

Homosexuality and the Bible

Compiled and Edited

by

The Rev. Michael Beckett

INTRODUCTION

Often when people talk about this or that, homosexuality in particular, they quote the Bible. However, just what do these people KNOW about the Bible? A recent study quoted by Dr. Peter Gomes in *The Good Book* found that 38 percent of Americans polled were certain the Old Testament was written a few years *after* Jesus' death. Ten percent believed Joan of Arc was Noah's wife. Many even thought the epistles were the wives of the apostles. Isn't that sad???

This same kind of biblical ignorance is all too present around the topic of homosexuality. Often people who love and trust God's Word have never given careful and prayerful attention to what the Bible does or doesn't say about homosexuality. For example, many Christians don't know that:

- Jesus says nothing about same-sex behavior.
- The Jewish prophets are silent about homosexuality.
- Only six or seven of the Bible's one million verses refer to same-sex behavior in any way—and none of these verses refer to homosexual orientation as it's understood today.

It is my hope that this thesis will aid all of our GLBT family in their quest for truth as to what the Bible says about homosexuality.

THE BIBLE ITSELF

Most people who are certain they know what the Bible says about homosexuality don't know where the verses that reference same-sex behavior can be found. They haven't read them, let alone studied them carefully. They don't know the original meaning of the words in Hebrew or Greek. Moreover, they haven't tried to understand the historical context in which those words were written. Yet the assumption that the Bible condemns homosexuality is passed down from generation to generation with very little personal study or research. The consequences of this misinformation are disastrous, not only for God's gay and lesbian children, but for the entire church.

One of the reasons for this misinformation is caused by the many variations of the Bible itself. There are different interpretations of languages, different versions of those interpretations, and paraphrases of the interpretations. In some cases, the publishers of the Bibles in questions simply guess as to the meanings of some of the ancient words used in the Bible.

To discuss this further, let's look at translations versus paraphrases:

Translations

A good translation is taken from the Koine Greek which is the most common written language used during the time the New Testament was written.

Interlinear translations are at one end of the spectrum. These translations contain the original-language text along with a word-for-word rendering into the target language. However, a strictly word-for-word translation is often not the best possible way to capture the meaning of each Bible verse. Why not? There are a number of reasons. Here are two:

1. No two languages are exactly alike in grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure. Professor of Hebrew S. R. Driver says that languages “differ not only in grammar and roots, but also . . . in the manner in which ideas are built up into a sentence.” People who speak different languages think differently. “Consequently,” continues Professor Driver, “the forms taken by the sentence in different languages are not the same.”

Since no language exactly mirrors the vocabulary and grammar of Biblical Hebrew and Greek, a word-for-word translation of the Bible would be unclear or might even convey the wrong meaning. Consider the following examples.

In his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul used an expression that is literally translated “in the (dice) cube of the men.” (Ephesians 4:14, The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures) This expression refers to the practice of cheating others when using dice. In most languages, however, a literal

rendering of this allusion makes little sense. Translating this expression as “the trickery of men” is a clearer way to convey the meaning.

When writing to the Romans, Paul used a Greek expression that literally means “to the spirit boiling.” (Romans 12:11, Kingdom Interlinear) Does this wording make sense in your language? The expression actually means to be “aglow with the spirit.”

During one of His most famous speeches, Jesus used an expression that is often translated: “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” (Matthew 5:3) But a literal rendering of this expression is obscure in many languages. In some cases, a strictly literal translation even implies that “the poor in spirit” are mentally unbalanced or lacking in vitality and determination. However, Jesus was here teaching people that their happiness depended, not on satisfying their physical needs, but on recognizing their need for God’s guidance. (Luke 6:20) So such renderings as “those conscious of their spiritual need” or “those who know their need for God” convey more accurately the meaning of this expression.—Matthew 5:3; *The New Testament in Modern English*.

2. The meaning of a word or an expression may change depending on the context in which it is used. For instance, the Hebrew expression that normally refers to the human hand may have a wide variety of meanings. Depending on the context, this word may, for example, be rendered “control,” “openhandedness,” or “power.” (2 Samuel 8:3; 1 Kings 10:13; Proverbs 18:21) In fact, this particular word is translated in over 40 different ways in the English edition of the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures.

Because the context can affect the way a word is translated, the New World Translation uses nearly 16,000 English expressions to translate some 5,500 Biblical Greek terms, and it uses over 27,000 English expressions to translate about 8,500 Hebrew terms. Why this variety in the way words are translated? The translation committee judged that to render the best sense of these words according to the context was more important than to produce a strictly literal translation. Even so, the New World Translation is as consistent as possible in rendering Hebrew and Greek words into the target language.

Clearly, Bible translation involves more than simply rendering an original-language word the same way each time it occurs. Translators must use good judgment in order to select words that present the ideas of the original-language text accurately and understandably. In addition, they need to assemble the words and sentences in their translation in a way that conforms to the rules of grammar of the target language

Paraphrases

To paraphrase:

1. a restatement of a text or passage giving the meaning in another form, as for clearness; rewording.
2. the act or process of restating or rewording.

A paraphrase is taking from a translation, usually The King James Bible, and putting it into the local

vernacular for better understanding. A paraphrase is a retelling of something in your own words. A paraphrase of the Bible is different from a translation in that a translation attempts (to varying degrees) to communicate as “word-for-word” or as “thought-for-thought” as possible. A paraphrase takes the meaning of a verse or passage of Scripture and attempts to express the meaning in “plain language” – essentially the words the author of the paraphrase would use to say the same thing. For easy reading, a paraphrase may be more desirable than a translation, and many people use paraphrases as their “reading Bible,” preferring to read straight through as with a novel. This can be particularly helpful in long narrative passages such as found in Genesis, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles.

While easier to read, especially for new Christians and younger people, a paraphrase will outdate itself in a few years after it was written. For example in the late 60's, the most popular Bible was "The Good News for Modern Man". However, a person reading it today would not totally understand it because some of the words used then would be non-understandable today.

Another popular paraphrase, The New Living Translation, while very readable, loses in its very readability. For example:

Romans 8:1 KJV says "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit"

Romans 8:1 NLT says "So now there is no condemnation for those who belong in Christ Jesus."

The NLT does not have the rest of that passage! The chapter of Romans 8 speaks specifically about walking in the flesh vs. walking in the spirit.

