

**GOD AND GAY MARRIAGE:
*What the Bible Really Says About Marriage Equality***

A Sermon Offered by Rev. Tim Kutzmark

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Unitarian Universalist Church of Reading

Revised and revisited from earlier version preached several years ago

[People attending worship were given a sheet of paper with the following information for them to refer to during the sermon.]

WHAT THE BIBLE REALLY SAYS ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY

Hebrew Scriptures

Genesis 19:5

(and parallel account in Judges 19)

They called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we may know (*yada*) them.”

Deuteronomy 23:17-18

“There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel, neither shall there be a sodomite (*qedesh*) of the sons of Israel. You shall not bring the hire of a harlot, or the wages of a dog, into the house of the Lord your God in payment for any vow; for both of these are an abomination of the Lord your God.”

Leviticus 19:22

“With a male you shall not lie the lyings of a woman; it is an abomination”

Leviticus 20:13

“If a man lies with a male as with a women, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them.”

Christian Scriptures

1 Corinthians 6:9

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes (*malakoi*), nor homosexual offenders (*arsenokaitai*), nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Romans 1:26-27

Therefore, God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For not only did their females exchange natural intercourse for that which is against nature, but also males, leaving

natural intercourse with females, lusted in their desire for one another, males working shame with males and receiving the punishment within themselves which their falsehood necessitated.

1 Timothy 9-10

We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers.

[TEXT OF REV. KUTZMARK'S SERMON]

SERMON: GOD AND GAY MARRIAGE

A few years ago I preached a sermon entitled “What the Bible Really Says about Gay Marriage.” With last week’s historic affirmation of marriage equality by President Obama—followed by the NAACP’s statement supporting gay marriage—it seemed wise to revisit and revise that sermon, and share it today. It is unavoidable; gay marriage will be an issue in the upcoming presidential election, and we, as religious liberals, as religious progressives—we as a Unitarian Universalist people of faith—need to know how to talk intelligently, confidently and informatively about the Bible, God and gay marriage. Perhaps this sermon will help equip us all for those difficult yet crucial conversations.

Sometimes truth can be lost.
Sometimes meaning can be lost.
Lost in ignorance.
Lost in lies.
Lost in translation.
Lost in tradition.

Today’s sermon is about translations and traditions that are dangerous. Today’s sermon is about truth and meanings that have been lost. Some of what we talk about may make some of us very uncomfortable, for the language we use will be somewhat explicit.

In order to understand clearly the series of lies that have been spread in the name of God, in the name of the Bible, we must speak a truth that demands clarity. That clarity sometimes mentions things many of us do not usually talk about.

Sometimes truth makes us uncomfortable. But remember, the lies that have been told about our subject this morning have created great discomfort, great despair, great destruction, great desperation in the lives of countless women who love women and men who love men. All in the name of a supposed “sin.”

And so . . . we begin . . .

God and Gay Marriage: What the Bible *REALLY* says about Marriage Equality (or, as I like to affectionately call this sermon, “Straight to Heaven.”)

This could actually be the shortest sermon I’ve ever written.

This is *exactly* what the Bible says about extending the right of legal marriage to same gender partners:

[Silent Pause]

(yep, that's it) . . . *nothing*. I looked at all 2355 pages of my Bible, and could find nothing, nada, zilch.

Although a US President went on record a few years ago saying: "Marriage is a *sacred* institution between a man and a woman," I could find nothing in the Bible that condemns same gender marriage. Although gay marriage will again be used as divisive tool as we move into another Presidential election, although all the top contenders for the Republican presidential nomination signed a pledge saying that they will *actively work* to make gay marriage illegal in ALL states, many quoting the Bible as the basis of their political opinion, gay marriage just doesn't appear on any page in the Bible. Moses and his 10 Commandments say nothing about whether two men have the legal right to marry. Joseph and his amazing techni-colored dreamcoat say nothing about whether two woman have the right to marry, Jonah and his big ole' whale say nothing about same sex marriages, even King David sitting on his Throne in Jerusalem says nothing about gay marriages (although a young handsome David seems to have had quite a passionate "special friendship" with his young, handsome best friend, Jonathan).

Despite what we might be led to believe by those who thump upon it, the Bible just doesn't make any mention of gay marriage

And what about the great JC Superstar himself? If this gay marriage thing was such a big deal, then Jesus must have said something, right? Jesus Christ— although he certainly had lots to say about hypocrites and those quick to judge others and those who lie—Jesus also had nothing to say about gay marriage. And given the statistic that one in ten people are most likely gay, there is strong likelihood that in Jesus' band of twelve male followers, at least one of those guys took a fancy to other guys. But if Jesus knew this, he never went on record saying anything about same sex partners . . . nothing, nada, zilch. In fact, Jesus never once is quoted as saying one word about homosexuality at all. *He never mentions it*. If it was the huge looming destroyer of humanity that so many conservative Christians and politicians today claim it is, don't you think Jesus, in all his prophetic wisdom, would have said *something*? Nothing, nada, zilch.

