

Sunday Symposium #2: A Biblical View of Sexuality

Two Objectives:

- Examining 4 different perspectives of what the Bible has to say about the specific issue of homosexual behavior
 - Exploring what the Bible has to say about human sexual behavior in general
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Objective #1:

Examining 4 different perspectives of what the Bible has to say about the specific issue of homosexual behavior...

The 4 Perspectives:

- #1 **Radical Support** of homosexual behavior as God-given and blessed, and the ELCA should be doing more than the new resolutions propose
- #2 **General Support** of homosexual behavior as God-given and blessed, and support of the new ELCA resolutions
- #3 **General Opposition** to new resolutions & policy changes of the ELCA – they are blessing behavior that is not in accordance with God’s intentions for creation
- #4 **Radical Opposition** to homosexual behavior

Perspective #1: Radical Support

- Goodsoil.org
- Genesis 1:27 “Imago Dei” – we are in the image of God
- Mark 12:30 “Love” – love is the foundation of Christianity
- Galatians 3:28 “Boundaries” – Jesus came to break down barriers
- Other texts directly referencing homosexual behavior do not apply – argue they are not looked at in context
- Bible is a “resource”-
(thus, experience becomes an equal authority to scripture)
- Sin=bigotry, homophobia & literalism
- “Sexual Orientation”: God-given & blessed-
(such teaching will end violence & injustice)
- Policy Changes = a good 1st Step

Writings & sources that illustrate the views of perspective #1-Radical Support:

-Who is Goodsoil?:

Goodsoil is a collaboration of organizations working for the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and their families in the full ministerial and sacramental life of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). We work to reconcile our church's policies and practices regarding same-gender marriage, blessings of covenanted unions, and the rostering of partnered LGBT ministers, harmonizing these with our shared values of faith, trust, commitment, monogamy, mutuality, and dignity.

-goodsoil.com/about.html

-Core values of this perspective:

“One of the realities that becomes apparent when we see Christ is that he consistently crossed religious and societal boundaries, reached out to the marginalized and modeled a radical ethic of love. In recent times, the church has repented of interpretations of scripture that justified slavery, silenced women, oppressed people of color, and maligned the Jewish people. The crucial question before the church is not whether the current recommendation on ministry policies challenges long-standing scriptural interpretations and ecclesiastical practices. It obviously does. Rather, the ultimate question is whether the recommendation on ministry policies proclaims Christ [Christum treiben] and his message of grace more faithfully than older interpretations and practices. We, the faculty of LSTC, are convinced that it does and, therefore, support the approval of the recommendation.”

-Faculty of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

-On interpreting biblical texts addressing homosexual behavior:

“The seven biblical texts that are frequently cited on the issue of homosexuality are not directly pertinent to the 21st century discussion because some of them condemn specifically homosexual rape, deal with questions of ‘clean and unclean’ that are not normative in the Christian community, do not take into account issues like ‘sexual orientation,’ and presuppose that all would agree with a particular interpretation of what ‘nature’ teaches.”

-From the document “*Appropriate Next Steps for the ELCA*”
By various theologians at ELCA Seminaries and Educational Institutions
-Published on goodsoil.org

-View of the Role of Scripture, Truth & Experience:

“The Bible is a resource.”

“There is no absolute truth.”

-Dr. Gwen Saylor
Prof. Of Old Testament, Wartburg Theological Seminary
Direct quotations from Fall 2001 course titled: “Biblical Interpretation”

“We must ask ourselves which of the church's values we continue to want, respect, and love; in other words, which values are compatible with who we are and are not destructive of our dignity as persons.”

-Theologian John McNeill in
Taking a Chance on God: Liberating Theology for Gays, Lesbians, and their Lovers, Families and Friends

-On the resolutions and policy changes in the ELCA = a good first step:

“I wish everyone in our church were at the place where we could simply say, ‘It is time to include responsible brothers and sisters in Christ in same-gender relationships among the rostered ministries of this church.’ That is, for me and many others, our ‘conscience-bound belief.’”

But I am a realist. Though we have taken some significant steps in the last 20 years, our church is not at the place where we can do more than what is proposed in the Recommendations. If they are adopted by the Churchwide Assembly they will open the door for us to be more honest.

-Herbert Chilstrom, Former ELCA Presiding Bishop

“Now the real work begins. What does this mean? This is a decision that will take decades to live into. We still do not fully understand what the church did when it opened the doors to women on the roster nearly 40 years ago, and we are still a profoundly Euro-centric and racist church body. What this ultimately will mean is a robust and diverse roster, with leaders aplenty for any and all contexts, serving in their full integrity and moving around the church at equal rates, for equal pay, at all levels of church leadership. That vision is decades off. That will not be the reality even in my lifetime, and I am just now 30.