Paraphrased Bibles often take liberties with the text as presented in the original languages. How so? The publishers who produce these Bibles, often called "free translations," either insert their opinion of what the original text could mean or omit some of the information contained in the original text. Paraphrase translations may be appealing because they are easy to read, however, their very freeness at times obscures or changes the meaning of the original text.

Consider the way that one paraphrase Bible translates Jesus' famous model prayer: "Our Father in heaven, reveal who you are." (Matthew 6:9, The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language) A more accurate translation of Jesus' words renders this passage: "Our Father in the heavens, let your name be sanctified." Note, too, the way that John 17:26 is rendered in some Bibles. According to one free translation, on the night of his arrest, Jesus said to his Father in prayer: "I made you known to them." (Today's English Version) However, a more faithful rendering of Jesus' prayer reads: "I have made *your name* known to them." Can you see how some translators actually hide the fact that God has a name that should be used and honored?

And then, there is the King James Version of the Bible. It probably is the most beautiful, elegant, literary English translation that will ever be produced. In fact, it contributed a great deal to the formation of the English language as we know it. Modern translations usually

lack the poetry of the King James because modern biblical scholars are more scientists than artists.

Nevertheless, there are two major problems with the King James Version. First of all, when it was translated in 1611, there were relatively few Hebrew and Greek manuscripts available and they tended to be recent and less accurate. In the 400 years since then, literally thousands more manuscripts have been discovered, ranging from small portions to complete copies of the Old or New Testaments. Many of these are very early and more accurate.

Secondly, the English in the King James Version is not at all the same language spoken today. Both the vocabulary and grammar have changed considerably. As a result, a reader often must retranslate the King James into modern English in his or her mind. For many people, especially children, reading the King James Version is like reading a foreign language.

So what DOES the Bible say?

Christian United Churches believe that the Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God, revealing God's love to every person through the law and the prophets, and finally, completely and ultimately in the being of Jesus Christ. However, the Bible is not a history book, a psychology text, or a scientific journal. The Bible is the description God gave us about who He is, and His desires and plans for humanity. The most significant component of this revelation is the story of our separation from God by sin and God's provision for restoration of fellowship through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross. Our need for redemption

does not change. Neither does God's desire to reconcile us to Himself.

Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." While the Bible was completed approximately 1900 years ago, its accuracy and relevance for today remain unchanged. The Bible is the sole objective source of all the revelation God has given us about Himself and His plan for humanity.

The Bible contains a great deal of information about the natural world that has been confirmed by scientific observations and research. Some of these passages include Leviticus 17:11; Ecclesiastes 1:6-7; Job 36:27-29; Psalm 102:25-27 and Colossians 1:16-17. (Look these passages up!) As the Bible's story of God's redemptive plan for humanity unfolds, many different characters are vividly described. In those descriptions, the Bible provides a great deal of information about human behavior and tendencies. Our own day-to-day experience shows us that this information is more accurate and descriptive of the human condition than any psychology textbook. Many historical facts recorded in the Bible have been confirmed by extra-biblical sources. Historical research often shows a great deal of agreement between biblical accounts and extra-biblical accounts of the same events.

The Bible's most important message—redemption—is universally and perpetually applicable to humanity. God's Word will never be outdated, superseded, or improved upon. Cultures change, laws change, generations come and go, but the Word of

God is as relevant today as it was when it was first written. Not all of Scripture necessarily applies explicitly to us today, but all Scriptures contain truths and examples that we can, and should, apply to our lives today.

So What about Homosexuality?

Over the centuries the Holy Spirit has taught us that certain Bible verses should not be understood as God's law for all time periods. Some verses are specific to the culture and time they were written, and are no longer viewed as appropriate, wise, or just.

Often, the Holy Spirit uses science to teach us why those ancient words no longer apply to our modern times. During the last three decades, for example, organizations representing 1.5 million U.S. health professionals (doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, counselors, and educators) have stated definitively that homosexual orientation is as natural as heterosexual orientation, that sexual orientation is determined by a combination of yet unknown pre- and post-natal influences, and that it is dangerous and inappropriate to tell a homosexual that he or she could or should attempt to change his or her sexual orientation.

In Genesis

Now what does the creation story say about homosexuality? Because the text says it is "natural" that a man and a woman come together to create a new life, some people think this means gay or lesbian

couples are “unnatural.” They read this interpretation into the text, even though the text is silent about all kinds of relationships that don’t lead to having children:

- couples who are unable to have children
- couples who are too old to have children
- couples who choose not to have children
- people who are single

Are these relationships (or lack of relationships) “unnatural”? There is nothing said here that condemns or approves the love that people of the same sex have for each other.

Therefore, Christian United Church believes that the Bible is the story of God’s love for the world and the people of the world. It tells the history of God’s love at work rescuing, renewing, and empowering humankind. It was never intended to be a book about human sexuality.

In fact, the Bible accepts sexual practices that we condemn and condemns sexual practices that we accept. Here are a few examples:

- **DEUTERONOMY 22:13-21**

If it is discovered that a bride is not a virgin, the Bible demands that she be executed by stoning immediately.

This is one of the reasons Joseph had such difficulty in accepting Mary after she became pregnant with Jesus. Rather than put Mary to death, Joseph decided to “put Mary away quietly” and move on with his life, until he was spoken to by the Holy Spirit in a dream, and told that Mary was carrying God’s child.

- **DEUTERONOMY 22:22**

If a married person has sex with someone else's husband or wife, the Bible commands that both adulterers be stoned to death.

- **MARK 10:1-12**

Divorce is strictly forbidden in both Testaments, as is remarriage of anyone who has been divorced.

- **LEVITICUS 18:19**

The Bible forbids a married couple from having sexual intercourse during a woman's period. If they disobey, both shall be executed.

- **MARK 12:18-27**

If a man dies childless, his widow is ordered by biblical law to have intercourse with each of his brothers in turn until she bears her deceased husband a male heir.

- **DEUTERONOMY 25:11-12**

If a man gets into a fight with another man and his wife seeks to rescue her husband by grabbing the enemy's genitals, her hand shall be cut off and no pity shall be shown her.

As well as the above examples of sexual 'misconduct' there are others that we totally ignore today. There has been a letter circulating on the Internet for several years, written in fun to Dr. Laura Schlesinger. In her radio show, Dr Laura Schlesinger said that, as an observant Jew, homosexuality is an abomination according to Leviticus 18:22, and cannot be condoned under any circumstance. The following response is an open letter to Dr. Laura, penned by a US resident, which was posted on the Internet. It's amusing, as well as informative:

Dear Dr. Laura:

Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God's Law. I have learned a great deal from your show, and try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind them that Leviticus 18:22 clearly states it to be an abomination ... End of debate.