Now, even if the Bible says nothing directly about *gay marriage*, it does have a few things to say about *homosexuality* in general. Or does it?

In the thirty-nine books of the Hebrew Bible, the Jewish Scriptures only mention same-gender sexual activity *four* times. In the twenty-seven books of the Christian Scriptures, often called the New Testament, same-gender sexual activity is only mentioned *three* times. That's *seven* times in the whole Bible. As scholar Robin Scroggs, in *The New Testament and Homosexuality*, suggests: "The first immediate impression...is [the Bible's] almost complete silence, perhaps indifference, about homosexuality."¹ In contrast, there are *five hundred* passages in the Bible concerning heterosexual behavior.² God seems much more concerned about what the straight folk are doing. In light of this virtual silence on homosexuality, it is not much of an exaggeration to say "homosexuality is not a biblical concern."³ In fact, the Bible never explicitly uses the word *homosexual* at all. In fact, the word "homosexual" has existed for only about one hundred and twenty

some years. It was first introduced by John Addington Symonds in his 1887 work, *A Problem in Modern Ethics*.⁴ According to John Boswell's exhaustive study *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*:

In spite of misleading English translations which may imply the contrary, the word "homosexual" does not occur in the Bible . . . no manuscript, Hebrew, Greek, Syriac, or Aramaic, contains such a word."⁵

Thus, if the word "homosexual" is not used in the Bible, it is important to examine which words were utilized. In understanding their meaning, we can understand what specifically the Bible is condemning.

(I've included a handout in today's order of service—and at the beginning of this printed version of the sermon—that you can use as a reference as we discuss each specific biblical passage.)

Let's begin in Genesis, the first book of the Bible, with the story of the fiery destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the cities of sin. According to how some Christian conservatives tell the story: the cities were condemned because in those cities were gay men having sex, practicing sodomy, and God wanted to wipe this out. This "is probably the most well known, certainly the most influential"⁶ passage used to condemn same-gender sexual acts. In fact:

All the major prophets used the example of the two cities to warn their contemporaries of the fate in store for them if they disobeyed . . . God. Sodom and Gomorrah became the symbols of the destruction that awaits sin.⁷

But what exactly *is* the sin of Sodom? Genesis 19:5 portrays the men of Sodom demanding "to know" two foreign men who the hero of the story, Lot, has lodged in his home for the night.

"To know," (the Hebrew word *yada*) can be interpreted as the act of sexual intercourse. In the case of Lot's two male visitors and the men of Sodom, it would be male-to-male sexual intercourse. But it is important to note that in this specific case, any same-gender sexual act would not be consensual. Lot is portrayed as attempting to prevent any such actions on his guests,⁸ and his two visitors likewise go to great lengths to avoid the mob that wants to rape them. Thus, any same-gender sexual act committed, or condemned, would be *rape* perpetrated by the men of Sodom. In the Semitic world, male-to-male rape was not an erotic act, but an expression of unequal power:

Sodomy among Semitic people...was a symbol of domination and control. A victorious or powerful warrior was always granted the right to sodomize the vanquished: regardless of the captive's gender. Popular belief held that [the act] gave the sodomist control (and in some cases, ownership) of the vanquished.⁹

“Is it right for anyone to suggest that the condemnation of homosexual gang rape is to be equated with the condemnation of homosexuality per se?¹⁰ This story says *nothing* about the morality of homosexual relationships based on contemporary models of equality, consent, respect, and commitment.

It is also important to note that this story that so many hold up as proof of the Bible’s condemnation of homosexuality also *approves* of the offering of young girls to a lustful mob, and advocates father-daughter incest as a way of impregnation when no other males are available.¹¹ As one scholar notes: “Selective literalism is a very weak basis upon which to argue for the condemnation of anything.”¹²

Let’s move forward to the next passage, Deuteronomy 23:17-18, which reads: “There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel, neither shall there be a sodomite of the sons of Israel. You shall not bring the hire of a harlot, or the wages of a dog, into the house of the Lord your God in payment for any vow; for both of these are an abomination of the Lord your God.” The word which the King James version of the Bible translates as sodomite is *qedesh*, which means a “holy man or holy women, and referred not to homosexuality but to the cult of pagan male and female temple prostitutes.”¹³ The *qedesh* or “dog” refers to male Canaanite cult prostitutes who engaged in sacred fertility rituals back in the time of Moses. These men were dedicated to the Goddess and had castrated themselves. Then, other male Canaanite Goddess worshippers would make an offering to the Goddess by having intercourse with the male Goddess-dedicated *qedesh*.¹⁴ Thus, this passage does not condemn homosexuality, but idolatrous sexual activity that worships another deity other than the Jewish God. It is clearly tied to the first commandment of Moses’ law: “I am the Lord your God; you shall have no other Gods before me.”¹⁵ What is being considered abhorrent is “an Israelite man [visiting] the [non Jewish, pagan] shrines to perform an act of [pagan] worship, which was a [ritual] sexual act. It was the abomination of idolatry that was condemned, not...the homosexuality per se.”¹⁶