Although I am thrilled by this step forward, it will be a long time before this church fully engages the gifts of lgbt pastors—just as our deep and abiding sexism and racism continues to thwart our ability to fully engage the gifts of leaders who are women and people of color.

And this decision does little to heal the brokenness that has driven hundreds of profoundly faithful and gifted leaders away from the church by virtue of our discriminatory policies. Most of them are gone forever. Many have joined the UCC or the Episcopal churches; many are simply wounded too deeply to ever darken the door of a church again. This is a sign of hope for a brighter future, a foretaste of the feast to come, but we still offer lament and confession for the sins of the past—and we pray that in God’s good time and God’s good grace, we will be reconciled.”

-Rev. Jay McDivitt, ELCA Pastor

“The social statement on human sexuality provides a solid foundation, but it is only that. Much more needs to be done to make it deeper and more inclusive. We need to be actively participating in and guiding the decisions about how policy changes will be implemented. We need to press ourselves and the larger church for clearer and more open thinking not only about gay and lesbian folks, but also about bi-sexual and transgender and the full range of God’s people who were barely mentioned at the assembly.”

-Rev Keith Olstad

Co-Pastor with Rev Anita Hill at St. Paul-Reformation Lutheran

Perspective #4: Radical Opposition

- Movements such as Westboro Baptist, Rev. Fred Phelps: godhatesfags.com
- Literalist
- Militant
- Heavy on Judgment
- Genesis 19:4-7, 24-25 – Sodom & Gomorrah
- Leviticus 18:22
- Leviticus 20:13

“Westboro Baptist Church engages in daily peaceful sidewalk demonstrations opposing the homosexual lifestyle of soul-damning, nation-destroying filth. We display large, colorful signs containing Bible words and sentiments, including: GOD HATES FAGS, FAGS HATE GOD, AIDS CURES FAGS, THANK GOD FOR AIDS, FAGS BURN IN HELL, GOD IS NOT MOCKED, FAGS ARE NATURE FREAKS, GOD GAVE FAGS UP, NO SPECIAL LAWS FOR FAGS, FAGS DOOM NATIONS, THANK GOD FOR DEAD SOLDIERS, FAG TROOPS, GOD BLEW UP THE TROOPS, GOD HATES AMERICA, AMERICA IS DOOMED, THE WORLD IS DOOMED, etc. Perceiving the modern militant homosexual movement to pose a clear and present danger to the survival of America, exposing our nation to the wrath of God as in 1898 B.C. at Sodom and Gomorrah, WBC has conducted **41,226** such demonstrations since June, 1991, at homosexual parades and other events, including funerals of impenitent sodomites (like Matthew Shepard) and over 200 military funerals of troops whom God has killed in Iraq/Afghanistan in righteous judgment against an evil nation.”

-godhatesfags.com

Perspective #2: General Support

- Similar quotes from Scripture as perspective #1: (Gen 1, Mark 12, Gal 3)
- Emphasis on experience and stories (friends & family)
- “Embrace the mystery” • God makes people different – love each other, embrace the diversity, live in unity
- Less contentious than Group #1
- “Live in the tension” - (more willing to compromise and live with those who oppose the resolutions)

Perspective #3: General Opposition

- C.O.R.E.
- Emphasize the Authority of Scripture: Scripture interprets our experience, rather than experience being the authority equal to, or greater than, scripture.
- Genesis 1:27...& 2:24...& Ch.3 – created male & female – created for each other – and yes, originally created in the image of God, but we have fallen
- Romans 3:23 – all have sinned, so we are not ganging up on one particular kind of sin, or one particular group of people
- 2 Peter 3:9, John 3:16, Rom 5 – God’s love for all sinners – no one is more righteous than another
- OT: A variety of relationships existed, but the ideal of Gen 2:24 is still upheld throughout – the ideal of one man and one woman united in marriage (ex: Abraham, David, etc)
- In Mt 19:4-6 Jesus upholds Gen 2:24; Paul does the same in Eph 5:31.
- Romans 1:20-28 “abandoning natural relations” was a result of falling away from God
- 1 Cor 6:9-11 – one behavior listed among many kinds of sexual and non-sexual sins
- “Christ Transforms Culture”: rather than having culture transform Christ or the Word
- God, and all Christians, are to love all people, and...
- We can love all people without blessing behavior that is not in accordance with God’s will (Ex. Adultery, addiction, stealing, etc)
- All people are called to repentance, and all receive forgiveness & new life in Christ!