I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some other elements of God's Laws and how to follow them.

1. Leviticus 25:44 states that I may possess slaves, both male and female, provided they are purchased from neighboring nations. A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans, but not Canadians. Can you clarify? Why can't I own Canadians?

2. I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?

3. I know that I am allowed no contact with a woman while she is in her period of menstrual uncleanness - Lev.15: 19-24. The problem is how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offense.

4. When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odor for the Lord - Lev.1:9. The problem is my neighbors. They claim the odor is not pleasing to them. Should I smite them?

5. I have a neighbor who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states he should be put to

death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself, or should I ask the police to do it?

6. A friend of mine feels that even though eating shellfish is an abomination, Lev. 11:10, it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality. I don't agree. Can you settle this? Are there 'degrees' of abomination?

7. Lev. 21:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle-room here?

8. Most of my male friends get their hair trimmed, including the hair around their temples, even though this is expressly forbidden by Lev. 19:27. How should they die?

9. I know from Lev. 11:6-8 that touching the skin of a dead pig makes me unclean, but may I still play football if I wear gloves?

10. My uncle has a farm. He violates Lev.19:19 by planting two different crops in the same field, as does his wife by wearing garments made of two different kinds of thread (cotton/polyester blend). He also tends to curse and blaspheme a lot. Is it really necessary that we go to all the trouble of getting the whole town together to stone them? Lev.24:10-16. Couldn't we just burn them to death at a private family affair, like we do with people who sleep with their in-laws? (Lev. 20:14)

I know you have studied these things extensively and thus enjoy considerable expertise in such matters, so I'm confident you can help.

Thank you again for reminding us that God's word is eternal and unchanging.

Your adoring fan,

James M. Kauffman, Ed.D. Professor Emeritus, Dept. Of
Curriculum, Instruction, and Special Education
University of Virginia

PS. It would be a damn shame if we couldn't own a
Canadian :)

The above teachings and verses are from the Holiness Code, given by God to Moses to set the Israelites apart from the peoples of the surrounding areas. Certainly people today don't agree with these teachings from the Bible. And they certainly shouldn't. The list goes on: The Bible says clearly that sex with a prostitute is acceptable for the husband but not for the wife. Polygamy (more than one wife) is acceptable, as is a king's having many concubines. (Solomon, the wisest king of all, had 1,000 concubines.) Slavery and sex with slaves, marriage of girls aged 11–13, and treatment of women as property are all accepted practices in the Scriptures. On the other hand, there are strict prohibitions against interracial marriage, birth control, discussing or even naming a sexual organ, and seeing one's parents nude.

As part of the Holiness Code we find Leviticus (Lev 18:22) is often cited as condemning homosexuality. Here again, it is in which translation or paraphrase one reads that the trouble begins. For example:

ESV: (English Standard Version): "You shall not lie with a man as with a woman; it is abomination."

KJV: (King James Version): "Thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind: it is abomination".

LB: (Living Bible): "Homosexuality is absolutely forbidden, for it is an enormous sin"

Net Bible: "You must not have sexual intercourse with a male as one has sexual intercourse with a woman; it is a detestable act." ¹

NIV: (New International Version) "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable."

NLT: (New Living Translation): "Do not practice homosexuality; it is a detestable sin."

RSV: (Revised Standard Version): "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination."

This is expanded in Leviticus 20:13. "If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act." Again, this is part of the Holiness Code, written to differentiate the Israelites from the peoples of the surrounding area. In examining the Leviticus verses, we find that the very pronounced Old Testament judgment against a man's having sexual relations with another man is included in the priestly Holiness Code of Leviticus (18:22 and 20:13) is significant because the concern of the priests was one of ritual purity. It was not the moral preaching of the prophets. From this priestly point of view, it is clear that above all else, Israel was to be uncontaminated by her pagan neighbors. In all things, she was to remain a separate "pure vessel unto the Lord." At this time, male prostitutes in the temples of the Canaanites, Babylonians, and other neighboring peoples, were common features of the pagan rites. There, it is understandable that this "homosexuality"

connected with the worship of false gods would certainly color Israel's actions and beliefs.

In transliterated Hebrew, the verse is written: "V'et zachar lo tishkav mishk'vey eeshah toeyvah hee." And in the original texts, the verse is, unfortunately, incomplete. Quite literally, it means "and with a male you shall not lay lyings of a woman." Its precise meaning is ambiguous. The phrase "lay lyings" has no obvious interpretation. Attempts have been made to make sense out of the original Hebrew by inserting a short phrase into the verse. For example:

1. The *Net Bible* translation inserts two words to produce "And with a male you shall not lay [as the] lyings of a woman." A man must not have sexual intercourse with another man as he would normally have with a woman. i.e. anal intercourse between two men is not permitted. From this literal, word for word translation, they produce a smoother English version: "You must not have sexual intercourse with a male as one has sexual intercourse with a woman."
2. An alternative translation would insert a different pair of words to produce: "And with a male you shall not lay [in the] lyings of a woman." That is, two men must not engage in sexual behavior on a woman's bed. Presumably, they must go elsewhere to have sex; a woman's bed was sacred and was to be reserved for heterosexual sex.

Many, probably most, theologians, Bible translators, and biblical commentators agree that the

verse is directed at men who engage in at least some form of anal sex with other men. But they do not agree on the full scope of the forbidden activities. And here again, it is in which translation or paraphrase one reads that the trouble begins. For example:

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The LB and NLT translations use the term "*homosexuality*" That is unusually deceptive for three reasons:

The passage in the ancient Hebrew is clearly talking about male-male sex acts. By using the word "*homosexuality*," the English translation appears to condemn lesbian activity as well. The latter behavior is definitely not mentioned in the original Hebrew text of this passage. In fact, lesbian behavior is not mentioned anywhere in the Hebrew Scriptures.

The term "*homosexuality*" has two distinct meanings in English. Sometimes it refers to sexual behavior (what some people do; their actions). Sometimes it relates to sexual orientation (what some people are; their feelings). One reader might conclude from an English translation that homosexual orientation is criticized in the Bible; others might assume that only homosexual behavior is criticized.

The word "*homosexual*" was first used in the very late in 19th century CE. There was no Hebrew word that meant "homosexual." Thus, whenever the word is seen in an English translation of the Bible, one should be wary that the translators might be inserting their own prejudices into the text.

