated as “sodomites” is believed by some scholars to mean the customer of “malakoi,” thus a relationship that had connotations of sexual and economic exploitation.
- Paul, out of his own understandings, religious and cultural, may have been speaking about male/male sexual relationship but there are also economic and power injustices involved in the relationships he is condemning. He is not talking same-gender, loving relationships.

# New Testament “Clobber” Passages

- Jude 1:7: “Likewise, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which, in the same manner as they, indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural lust, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.”
- Recall that Sodom and Gomorrah is condemning the city’s male population’s desire to rape the strangers who came to Lot’s home when welcoming, protective hospitality was the expected, essential custom in desert communities & cultures. This was Jesus’ understanding of the story as we see in Matthew and Luke. Jesus sends his disciples out to teach, preach and heal in his name. If a town did not welcome them and “the Good News,” he said, “it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of Judgment than for that town.” (Matt. 10:15) Jesus understands this to be about hospitality.
- The Greek translated here as “pursued unnatural lust” is more literally translated as “having gone after strange flesh.” It may refer to homosexual sex, but it may just as easily refer to male/male sex between heterosexual men and/or about threatened sexual violence/rape toward strangers and/or sex with a man without power to say, “No.” The writer of Jude is already reinterpreting what the meaning of the Sodom and Gomorrah story, based on his own cultural understandings rather than Jesus’.



# Questions & Answers

# The Scripture Points to an Inclusive God (Rev. Mike Tupper)

- 1) The Goodness of God's creation of human beings - Genesis 1:26-31
- 2) The summary of the commandments of God is love - Matthew 22: 34-40
- 3) Application of the Great Commandment by Jesus toward the marginalized - Luke 10:25-37
- 4) God's inclusion of those considered 'impure' and 'outsider' - Acts 10:1-36
- 5) Equality in Christ - Galatians 3:26-29
- 6) Image of God, equality in Christ, central command to love - Colossians 3:10-14
- 7) Inclusion of sexual and gender minority - Acts 8:26-40

## The Scripture Points to an Inclusive God



Genesis 1:26-31- God created all humans in God's image and said, "All of it was very good"

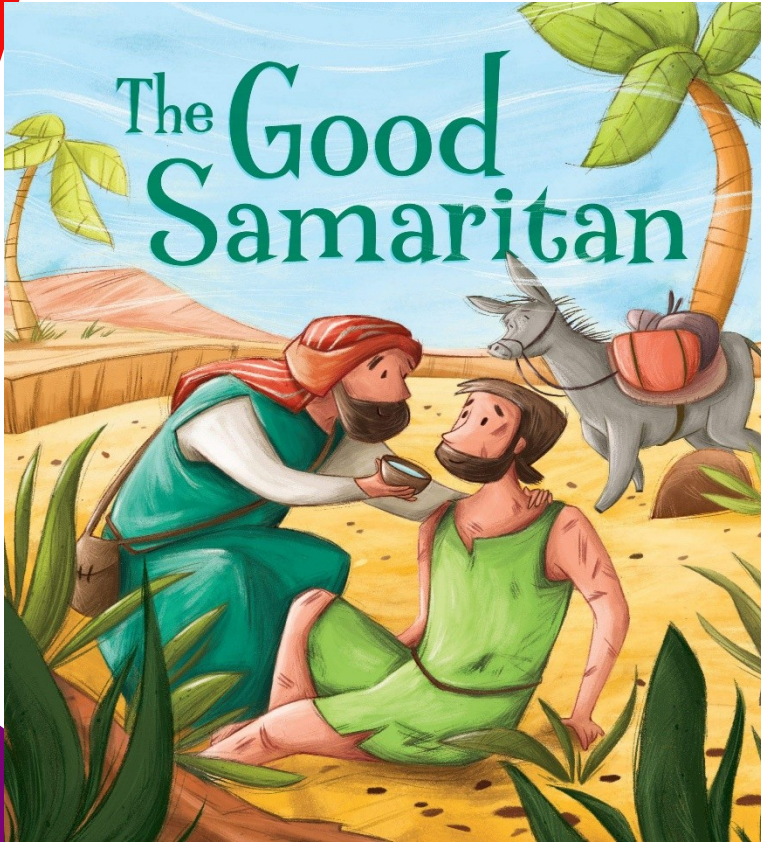


## The Scripture Points to an Inclusive God



Matthew 22:32-40 The summary of God's commandments is love. "Love others as much as you love yourself"

## The Scripture Points to an Inclusive God



Luke 10:25-37  
Application of the  
Great Commandment  
by Jesus toward the  
marginalized

## The Scripture Points to an Inclusive God



Acts 10:1-36 God's inclusion of those considered "impure" and "outsider" – Peter's vision and consequent baptism of "gentiles"

## The Scripture Points to an Inclusive God



Galatians 3:26-29 Equality in Christ

# The Scripture Points to an Inclusive God



Colossians 3:10-14 Image of God, equality in Christ, central command to love

## The Scripture Points to an Inclusive God



Acts 8:26-40 Inclusion of sexual and gender minority – Philip baptizes the Ethiopian eunuch



Questions  
&  
Answers

# Suggestions for Continued Learning

- Books:
  - Bible, Gender, Sexuality by James Brownson
  - What God Has Joined Together? by David Myers and Letha Scanzoni
  - Homosexuality and Christian Faith edited by Walter Wink
  - God and the Gay Christian by Matthew Vines
  - Beyond a Binary God: A Theology for Trans\* Allies by Tara Soughers
  - Transforming: The Bible & the Lives of Transgender Christians by Austen Hartke
  - The Rise and Fall of the Bible by Timothy Beal (more about how we understand the Bible)
  - Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology by Patrick S Cheng
  - Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality, and Spirit by Patrick S Cheng
  - From Sin to Amazing Grace: Discovering the Queer Christ by Patrick S Cheng



# Suggestions for Continued Learning

- Movies:
  - Seven Passages: The Stories of Gay Christians (documentary: Stephanie Sandberg, Director)
  - Boy Erased (drama: Joel Edgerton, Director)
  - Saved! (satire: Brian Dannelly, Director)

# Suggestions for Continued Learning

- Web links:
  - UCC Open and Affirming Coalition – <https://openandaffirming.org>
  - UCC Michigan Conference – <http://www.michucc.org/ministries/open-affirming/process>
  - The Gay Debate: The Bible and Homosexuality – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ezQjNJUSraY>
  - Do Bibles Matter in Homosexuality Debates? – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gq1UPevID6E>



# Closing Prayer