Writings & sources that illustrate the views of perspective #3- General Opposition:

-Who is Lutheran C.O.R.E.?:

Lutheran CORE:

“The over-arching goal of Lutheran CORE is to be a voice for the Word of God within the church. We are, therefore, a confessing and confessional movement within the Lutheran church. We seek the renewal of Lutheran churches according to Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, and we endorse the Common Confession as a summary of Lutheran convictions for our time and place. Lutheran CORE is open to all who share our commitment for renewal — congregations, lay people, pastors, and other reform movements.

We are committed to prayer for the Lutheran churches and their leaders. We seek for ways to dialog with both synodical and churchwide leaders. We will continue to support our church, when its decisions and

actions conform with the Word of God. We will speak the truth in love when our church diverges from the Word of God.”

-Lutherancore.org

-On the Authority of Scripture:

The Lutheran Confessions offer a clear answer to this question: “We believe, teach, and confess that the only rule and guiding principle according to which all teachings and teachers are to be evaluated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments alone” (*Book of Concord, Formula of Concord, Epitome, Rule and Norm*).

Likewise, the ELCA Confession of Faith states: “This church accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life” (*ELCA Constitution 2.03*).

As the *source* of the Church’s proclamation, faith, and life, Christians draw their understandings for faith and life from the Bible. As the *norm* of the Church’s proclamation, faith, and life, Christians look to the Bible to define what is a faithful interpretation of the Christian faith.

A commitment to the clear word of Scripture was central to the Lutheran Reformation. It is essential that all statements and actions of the ELCA reflect this commitment to Scripture stated in our constitution and essential to our identity as Lutherans.

-Lutheran CORE

Many ELCA members are unwilling to change church teaching on marriage, sexual ethics, and same-sex sexual activity, because...

“They believe that the ELCA must remain faithful to the Scriptures and to the Christian consensus of nearly 2,000 years on marriage, sexual ethics, and homosexual behavior. They have considered the arguments of those asking the ELCA to reject the classical understanding of Scripture and the settled teaching of the Church. They have not found those arguments to be convincing. They find Scripture’s teaching on marriage and on same-sex sexual activity to be clear. They believe that there must be overwhelming evidence in favor of change to be willing to reject what they see as the clear witness of the Bible and its interpretation by generations of Christians.”

-Lutheran CORE

“Those who would press the church to change the norm of her teaching on this question must understand that they press the church toward schism. For a church which allows itself to be pushed to regard homosexual activity as no longer a departure from the biblical norm and to recognize homosexual partnerships as a form of personal relationship equivalent to marriage would no longer stand on the foundation of the Scripture but rather in opposition to its unanimous witness. A church that takes such a step has thereby ceased to be an evangelical church in the tradition of the Lutheran Reformation.”

Wolfhart Pannenberg
Professor of Systematic Theology,
University of Munich

-On Christ Transforming Culture, rather than culture transforming Christ and the Word:

“The Redeemer... tries the hearts and judges the subconscious life; he deals with what is deepest and most fundamental in man. He heals the most stubborn and virulent human disease; he forgives the most hidden and proliferous sin, the distrust, lovelessness, and hopelessness of man in his relation to God. And this he does not simply by offering ideas, counsel, and laws; but by living with men in great humility, enduring death for their sakes, and rising again from the grave in a demonstration of God’s grace rather than an argument about it.”

“History is fundamentally not a course of merely human events, but always a dramatic interaction between God and men... History is the story of God’s mighty deeds and of man’s responses to them... [which includes] the divine possibility of a present renewal.”

Where is the ELCA?

How many people hold each of these 4 perspectives:

- At the National Assembly in August, the votes fell along these lines:
55-60% Radically or Generally supported changing ELCA policy,
while 40-45% Generally opposed changing ELCA policy
- However, in the 2005 Report from the ELCA Task Force for Sexuality Studies, the feedback forms returned to the task force revealed the ELCA falls along these lines:
57% Generally opposed changing ELCA policy, while 22% Radically or Generally supported changing ELCA policy

“The majority of the responses expressed **opposition** to the blessing of same-sex unions and to the ordaining, commissioning, or consecrating of people in such partnerships.
(57%)

However, a significant number of responses expressed **approval** of such practices. (22%)
Others proposed **alternatives** that would permit those congregations or synods that wish to call partnered gay and lesbian candidates to do so without making it the policy of the whole church.

Still others counseled **delay** in decision or gave **no opinion**.

—Report and Recommendations from the Task Force
for Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Studies on Sexuality, p.10

*Finally, since your pastors have been asked to provide our own view, we shall do so, with the understanding that the above information was a genuine attempt at reporting fair and unbiased facts and information. While the following comments indicate which perspective your pastors view this issue.

And, we are called to share this personal perspective with love, gentleness and respect, knowing there are dissenting perspectives within this congregation, and the ELCA as a whole. And, we do so without using any sort of force or pressure, trying to compel the congregation to move in a certain direction through voting. That is up to you!