The second part of this verse explains what type of sin this transgression falls under. There are two types of sin in the Mosaic Code:

1. Moral sin is produced by rebellion against God. This seems to be the interpretation of most biblical translations imply when they translate the Hebrew "*toeyvah*" in this verse into English words such as "*abomination*," "*enormous sin*," or "*detestable*."
2. Ceremonial uncleanness is caused by contact with a forbidden object or by engaging in a behavior which might be quite acceptable to non-Hebrews, but which was forbidden to the Children of Israel. Eating birds of prey, eating shellfish, cross breeding livestock, picking up sticks on a Saturday, planting a mixture of seeds in a field, and wearing clothing that is a blend of two textiles are examples of acts of ritual impurity which made a Child of Israel unclean. These were

not necessarily minor sins; some called for the ancient Israelite to be executed or expelled from the tribe.

From the above, we can conclude that these verses are referring only to the Holiness Code of the Israelites (Jews) and not to be taken as commands from God for us in today's world. Jesus and Paul both said the holiness code in Leviticus does not pertain to Christian believers. Nevertheless, there are still people who pull the two verses about men sleeping together from this ancient holiness code to say that the Bible seems to condemn homosexuality.

But wait, before we go any further, let's ask: What does this text say about God? Even if the old holiness codes no longer apply to us as Christians, it is important to remember that in every age, people of faith are responsible for setting moral and ethical standards that honor God. But we people of faith must be very careful not to allow our own prejudices to determine what those standards should be. Instead of selecting one item from an ancient Jewish holiness code and using it to condemn sexual or gender minorities, let's talk about setting sexual standards that please God -- standards appropriate for heterosexuals and homosexuals alike, standards based on loving concern, health, and wholeness for ourselves and for others.

Over the centuries the Holy Spirit has taught us that certain Bible verses should not be understood as God's law for all time periods. Some verses are specific to the culture and time they were written, and are no longer viewed as appropriate, wise, or just.

Often, the Holy Spirit uses science to teach us why those ancient words no longer apply to our modern times. During the last three decades, for example, organizations representing 1.5 million U.S. health professionals (doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, counselors, and educators) have stated definitively that homosexual orientation is as natural as heterosexual orientation, that sexual orientation is determined by a combination of yet unknown pre- and post-natal influences, and that it is dangerous and inappropriate to tell a homosexual that he or she could or should attempt to change his or her sexual orientation.

The Sin of Sodom

Inhospitality is always the reason cited in scripture for the destruction of Sodom. Homosexuality is never cited in scripture as the reason God destroyed Sodom. Isn't that interesting?

Hospitality in ancient near Eastern culture was far more important than in modern western culture. Travel through an often desolate wilderness was a tiresome process. Inns and safe places to spend the night were few and far between. Therefore travelers tended to stop and spend the night with whoever was friendly enough to offer shelter.

Imagine yourself riding or leading a camel through arid, dusty country day after day and you begin to appreciate the importance of hospitality in ancient times. Welcoming weary travelers for an overnight stay was common in the ancient near east. Hosts welcomed

travelers passing through, expecting the same hospitality would be returned to them in their travels.

After the men of Sodom gather at Lot's door and demand, "*Bring the men out unto us that we may know them,*" Lot steps outside, shuts the door to protect his guests and tries to reason with the would-be rapists.

Lot, the main participant and an eyewitness to the incident, cites hospitality as the primary reason the men of Sodom should not rape his visitors:

"for therefore [for hospitality] came they under the shadow of my roof" -Genesis 19:8.

Lot's appeal to the men of Sodom not to breach the hospitality ethic carries evidentiary weight for anyone who believes the Bible. For Lot, an active participant in this drama, inhospitality was a major factor in the Sodom story.

Genesis 13:8 tells us the herds of Abraham and Lot were so large that the men agreed to separate their camps, in order to have enough room to graze. Lot pitched his tent toward Sodom. The pagan influence of the people of Sodom eventually caused Lot to lose his family.

Scripture demonstrates extraordinary concern for the welfare of strangers. God carefully instructs His people that strangers must be treated with hospitality, justice and righteousness. Emphasis on hospitality - being careful not to practice inhospitality - permeates Jewish law.

1. God contrasts the hospitality of Abraham with the inhospitality of the men of Sodom, Genesis 18-19.
2. God commands the Jews not to treat strangers with inhospitality.

“Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.” - Exodus 22:21.

When the men of Sodom gathered around Lot's house 'to know' the strangers, they meant no more than to 'know' who they were, and the city was consequently destroyed not for sexual immorality, but for the sin of inhospitality to strangers. The Hebrew verb 'to know' used in this case is used in a sexual connotation only 10 of its 943 occurrences in the Bible, and the story of Sodom is the only place where it has been given a homosexual connotation. Listen to what Ezekiel 16:48–49 tell us: “This is the sin of Sodom; she and her suburbs had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not help or encourage the poor and needy. They were arrogant and this was abominable in God's eyes.” *“As I live, saith the LORD GOD, Sodom thy sister hath not done, she nor her daughters, as thou hast done, thou and thy daughters. Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom,*

1. *pride,*
2. *fullness of bread, and*
3. *abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters,*
4. *[Inhospitality] neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were*
5. *haughty, and*
6. *committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good.”* Ezekiel 16:48-50

Jesus himself believed that Sodom was destroyed for the sin of inhospitality. "Whosoever will not receive

you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city." (Matt. 10:14, Luke 10:10-12)

But what does the story of Sodom say about homosexual orientation as we understand it today? Nothing. It was common for soldiers, thieves, and bullies to rape a fallen enemy, asserting their victory by dehumanizing and demeaning the vanquished. This act of raping an enemy is about power and revenge, not about homosexuality or homosexual orientation. The sexual act that occurs in the story of Sodom is a gang rape—and homosexuals oppose gang rape as much as anyone. The story of Sodom also says that 'every man in the city' wanted 'to know' the strangers. Now, really...surely no one could believe that every man in the city of Sodom was gay...

The New Testament....

Strictly speaking, the New Testament says *nothing at all* about homosexuality. There is not a single Greek word or phrase in the entire New Testament that should be translated into English as "homosexual" or "homosexuality." In fact, the very notion of "homosexuality"—like that of "heterosexuality," "bisexuality," and even "sexual orientation"—is essentially a modern concept that would simply have been unintelligible to the New Testament writers. The word "homosexuality" came into use only in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and, as New Testament scholar Victor Paul Furnish notes, it and related terms

“presume an understanding of human sexuality that was possible only with the advent of modern psychological and sociological analysis.” In other words, “The ancient writers . . . were operating without the vaguest conception of what we have learned to call ‘sexual orientation’.”

