

The Comprehensive Compassion of Progressive Revelation

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Then and Now:

We live in a wonderful time in an area of progressive change in the Capital city of North Carolina. As Christian people living in the cosmopolitan area of Raleigh we are among people of many cultures and backgrounds. Our Bishop, Michael Curry, equates Raleigh to the region of Galilee, where Jesus lived and taught, because it was ethnically and economically diverse. We desire to be hospitable to all who partner with us in this Christian community and welcome the challenge of our time and our world. This is not always easy but, those who remain together with us, find it stimulating and rewarding in our personal lives as well as an opportunity to enable the Realm of God to our time and place.

Here and There:

The Episcopal Church is also a part of the World-wide Anglican Communion that is pervasive around the globe. We are not always on the same "page" but, so far, we have continued together through "thick and thin" in sharing our heritage of scripture, tradition, and reason. In our desire to be faithful as the people of God we, like Jesus in the area of Galilee, have our religious differences within and outside our Communion. To fully understand and express the compassionate love of God that Jesus understood as Abba, a tender and familiar expression for father in Arabic, that contrasted the harsh and legalistic view of the Kingdom of God that many others held. Even today many of us speak of a loving God while promoting strict rules and interpretations of what we believe to be the true structure of God's Realm now. We do this with our interpretations and use of the Bible using a variety of verses quoted from various books that evolved over a long time of culturally diverse periods of history.

Old and New:

The historical documents preserved at the back of the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer regarding the customs of using scripture actually warns against interpreting one portion of scripture so as to contradict other portions. *"The Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority in Controversies of Faith: and yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything that is contrary to God's Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another."* (Book of Common Prayer - Historical Documents, pg. 871 #20 Of The Authority of the Church) Since the Anglican Church exists among many different cultures and customs around the world, it is not uncommon for local interpretations of scripture to be understood differently. Then with the rapid increase of different denominations and independent branches of Christianity that have emerged just in this last century alone, a great variety of scriptural interpretation now exists regarding biblical texts.

Change in Meaning:

Another important fact is in the linguistic definitions of words we read in scripture that are very different in meaning when we carefully compared them to our more modern usage. Marcus Borg, in his latest book, "Speaking Christian", provides a wealth of information regarding notable differences in their meaning within the early Christian communities when compared to their common meanings today. In chapter 3, Marcus starts with the word Salvation and says that it is a "loaded" word. While it is used over 500 times in the Bible it *"seldom refers to the afterlife"*. In scripture it *"speaks mainly about transformation of life this side of death - about personal transformation and political transformation. Salvation in the Bible is seldom about an afterlife."* Regarding the Christian Creeds Marcus points out, in chapter 22, that they *"all are historical products that use the language of their time and place"*. *"In both Greek and Latin, the meaning of the word translated in English as person is quite different from its modern meaning. In the fourth century when trinitarian doctrine was*

formulated, the word persona in Latin and its Greek equivalent prosopon referred to the mask worn by actors in the theater.....The ancient meaning of persona/prosopon suggests that for Christians the one God is known and speaks in three primary roles or ways: as creator and the God of Israel; in Jesus; and through the Spirit". His book can become a vital tool in helping a variety of Christians today become better acquainted with the meaning of biblical words and how differently we define them today.

Proper and Improper use of Scripture:

This is generally referred to as Exegesis - (*an explanation or critical interpretation (especially of the Bible)*) or Eisegesis - (*personal interpretation of a text (especially of the Bible) using your own ideas*). Too often the Bible and other Holy Writings are misused by people who choose particular texts to support their beliefs and doctrines. This is particularly true in discussions regarding race, gender, and human sexuality. In our more recent history in America religious people have used scripture to support slavery, subjugation of women, and rage against homosexuality. How we use Scripture is a very important consideration when we engage in the study and application of our sacred writings. We need to be cautious when quoting texts to be sure we are faithful to their meanings and not just as a "proof text" to support a personal belief.

