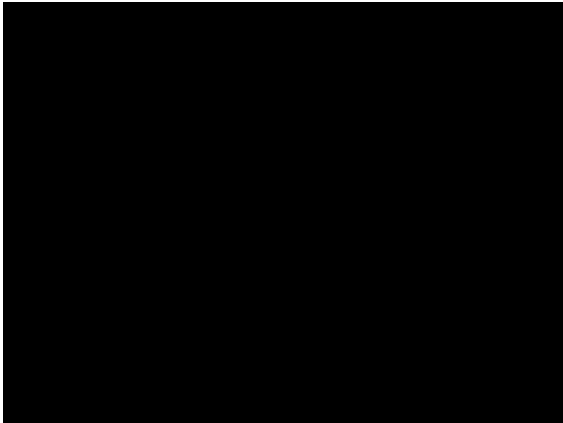


- Almighty God, you hate nothing that you have made, and forgive all the errors of all those who put their trust in you.
- You alone know all the forces which mould or mar each of our lives and our loves.
- Forgive us all we pray for what has been wrong in our pasts.
- Heal the hurts which scar our memories and help us to correct the failings in our present lives.
- So enable us, by your Spirit, to follow the pathway of your Son that we may also be ministers of your healing grace and love to others that we and they may know you directing and enriching our future.
- Through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

Just Good Friends?: Same-sex relationships

WEMTC
Marriage & Intimate Relationships IV
Saturday 23rd January 2010



Three Challenges to the Church

- Social and Cultural Change
- Personal and Pastoral Experience
- Past and Present Failings

Case studies

- Spend 20 minutes discussing your case and preparing a short 2-3 minute presentation to the other groups that will address:
- What do you see as the main pastoral and ethical issues?
- How does the Bible help you?
- Do you have your own ethical judgment about the situation?
- How would you handle the situation?
- ENSURE ALL VOICES ARE HEARD AND REPRESENTED

Homosexuality & The Bible

How Appeal to Scripture? Richard Hays' Four Tasks

- Source: "The Moral Vision of the New Testament"
- Four tasks:
 - Descriptive
 - Synthetic
 - Hermeneutical
 - Pragmatic

What does the Bible Say?

Descriptive/Exegetical Task

The 'Classic Texts'

- Dangers of proof-texting
- Genesis 19.4-5 – Story of Sodom
- Leviticus 18.22 and 20.13 – 'Not lie with a male as with a woman'
- 1 Corinthians 6.9-10 – List of sins including two traditionally understood as referring to homosexual practice
- 1 Timothy 1.9-10 – List of sins contrary to Law and Gospel
- Romans 1.18ff (esp vv26-27) – Description of God's judgment on human rebellion including God 'giving them up' so they 'exchange natural intercourse for unnatural'

What Do We Learn From These Texts?

- All of them speak negatively about homosexual practices – the Bible never commends homosexuality
- Most relate to male-male sexual acts but Romans 1 includes female-female

Challenge 1

- The texts are only negative about SOME not ALL homosexual practices
- For example, gang rape (Sodom), cultic prostitution (Lev & Paul), abusive relationships (Paul), heterosexuals engaging in homosexual acts (Rom).
- The Bible is silent when we turn to it to ask about whether or not faithful, loving same-sex relationships are acceptable.

Response 1

- ✓ *Some texts are more narrow (eg Sodom) but others require special pleading*
- ✓ *Following this approach only leaves the Bible silent on homosexuality.*
- ✓ *What Christians should say therefore still needs to be worked out and the bigger picture of biblical teaching, the wisdom of tradition, and the tentativeness of modern knowledge and experience warn against changing teaching.*

Response 1 (Cont)

- ✓ *The consistently negative and wide-ranging texts on same-sex conduct and the teaching on marriage point towards saying all forms of homosexual practice are wrong.*
- ✓ *Hard to believe Paul would have said anything else, especially as loving relationships not unknown in ancient world but he does not commend them but is only negative.*

Challenge 2

- Other biblical texts (eg David and Jonathan, Jesus' welcome of outcasts) should be given weight and not just the 'classic texts' on homosexuality
- We must consider broader biblical principles such as love of neighbour, liberation of oppressed, covenant faithfulness in relationships