None of the four gospels mentions the subject. This means that, so far as we know, Jesus never spoke about homosexuality, and we simply have no way of determining what his attitude toward it might have been, however, we do have cause to wonder as will be seen later. Moreover, there is nothing about homosexuality in the Book of Acts, in Hebrews, in Revelation, or in the letters attributed to James, Peter, John, and Jude. Further, homosexuality is not mentioned in ten of the thirteen letters attributed to Paul. It is only in Romans 1:26–27, 1 Corinthians 6:9–10, and 1 Timothy 1:8–11 that there *may* be references to homosexuality. The lack of references to homosexuality in the New Testament suggests that it was not a matter of major concern either for Jesus or for the early Christian movement.

The one passage in the New Testament that almost certainly does refer to homosexuality is based on some highly debatable presuppositions about its nature and causes.

The passage in question is Romans 1:26–27. Earlier in this letter to the Romans, the Paul is talking about idolatry, the worship of false gods. Then, beginning in verse 24, he talks about the results of idolatry. Verses 24 and 25 identify the results of idolatry as lust, impurity, and the degrading of one’s body. Then, verses 26 and 27 spell out in more detail the nature of this lust,

impurity, and bodily degradation as follows (New Revised Standard Version):

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.

Following verses 26 and 27, the remainder of the chapter lists some of the other results of idolatry, and the list is rather similar to the catalogues in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 and 1 Timothy 1:8–11. In other words, homosexuality is but one among other types of unacceptable behaviors. What must be emphasized, then, is that the passage, taken as a whole, is not about homosexuality. It is about idolatry. The only reason it mentions homosexuality at all is because Paul states that it is a result of willful idolatry. Knowing full well that there is one true God, people nevertheless freely choose to worship false gods.

Let's go back 2,000 years. Paul is writing this letter to Rome after his missionary tour of the Mediterranean. On his journey, Paul had seen great temples built to honor Aphrodite, Diana, and other fertility gods and goddesses of sex and passion instead of the one true God the apostle honors. Apparently, these priests and priestesses engaged in some odd sexual behaviors—including castrating themselves, carrying on drunken sexual orgies, and even having sex with young temple prostitutes (male and female)—all to honor the gods of sex, fertility, and pleasure. We're talking about worshipping idols here, worshipping other gods besides

God, and temple prostitution, not about homosexual men and women.

Now what do the writings of Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 say, first, about God, and then about homosexuality? These are the last two places in the Bible that seem to refer to same-sex behavior. We can combine them because they are so similar.

The New Revised Standard Version translates 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 as follows:

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.

Paul is exasperated. The Christians in Ephesus and Corinth are fighting among themselves. (Sound familiar? Think denomination against denomination and splits in churches.) In Corinth they're even suing one another in secular courts. Paul shouts across the distance, "You are breaking God's heart by the way you are treating one another."

Like any good writer, Paul anticipates their first question: "Well, how are we supposed to treat one another?" Paul answers, "You know very well how to treat one another from the Jewish law written on tablets of stone." The Jewish law was created by God to help regulate human behavior. To remind the churches in Corinth and Ephesus how God wants us to treat one another, Paul recites examples from the Jewish law first. Don't kill one another. Don't sleep with a person who is married to someone else. Don't lie or

cheat or steal. The list goes on to include admonitions against fornication, idolatry, whoremongering, perjury, drunkenness, revelry, and extortion.

In the original language of these epistles, Paul also includes the words: "*malokois*" and "*arsenokoitai*." This is where the confusion begins. What's a *malokois*? What's an *arsenokoitai*? Actually, those two Greek words have confused scholars to this very day. Greek scholars say that in first century the Greek word *malaokois* probably meant "effeminate call boys." The New Revised Standard Version says "male prostitutes." As for *arsenokoitai*, Greek scholars don't know exactly what it means—and the fact that we don't know is a big part of this debate.

Although the word in English Bibles is interpreted as referring to homosexuals, we can be fairly certain that this is not the meaning that Paul wanted to convey. If he had, he would have used the word "*paiderasste*," which was the standard Greek term at the time for sexual activity between males. We can conclude that he probably meant something other than people who engaged in male-male adult consensual sexual behavior.

Many sources have speculated about the meaning of "*arsenokoitai*:"

1. "Homosexual offenders:" The *NIV* contains this phrase. Suppose for the moment that Paul had attacked "*heterosexual offenders*" or "*heterosexual sexual offenders*." We would not interpret this today as a general condemnation of heterosexuality. It would be seen as an attack only on those heterosexuals who commit sexual

offences. Perhaps the appropriate interpretation of this verse is that it does not condemn all homosexuals. Rather it condemns only those homosexuals who engage in sexual offences (e.g. child sexual abuse, rape, unsafe sex, manipulative sex, coercive sex, etc).

2. Male prostitutes in Pagan temples: One source states that the Septuagint (an ancient, pre-Christian translation of the Old Testament into Greek made between the 3rd and 1st century BCE) translated the Hebrew "*quadesh*" in I Kings 14:24, 15:12 and 22:46 into a Greek word somewhat similar to "*arsenokoitai*." This passage referred to "*male temple prostitutes*" -- people who engaged in ritual sex in Pagan temples. Some leaders in the early Christian church also thought 1 Corinthians was referring to temple prostitutes. Some authorities believe that it simply means male prostitutes with female customers - a practice which appears to have been a common practice in the Roman empire.
3. Pimp: Another source refers to other writings, written later than 1 Corinthians, which contains the word "*arsenokoitai*:" This includes the Sibylline Oracles 2.70-77, Acts of John, and Theophilus of Antioch's Ad Autolyicum. The source suggests that the term refers "*to some kind of economic exploitation by means of sex (but not necessarily homosexual sex).*" Probably "*pimp*" or "*man living off of the avails of prostitution*" would be the closest English translations. It is worth noting that "*Much Greek homosexual erotic literature has*

survived, none of it contains the word *arsenokoitai*."

4. Masturbators. At the time of Martin Luther, "arsenokoitai" was universally interpreted as masturbator. By the 20th century, masturbation had become a more generally accepted behavior. So, new translations abandoned references to masturbators and switched the attack to homosexuals. The last religious writing in English that interpreted 1 Corinthians 6:9 as referring to masturbation is believed to be the [Roman] *Catholic Encyclopedia* of 1967.