•We stand with the position of the 57% majority of ELCA members who, when asked to share their views by the Task Force in 2005, responded with moderate opposition to the policy changes that ended up being implemented anyways in the August 2009 Churchwide Assembly.

- We believe the Word of God is clear – homosexual desire and behavior, along with many other sexual desires and behaviors, is not in accordance with God’s intended will for humanity.
 - We believe it is possible, and necessary, for a disciple of Jesus Christ to love ALL people, and anytime a brother or sister is ensnared in sin, to love that person all the more, while humbly working, hoping and praying for God to work repentance, forgiveness and new life in that person, as God does in all of us, all the time, whenever any kind of sin separates us from God.
 - And finally, we are troubled by the disconnect between the national expression of the ELCA, and the general membership in the local congregations of the ELCA.
 - It is apparent that the disproportionate representation of the perspective of Radical Support of policy changes among those who serve in ELCA Seminaries, ELCA Colleges and Universities, and the National Headquarters of the ELCA, is a small, but powerful force that is moving the denomination in a direction opposed by the majority of the denomination’s membership.
 - And therefore, we are in support of the efforts of Christian individuals and groups, such as those who participate in Lutheran CORE, who: *“Continue to support our church, when its decisions and actions conform with the Word of God. We will speak the truth in love when our church diverges from the Word of God.”*
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Objective #2:

Exploring what the Bible has to say about human sexual behavior in general

V.I.P.-

“Vitally Important Point!!!”

At this time in the Church, we must not single out homosexual desire and behavior as the one issue we must deal with...

God is calling the Church to focus upon, and repent of, A VARIETY of sexual desires and behaviors that are not in accordance with God’s will.

Matthew 7:3

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in someone else’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye.”

How to properly apply these words of Jesus:

- That does not mean we say, “Well, since people saying homosexual behavior is a sin are guilty of sins themselves, they are hypocrites. Therefore, let us dismiss their self-righteous words, and bless the loving, committed, & monogamous same-sex relationships.
- What it does mean is this: All Christians must humbly and gently admit that all are guilty of a variety of sexual sins, and prayerfully seek for God to lead us all to repentance, and bring our hearts back in line with His ways and intentions for us.

The Approved Social Statement:

- Yes, it does move the Church towards the policy changes adopted by the Churchwide Assembly in August, and therefore, according to those who moderately oppose the changes, the document strays from Scripture regarding this issue.
- However, the document does have some benefits, in that it does address a variety of sexual desires and behaviors that the Church must address, for they also go against Scripture’s teachings about God’s will for human sexual behavior.

Examples:

- The document supports strong laws and prosecution in cases of child abuse & molestation.
- The document admits the failures of our culture when it comes to over-sexualization in the media, especially when children and teens are exposed to such material.
- And the document labels co-habitation before marriage as an “unfavorable situation.”

What is God’s will for human sexual behavior in general?

2 Options in Scripture:

- Sex is a blessing from God, for both reproduction and enjoyment, to be shared by the union of one man and one woman in marriage.
- Those who are not married are to commit to, and even be blessed by, a celibate lifestyle.

Jesus-

- According to there being no evidence to the contrary in Scripture, it is believed that Jesus was never married, and lived a celibate lifestyle.

- His teachings did include addressing the issues of divorce (Mt 19:3-9), adultery (John 8), and lust (Mt 5:27-30).
- And again, in Matthew 19:4-6, Jesus upholds God's revelation in Genesis of creation being designed in such a way as marriage is the joining together of one man and one woman.
- Overall, Jesus does not spend a great deal of time on sexual issues, but the Scriptures tell us he believed in celibacy for those who were not married, and fidelity and purity for the married union of one man and one woman.

Paul-

- Unmarried himself
- Devoted to a celibate lifestyle
- In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul clearly EMBRACES his own celibacy, and even encouraged others to live the same way. But, he also supports sex within the marriage of one man and one woman.
- Wrote numerous passages in his letters listing a variety of sexual desires and practices that believers in Christ are to consider sinful & immoral. Such behaviors are against God's will, and those who practice them are called to repent, and should lovingly be forgiven and restored.

Where Do We Go From Here?

- Continued diligence in God's Word, and continue to humbly, yet firmly teach what God clearly reveals to us about human sexual desire & behavior
- Continued diligence in prayer for all people, including ourselves, who struggle with all kinds of sexual sin that separates us from God
- Continued love for all people who struggle with sexual sin.
- Emphasize that such love can, and does, take place without the necessity of redefining what scripture calls a sexual sin.
- Continue to recognize the planks of sexual sins in our own eyes, and confess, repent, and seek forgiveness, reconciliation and new life in Jesus Christ.