Today, when people quote verses selected from multiple books throughout the Bible, especially when people try to prove that the Bible considers homosexuality to be an abomination and sinful, they use this improper method. Here are some scriptures that are popularly used in this manner:

- **Leviticus 18:22** *"Never have sexual intercourse with a man as with a woman. It is disgusting."* This verse is taken out of a section that invokes many other restrictions that are not adhered to or not very relevant for today, like 18:19 *"Never have sexual intercourse with a woman while she is unclean during her monthly period."* or 19:19 *"Obey my laws. Never crossbreed different kinds of animals. Never plant two kinds of crops in your field. Never wear clothes made from two kinds of material."* or 19:31 *"Don't turn to psychics or mediums to get help. That will make you unclean."* This section of Leviticus, from chapters 17 through 26, is referred to as The Holiness Code - a collection of secular, ritualistic, moral, and festival regulations stressing that the people of Israel are separated from the rest of the world because God has chosen them. It is important to recognize that Homosexuality, as we define and consider it today, was not a part of their understanding or consideration.

This is Eisegesis (reading an idea into) not Exegesis (receiving an idea from) scripture

- **Genesis 19:1-29 - Sodom and Gomorrah**
This is another story that is often connected with homosexuality and from which the word sodomy is derived. Sodomy may be committed by a man with another man or with a woman. When we hear Jesus referring to Sodom and Gomorrah in the Gospels he is not referring to sex but is clearly speaking about inhospitality and lack of welcome to strangers as the real sin of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Matthew 10:14-15, "If anyone doesn't welcome you or listen to what you say, leave that house or city, and shake its dust off your feet. I can guarantee this truth: Judgment day will be better for Sodom and Gomorrah than for that city."

Even today some still use sodomy, treating a man as a woman, as evidence of their winning superiority. Indeed our hospitality and welcoming respect for one another, especially woman and minorities of every kind, still needs much improvement according to Jesus.

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- *"I will group 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:9-10 together for discussion purposes because the debate around each centers pretty much around the proper definition of one word -*

arsenokoitais. The Greek word *arsenokoitais* has posed a problem for scholars throughout the years, as it appears to be a 'slang' word not commonly used. In fact it only appears twice in Scripture; once in 1 Timothy 1:9-10 and again in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10." As you read down to the end of this article you will see a more recent and quite clear meaning comes to the fore. "The Greek compound term *arseno-koitais* literally means 'the male who has many beds'. The word *arsen* means 'male', the adjective *o* means 'the', and the term *koitais* is defined as 'many beds'. Thus, the entire phrase means a male with multiple bed-partners; a promiscuous man. Everywhere that the word *koitais* is used in the plural in the Bible denotes promiscuity. However, when the same word is used in the singular form, the Bible gives approval because the singular denotes monogamy." it is simply about promiscuity regardless of one's sexual orientation. For a more complete explanation please go to this website: http://www.gaychurch.org/Gay_and_Christian_YES/calling_the_rainbow_nation_home/7c_gac_clobber_passages_arsenokoitais.htm

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- Romans 1:21-31 - In Romans, we are introduced to a group of people who knowingly reject God. It most likely speaks of those who were temple prostitutes as part of a religious cult. In this opening portion of Romans, Paul is elaborating on the theme that "all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory".

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Some Concluding Words:

In reading the Christian Scriptures we cannot find anything that was mentioned by Jesus because he never taught for or against homosexuality. This raises the question, if homosexuality truly is a sin worthy of eternal damnation, as some believe it is, then why didn't Jesus discuss it?

Archbishop Desmond Tutu said, "We fought against apartheid in South Africa, supported by people the world over, because black people were being blamed and made to suffer for something we could do nothing about - our very skin. It is the same with sexual orientation. It is a given. I could not have fought against the discrimination of apartheid and not also fight against the discrimination that homosexuals endure, even in our churches and faith groups.For me this struggle is a seamless robe. Opposing apartheid was a matter of justice. Opposing discrimination against women is a matter of justice. Opposing discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is a matter of justice." (pg. 54, of his book, "God Is Not A Christian: and other provocations)

Today we recognize that our human sexuality is something with which we are born. The expression of our sexuality is as follows:

Heterosexual - sexually attracted to members of the opposite sex

Homosexual - sexually attracted to members of your own sex

Lesbian - of or relating to or characterized by homosexual relations between woman

Gay - homosexual or arousing homosexual desires (generally referring to men)

Bisexual - sexually attracted to both sexes

Transsexual - overwhelmingly desirous of being, completely identifying with, the opposite sex

I will repeat again that homosexuality, as we know and understand it today, was not included in the culture of the Bible. With modern Psychology and genetics we are able to recognize that no one chooses homosexuality anymore than heterosexuality. It is a given that must be made acceptable among all people if true justice is to be done.