In 1958, for the first time in history, a person translating that mysterious Greek word into English decided it meant *homosexuals*, even though there is, in fact, no such word in Greek or Hebrew. But that translator made the decision for all of us that placed the word *homosexual* in the English-language Bible for the very first time.

What do these texts say about God? After quoting from the Jewish law, Paul reminds the Christians in Corinth that they are under a new law: the law of Jesus, a law of love that requires us to do more than just avoid murder, adultery, lying, cheating, and stealing. Paul tells them what God wants is not strict adherence to a list of laws, but a pure heart, a good conscience, and a faith that isn't phony. That's the lesson we all need to learn from these texts. God doesn't want us squabbling over who is "in" and who is "out." God wants us to love one another. It's God's task to judge us. It is *NOT* our task to judge one another.

In the past, people used Paul's writings to support slavery, segregation, and apartheid. People still use Paul's writings to oppress women and limit their role in the home, in church, and in society. Rather than using Scripture to justify the ends to an oppressive means, the Christian United Church seeds to use the Bible as a means to demonstrate the love of God, and to use the Holy Scriptures as a guide to the way we, as Christians, should live.

Gay Relationships in the Bible?

Having examined the Scriptures for what the Bible supposedly says and does not say about homosexuality, we now need to ask, "Are there any examples of homosexual relationships in the Bible?" While nothing can be stated as fact, there are examples to consider. They are as follows:

Jonathan and David

1 Samuel 18:1,3

"And it came to pass, when he [David] had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul . . . And Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul."

And immediately afterward, Jonathan disrobed before David:

1 Samuel 18:4

"Jonathan divested himself of the mantle he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his military dress, and his sword, his bow and his belt.

Jonathan was not only disrobing, but was turning the symbols of his manhood over to David. This draws a very clear picture of what is happening here.

1 Samuel 20:30

"Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan, and he said unto him, Thou son of perverse rebellious woman, do not I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse [David] to thine own confusion, and unto the confusion of thy mother's nakedness?"

Reference to the nakedness of one's parents is one of the methods used in the Bible to refer to a sexual relationship. Jonathan had chosen David as his lover. And in the same conversations Saul says:

1 Samuel 20:31

Why, as long as the son of Jesse lives upon the earth you cannot make good your claim to the kingship!

This clarifies Saul's problem. One of the most important duties of being a king was producing an heir. Obviously, Jonathan had no intention of producing an heir, and therefore could not provide the final step needed to make good his claim to the kingship. He loved David and **only** David.

1 Samuel 20:41

" . . . they [David and Jonathan] kissed one another, and wept one with another . . . "

Here they are displaying a deep affection for one another, and showing an emotional attachment well beyond what would be shown by two heterosexuals in a similar situation. They actually weep together because of their upcoming forced separation.

2 Samuel 1:26

[After Jonathan's death, David said,] "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women."

As you can see, they were very much in love. The Bible shows them kissing one another -- not a normal activity for heterosexual men. To make sure you don't miss the sexual aspect, the love is compared (favorably, by the way) with the love of a woman. Their souls were knit together in love, and they made a covenant because of their love. Just think about how many covenants are made because of love. The covenant of marriage sort of sticks out. The actions immediately following that declaration of love are also unmistakable. Not many covenants made because of love result in the participants disrobing in each other's presence, but one such covenant -- the covenant of marriage -- does.

The comment about the nakedness of Jonathan's mother in the discussion of his relationship with David

strongly implies a sexual element to the relationship. This just reiterates what is already obvious.

To emphasize the point, Saul offers his oldest daughter Meroh to David, but David turns down the offer. He then offers his younger daughter Michel to David, who loves David, but David also turns this down. Something very interesting here is that, even though the Bible says that Michel loved David, there is no reciprocal "David loved Michel" statement. David finally agrees to marry Michel, but not for love, but rather for the benefit of having the king as his father-in-law.

1 Samuel 18:26

"When the servants reported this offer to David, he was pleased with the prospect of becoming the king's son-in-law."

Note that there is no mention of being pleased at the prospect of marrying Michel, but only with becoming the king's son-in-law.

David was obviously bisexual. But with a preference for men, since he found his love for Jonathan to be wonderful, passing the love of women. As a King he **had** to have a harem and produce heirs, no matter his sexual orientation, but his one true love was Jonathan.

Ruth and Naomi

One of the most beautiful passages in the Bible, and very frequently used in wedding ceremonies, is found in Ruth 1:16 – 17(KJV):

And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.

Far from home, her family entirely deceased, Naomi decides to go back home to Israel. Ruth, the wife of one of Naomi's deceased sons will not take Naomi's advice and go look for a new husband.

Ruth and Naomi returned to Israel. God blessed and honored the covenant the two women made between them. Ruth became an ancestor of Jesus.

The Centurion and His Servant

There is only one place in the entire Bible where we can find a glimpse of how Jesus personally might have felt, about homosexuals and their relationship to Him, and their relationship to God, as we Christians know God. It is the New Testament story of the Centurion and his Servant.

The story is told in two separate Gospels in our New Testament: Matthew 8:5-13, and Luke 7:1-10, regarding the Centurion who approaches Jesus so that his "servant" (modern English translation) might be cured. In Matthew's version, the Centurion came directly to Jesus seeking His help. In Luke's version, the Centurion called upon the Elders of Capernaum's Jews, sending them in his place to seek help. In Matthew, Jesus went to meet

the Centurion and spoke to him. In Luke, Jesus did not actually meet the Centurion but spoke to the city's Elders about his request, instead.

Whichever version one chooses, the particulars agree: There was a Roman Centurion -- "Commander of 100," a high office in Rome's armies -- whose personal servant was ill unto death and no one had been able to cure him. The Centurion was so distraught that he was willing to seek help from a nomadic "Healer" of whom he had heard.

Upon learning of the Centurion's distress and his plea for help from Jesus, the Lord instantly and without question chooses to act affirmatively. In Matthew's version, the Centurion says in person to Jesus, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed," proving the Centurion's simple faith in Jesus' powers.

In Luke's version, the Centurion instead sends word through the Jewish Elders, saying, "...but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed," which equally demonstrates the Centurion's simple faith.

What was the Centurion's disposition at the time? How concerned was he over the impending death of his "servant"?