But this distinction is not the case in the Jewish Scripture’s next two passages: Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, where the condemnation of homosexual activity seems explicit: “If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination.” But, look more closely, the use of “abomination” provides our first clue for understanding the context of this passage. Scholar John Boswell writes of the true meaning of the Hebrew word *to’ebah*, which we translate as “abomination:”

Abomination does not . . . signify something intrinsically evil . . . but something which is ritually unclean for Jews, like eating pork [which is] prohibited in these same chapters.”¹⁷

Thus, these two passages are understood, not as moral imperatives, but as ritual cleanliness rules specific to practicing the Jewish religion. This is part of the Holiness Code, not the moral Law Code, and it informs aspects of Jewish religious distinctiveness. It includes directives against wearing fabrics of blended materials and the cutting of the

beard or hair. “In ancient Israel this code was a single piece; one did not pick and choose”¹⁸ which part to enforce.

But—and this is crucial—this Holiness Code and all the other aspects of Jewish ritual purity became no longer valid for Christians in the year 49 CE, when early Christian church leaders Peter, Paul, and Jesus’ older brother James met in the Council of Jerusalem and decreed that the Jewish ritual law no longer had to be maintained by Gentiles who converted to Christianity. Thus, this prohibition, while applicable to the early Jewish faith, no longer is valid in the Christian faith. The current Christian church cannot invoke it, for they do not follow it, by their own decision. [It is important to note here that in this Holiness Code nothing is ever said about female homosexuality, so you women are totally off the hook!]

We must now leave the Jewish Scriptures and move into the Christian Scriptures —what is commonly called the New Testament—for our final three passages. These come, not from Jesus, but from the letters attributed to the early Christian teacher Paul. A letter he wrote to the fledgling church in the Greek city of Corinth states that the *malakoi* and *arsenokaitai* will not enter the Kingdom of God. The King James Version of the Bible translates these Greek words as the “effeminate” and “abusers of themselves with men.” The Revised Standard Version version of the Bible translates them both as “homosexual,” and the New Jerusalem Version translates this as “catamites and sodomites.” In its actual translation, *malakoi* is a Greek pejorative term referring to boys and youths [who]. . . “sell themselves to other men for sexual services; in other words . . . call-boys,”¹⁹ male prostitutes. *Arsenokaitai* translates as “a man lying.”²⁰ This word refers to the adult male who “lies with” or hires the callboy.²¹

The passages in 1 Timothy and Romans 1 share a similar context: they refer to male prostitution: those who practice it, or purchase it, or sell others into it. These passages are talking about an older man coupling with—and paying for—an adolescent boy.

Make no mistake about it: Paul’s understanding of “men committing shameless acts with other men” alludes to the form of same-gender sexuality most commonly practiced in the Greco-Roman world: pederasty: an adult male using a young boy or youth for his pleasure. The Christian Scripture condemnation of homosexual behavior is limited to these specific forms of behavior, behavior that involved inequality and exploitation and abuse. Despite the mistranslations of the Greek words, the Christian Scripture is silent about the morality of homosexual relationships based on contemporary models of equality, consent, respect and commitment.

And that, my friends, is all the Bible has to say about same-gender sexuality.

So, then, I ask: where is the sin in homosexuality? Where is the sin in gay marriage?

Perhaps the *true sin* in this discussion is something else entirely.

Perhaps the greatest sin of all is turning a book—the bible—and several mistranslated passages—into permission to deny worth, dignity, and legitimacy to people whose only wish is to love deeply and love truly till death do them part.

How long, O Lord, how long will *that* sin to go unpunished?

How long, O Lord, how long will *that* sin to go unstopped?

How long, O Lord, how long will *that* sin be written into the legal code of this country?

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¹Scroggs, Robin. *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia, PA:Fortess Press, 1983), p. 70.

²Johnson, Dr. Paul R., and Eaves, Sr., Thomas F. *Gays and the New Right* (U.S.A:P.R. Johnson, 1981), p. 19.

³Ide, Arthur Frederick. *Zoar & Her Sisters* (Minuteman Press:Oak Cliff, TX, 1991), p. 20.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Boswell, John. *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago Il:University of Chicago Press 1980), p. 92.

⁶Boswell, op. cit., p. 92.

⁷Brash, Alan A. *Facing Our Differences* (Geneva:WCC Publications, 1995), p. 35.

⁸Gen 19:6-8

⁹Ide, op. cit., p. 39.

¹⁰Spong, John Shelby. *Living in Sin?* (San Francisco, CA:Harper & Row, 1988), p. 142.

¹¹Spong, op. cit, p 141.

¹²Ibid., p. 142.

¹³Spong, op. cit., p. 143.

¹⁴Horner, Tom. *Jonathan Loved David* (Philadelphia, PA:The Westminster Press, 1978), p. 65.

¹⁵Ex 20:1

¹⁶Horner, op. cit., p. 70.

¹⁷Boswell, op. cit., p. 100-101.

¹⁸Des Moines Register, November 18, 1990

¹⁹Scroggs, op. cit., p. 42.

²⁰Spong, op. cit., p. 150.

²¹Scroggs, op. cit., p. 108.