Response 2

- ✓ *It is important that the debate does not just focus on negative texts about homosexual practice*
- ✓ *Other texts must shape our thinking and response, especially the need to love and welcome homosexual people.*
- ✓ *There are dangers in rejecting specific biblical teaching because of a general principle*
- ✓ *Scripture nowhere commends sexual relationships simply because they are faithful covenants – it is because they are marriage*

Conclusion – English Bishops

'The various suggestions for revising the traditional view of the biblical material have not succeeded in changing the consensus of scholarly opinion about the meaning of the key passages in Leviticus and the New Testament. At the moment, the traditional understanding of these passages remains the most convincing one in the minds of most biblical scholars' (SIHS, 4.4.34).

Conclusion – English Bishops

As long as this is true, 'it is difficult to see that an appeal to the revisionist reinterpretation of the passages in question provides an adequate basis for a Church that takes the scholarly reading of Scripture seriously to alter either its traditional teaching about homosexuality or its traditional practice' (SIHS, 4.4.35)

What does the Whole Bible Say?

Synthetic Task

What Do We Learn From These Texts?

- The texts are in both the Old Testament and the New Testament
- The texts come in different forms – narrative (Gen 19), Israelite law (Lev), Apostolic theological (Rom) & moral (1 Cor, 1 Tim) teaching to churches

The Church and the Bible

- This understanding has been the view held by the church across time and space.
- It remains the stated teaching of the Anglican Communion (Lambeth Resolution I.10 in 1998) and the Church of England (1987 General Synod motion, Issues in Human Sexuality) and almost all Christian denominations.
- It is not a strange, novel fundamentalist reading of the Bible

What does the Bible Say Today?

Hermeneutical Task: The Challenges

Challenge 3

- Although all the texts are negative, when we ask *why* we find that the reasons are ones we don't accept
- For example, it is the need for sex to be procreative, the need for (superior) males to be active and women to be passive in sexual acts.

Response 3

- ✓ *Do we really know the rationale ?*
- ✓ *Many different attempts to explain it suggest that we not clear what the reason really is or that it is one we must reject.*
- ✓ *Is the creation narrative – being male and female – not the most likely reason, especially given Romans 1?*

Challenge 4

- We know better than the biblical writers
- Our knowledge and understanding of human sexuality is so much better
- For example, we know about homosexual orientation, they assumed everyone was heterosexual.

Response 4

- ✓ *Do we really know better ?*
- ✓ *This seems to represent lack of humility before Scripture as God's Word*
- ✓ *We have much to learn about human sexuality from other disciplines and their findings are still so disputed.*

Challenge 5

- We have changed our reading of the Bible or rejected the Bible's teaching in many other areas – taking interest, slavery, contraception, divorce and remarriage, women in leadership
- The Spirit is leading us to do so now in this area of sexuality.
- Just as the Jews accepted Gentiles in Acts 15 so the church must accept gay people today despite what Scripture says

Response 5

- ✓ *The church in these areas has not rejected Scripture but learned to understand Scripture better*
- ✓ *Doing this in some areas does not mean it is wrong in this area*
- ✓ *A specific case must be made in relation to homosexuality and most of the church clearly does not see its reading of the Bible as wrong*
- ✓ *Here - unlike the other examples - there is a consistent negative witness in the Bible*

Response 5 (Cont)

- ✓ *Acts 15 particularly weak as basis for change here as that change was based on Scripture and the limits placed on Gentiles included no sexual immorality*
- ✓ *The danger here is perhaps being led not by the Holy Spirit but by the spirit of our age.*

How Live The Bible Today?

Pragmatic Task

What does this mean in practice? Listening and Learning

- Need to be open to correction by Word and Spirit
- Need to understand better the reality of those who experience same-sex attraction
- Need therefore to be willing to listen as well as speak out about what we believe

A Community of Grace?

- Forgiving Grace – ‘Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us’
- Welcoming Grace – ‘Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God’ (Rom 15.7)

A Community of Grace?

- Transforming Grace – ‘And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit’ (2 Cor 3.18)
- Costly Grace – ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me’ (Mk 8.34)