In Matthew, it is written that "...there came unto him a Centurion, beseeching him"...

In Luke, it says, "...a certain Centurion's servant, who was dear unto him..."

What should we make of that? Let us consider:

You are a Roman Centurion, a soldier of experience and rank, authorized -- unlike soldiers of lower rank -- to carry with you into the field, and to any

far-flung post the Emperor sends you, your own personal servant. Typically, in Rome's Legions, your servant is a slave, not a freeman. He is male, since women are generally not allowed other than as camp-following prostitutes. He is younger than you, in order to assure your authority and supremacy, but still old enough and strong enough to lift the heavy bronze breastplates and tie the leather thongs that fasten them on your chest and back, tie the greaves on your shins, follow alongside in combat with your spare spear and sword, groom and feed your horse, etc.

And, because you are a man who has needs, and you are a Roman and a Pagan and your varied gods have no proscriptions against homosexual acts, your servant is also available for sex as and when you deem fit.

(We know for certain, from extra-Biblical writings in voluminous quotes, that Roman officers commonly owned slave-servants who fulfilled many needs, and that this was customary in that day. This does not mean that the officers were themselves what we would call "homosexual" -- usually, they had lovers or wives back home, safe in Rome. It only means that while away, on campaign, they saw no religious obstacle to sexual outlet whatever the gender.)

So, even though you are on temporary military duty, in Capernaum, a remote outpost of the Empire, and you could easily find a replacement servant to help with your battle-gear and mess, all you need do, by law, is grab a likely youth off the street and say, "You are mine; come serve me," even so, not all your needs as an Officer can be easily met by just anyone off the

street. There is history, long association, and intimate familiarity at work, here.

Would you "beseech" the help of a wandering psychic of a foreign religion for a mere "servant" of yours? Would you hold "dear unto" you a mere servant? Would you humble yourself in front of your own god or gods, in front of the ignorant natives who were your subjects, just in order to cure a mere servant in a menial position...you, of exalted rank and power?

Not likely. Not if you are a Roman Centurion. You would not, could not, risk the ridicule.

Now, let's consider the actual language given us in the Gospels. This is important to Fundamentalist/Evangelical Christians, believing that the Bible is the Inerrant Word of God and it cannot lie.

In Matthew, the earlier account, directed to a Greek-speaking Jewish audience, the Greek word given for servant is "pais" -- which means literally "boy", but can also mean "servant", and in the vernacular of the times also meant "lover". In Greek extra-Biblical writings of the time, the word "pais" is used as a euphemism for "boy lover." (In modern English, the word "pederasty" derives partly from "pais".)

Luke, who was writing in a distinctly Greek milieu, changes the word "pais" to the more eros-neutral "doulos" ("servant" or "slave"), presumably sensitive of its homosexual implications to any reader with a Greek cultural background. (It is this rendering which Strong, writing in the pronouncedly anti-gay era of the late 1800s, preferred to use in his famous numbered Concordance.)

Hence, the setting for the story: A Roman Centurion's "pais" -- presumably his boy servant, lover,

partner in a slave relationship -- is ill unto death. He desperately, beseechingly seeks a cure from what for him is a most unlikely source: A wandering, be-sandaled, Jew, a member of a subject tribe, about whom tales have been heard of miraculous "healings."

The Centurion, so desperate is his concern, fastens upon one thing and one thing only: Faith; his raw, pure, unqualified faith that the "holy man" from whom he seeks help is all that He is claimed to be, a man with the power of Divine Healing.

The Centurion *believes.

Now...what, we must ask, is Jesus' response? Jesus the All-Knowing, Son of God, Omniscient and Aware?

Does Jesus abjure the Centurion for living in a questionable relationship with his "pais"? No.

Does Jesus ask the Centurion about his designs on the boy, saying, "Until I am satisfied about your relationship, I will not heal him!" No.

Does Jesus say, "I know about you Romans and your 'paises,' and God's Law prevents me from helping you unless you convert your ways"? No.

Does Jesus even insist that the boy, who was at the very least a slave, a thrall to a representative of a foreign military power, first be made a freeman by the Centurion? No.

He simply *heals* the boy.

And upon so doing, Jesus says: (Matthew's version) "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel....Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee."

(Luke's version) "... He marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him,

'I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.'"

The Ethiopian Eunuch

Acts 8:26-40 tells the story of the Ethiopian eunuch: Philip, a deacon of the Jerusalem Church, fled Jerusalem after the stoning of Stephen, to evangelize in Samaria. This is God's clue that He is interested in evangelizing the outcasts. God wants Samaritan outcasts to be saved as much as He wants Jews to be saved. Samaritans were despised because they were not full Jews. They were descended from Jews who intermarried with pagan Canaanites at the time of the Babylonian captivity. In Samaria, God richly blessed Philip's evangelistic efforts, Acts 8:6-14. The Jerusalem apostles, hearing of the revival, send Peter and John to assist Philip.

After Peter and John arrive, the angel of the Lord instructs Philip to leave the revival and to go south, into the Gaza desert. Always obedient, Philip heads south. While in the desert, Philip meets the second Ethiopian eunuch mentioned in scripture (the first Ethiopian eunuch in scripture is found in Jeremiah 38:7). Eunuchs were another class of individuals considered by many Jews as outcasts. This eunuch was traveling south in his chariot, away from Jerusalem.

Scripture describes this man as a "*eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians*" Acts 8:27. (It is also interesting to note that the eunuch, being Ethiopian, was more than likely black.)

The diligence with which the eunuch read the Isaiah scroll, the earnestness with which he inquired of

Philip, and the promptness with which he asked for baptism, after he believed the gospel, all testify to the lofty nature of this eunuch's character.

Two thousand years after the fact, it is impossible to prove that the Ethiopian eunuch was a gay man. It is equally impossible to prove that the Ethiopian eunuch was not a gay man. What we can say is that the evidence points to the fact that the Ethiopian eunuch was a physically intact, born eunuch or natural eunuch, not a physically castrated eunuch.

Jesus pointed out to His disciples in Matthew 19:12 concerning eunuchs: that the first class of eunuchs were "so born from their mother's womb." Born eunuchs never made a personal choice to be a eunuch. Jesus made an exception for born eunuchs, to the heterosexual marriage paradigm.

Clement of Alexandria informs us that: "*a true eunuch is not one who is unable, but one who is unwilling, to indulge in pleasure*" [with a woman].

And quoting followers of the Gnostic teacher Basilides on eunuchs, Clement further tells us: "*Some men, from their birth, have a natural sense of repulsion from a woman.*" As a born eunuch, the most probable scenario is that the Ethiopian eunuch was a gay man.

As we will see, given these facts, it perfectly fits scripture to believe that this eunuch was not only a born eunuch but also a gay man.

After the Ethiopian eunuch expressed believing faith in Jesus Christ, Philip did not forbid him to be baptized but willingly baptized him. Deuteronomy 23:1 forbade entry into the Jewish congregation, of one "*wounded in the stones*" or with his "*privy member cut off.*"

This was understood by ancient Jews, to prohibit a castrated eunuch from entering the congregation of Israel. Because this prohibition was strictly observed among Jews, Philip, a Jew, would not have ignored the law of Moses.

Remember, too, that at this time in history, no one on earth knew that Jews and Gentiles were one body in Christ because God had not yet given that revelation to anyone.

The apostle Paul had not been saved yet and Ephesians had not been written. The early church was a largely Jewish group, who believed they were still required to keep the Jewish law. (They were still arguing about keeping the Law in Acts 15, seven chapters after the events in Acts 8.)

Therefore, because Philip was willing to baptize the eunuch and admit him to membership in the Christian congregation, he must have known that the Ethiopian eunuch was not a physically castrated eunuch.

A physically intact, born eunuch, could enter the congregation of Israel, according to the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Yebamoth, Folio 81a, and according to Jeremiah 34:15-19.

Some will argue that the physical status of the eunuch was unimportant to Philip but that is highly unlikely. Paul was not yet converted when these events occurred. His conversion occurs in Acts 9. God's revelation to Paul, that we are '*not under law but under grace*' (Romans 6:14), had not yet been given. Pauline revelation would not be "revelation" if God gave it to Philip before He gave it to Paul. Therefore, Philip was operating as if the Law of Moses was still in effect. And the Law of Moses forbade "*one wounded in*

the stones or with his privy member cut off" [a castrated eunuch] to enter the congregation.

Lacking Pauline revelation about law and grace, not knowing that Jews and Gentiles were one body in Christ, (That Jews and Gentiles were one body in Christ was revealed to Paul and written by him, in Ephesians 2:15-16, some 20 years after Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch.) it is not reasonable to believe that Philip would ignore Deuteronomy 23:1 in dealing with the Ethiopian eunuch.

Natural eunuchs or eunuchs by nature or born eunuchs were physically intact men who, from their mother's womb, possessed what Gregory of Nazianzus referred to as "*natural chastity*" or no sexual interest in women. Gregory understood that eunuchs by nature faced a different temptation, toward sexual relationships with other men. Gregory warned eunuchs by nature against cult prostitution in worship of the Canaanite fertility goddess.

It is interesting to note that Philip did not instruct the eunuch that he had to stop being a eunuch. And Philip, who had power to heal the sick, did not heal the eunuch of being a eunuch. Also, It is inconceivable that godly Philip simply decided to ignore Deuteronomy 23:1.

It is more likely that Philip ascertained from the eunuch that he was a natural eunuch, a eunuch by nature, a physically intact man, born a eunuch, from his mother's womb.

This line of reasoning does not prove the Ethiopian eunuch was homosexual but it certainly makes more sense than the traditional teaching, that a Spirit-filled evangelist who believed he was under the Law of

Moses, would intentionally violate the Law of Moses by allowing a physically castrated eunuch to become part of the Christian congregation.

Understanding that the Ethiopian eunuch was a gay man sets the story in an entirely different light. That God included the eunuch in the family of God before He revealed to Paul that Jews and Gentiles would be one body in Christ is a dramatic event. When God does something this dramatic, He has a wise purpose. When a Spirit-filled evangelist is specifically directed by God, to leave an active revival, to preach salvation to a eunuch, a gay man, we discover that God loves homosexuals as much as God loves heterosexuals. We also understand that God has a loving, redemptive plan for eunuchs-gays, which does not compel them to change their sexual orientation.

God reveals in Acts 8 that He intends born again, gay people to be part of His church. God intended to save this individual, even though he was a eunuch, a gay man. Philip willingly journeyed into the Gaza desert to lead a homosexual man to Christ. What an incredible example for modern Christians to follow!

What God Did *Not* Say About The Ethiopian Eunuch?

The common Christian teaching is that when you get saved, God saves you from being homosexual. Gays and lesbians are instructed to forsake their innate sexual orientation like they forsake fleshly sins. It is interesting to note that Scripture records no command from God, instructing the eunuch that after salvation, he must change his sexual orientation and stop being a eunuch.

Scripture says nothing about Philip encouraging the Ethiopian eunuch to join an Ex-Eunuch Ministry or an Ex-Gay Ministry. Scripture is clear that Philip, who had power to heal the sick and work miracles, Acts 8:6-7, did not heal the Ethiopian eunuch of being a eunuch or a homosexual.

God moved Luke to record that, after the eunuch believed with all his heart and was baptized, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip and *“the eunuch saw him no more”* Acts 8:39.

This statement by the Holy Spirit is of paramount importance. This is God's clue in the text of scripture, that the Ethiopian eunuch was still a eunuch after he got saved. God saved the eunuch's soul but did not change his sexual orientation.

So, what is all of this telling us? It is telling us that peace and joy are available when you believe God's truth instead of man's lies. God never said the unkind things about gays, lesbians, bisexuals and the transgendered that some Christians say about us. Whom you choose to believe determines your peace and happiness. If you believe the haters, you'll never have peace. If you believe God and the Bible, your life can be a peaceful oasis in a sometimes crazy world.

God loves you with an everlasting love!

GLBT Christian - you are a wonderful part of God's Creative Plan. You are NOT a freak of nature. You are not an accident. God loves you, John 3:16, and according to Jesus, God intends some of His children to be born gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered, Matthew 19:12. GLBT people are not the result of a

sinful personal choice nor are we the result of the fall of Adam. As the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch demonstrates, GLBT people are as much a part of God's Redemptive plan as everyone else.

"Taste and see that the Lord is good." Psalm 34:8

Life is an adventure and God wants to share the adventure with you. Will you make the Lord Jesus welcome in your life today?

We at Christian United Church would love to have you join us, to grow in spirit, knowledge, and in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to join us in worship of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

It is our hope that by reading and studying this text, you have found some peace in being who you are, and in the knowledge that God loves you, and you are welcome to God's Kingdom, and into our fellowship.

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