

Deconstructing Sexuality

Week 4 - Crash Course

Pray & Welcome

Introduction

- **Safe and Respectful Classroom:** Anxieties, trauma, discomfort in disagreement. Every person deserves our respect and dignity because every person is made in the image of God, beloved by God, and who they are is secure within the eternal life of God. That is not up for question or discussion here, and I'm sure we all agree.
- **Trigger Warnings:** Those who may struggle with thoughts of suicide, suffered trauma related to their sexuality, or spiritual abuse at the hands of religious leaders. Mention rape, violence, and exploitation.
- **This is about us, our beloved people:** According to a study on how religious faith impacts LGBTQ adults, Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth contemplate suicide three times more often than heterosexual youth and are 8.4 times more likely to attempt suicide if they experience family rejection. This goes up to 38% if these students are heavily involved in churches. They're also more likely to be targets of harassment and hate crimes than any other minority group in the US. According to David Kinnamin's book *Unchristian*, 91 % of non-Christians believe Christians to be homophobic.
 - Bridget Rivera says it plainly in her book *Heavy Burdens*, "Tragically, many LGBTQ Christians find their church to be the source of the storm when it ought to be the shelter."
- We can help this in the church:
 - Our sexuality, gender identity, or orientation does not determine in any way God's unconditional love for us or our belonging in the church.
 - Regardless of our sexual identity, the church must be the place where individuals can learn what it means to express their sexuality in healthy, loving, God-honoring ways. Regardless of

our sexual orientation, we should encourage each other to grow in our love of God and each other.

- If you are gay, I want you to know that this community loves and supports you in Christ. You are not broken or sinful because you are gay. God loves you, and we do too.
 - If you find yourself disagreeing through this course, and wondering if you can fit in this church, I want you to know that this community loves and supports you in Christ. You can carry your convictions gently, especially on matters that are complex. This is not the doctrine we are drawing the line on, so you, too are welcome, even in disagreement.
 - If you're unsure where you are with these complex issues, I want you to know that this community loves and supports you in Christ. You don't need to arrive somewhere in this but can hold this with mystery and trust, knowing that we're doing our best in uncertainty to live in love.
 - Years from now, I don't think we will be talking about this issue with as much anxiety. I think what matters most is how we love one another as Christ. My hope is for all of us to be thoughtful and carry our views faithfully, humbly, and lovingly.
- **Over the next two weeks, our aim is Christ-likeness:** Part of right belief (orthodoxy) is right-living (orthopraxy). We want to have the mind of Christ and live out our faith in the way of Christ.
 - So, our aim in this class is to appreciate the complexity of sexuality in Scripture to see some of the texts used to build a sexual ethic are not the best ones. There are far more clear and helpful passages in the bible to work with. The following class will look more closely at the texts we should work with.
 - **This week's approach:** What do the Scriptures have to say about sexuality? There is so much to say about this and so many ways to approach this. I'm going to take the angle of engaging the most pressing issue I've experienced for myself and in working with others in the church: **What do the Scriptures have to say about sexuality?**

Key Texts Not Addressed:

- Singleness - Of the Lord himself and St. Paul, who wrote much of what we're about to study. For Paul, marriage is an accommodation for those burning with lust (1 Cor 7:8).
- We won't cover the accommodations that Jesus and Paul gave for divorce that, according to the OT, is not the will of God.
- The stories of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19) and the Levite's concubine (Judg. 19) focus on the horror of rape and the ancient abhorrence of the violation of male honor in rape. These are not the situations that speak to lifelong kinship bonds of same-sex relationships.
- Leviticus 18 and 20 seem to primarily address men in control of their family or who have the power to do what they want to do within their family, including sleeping with other family members or the spouses of other family members. This may not make sense to us, but in an ancient context, it does where there were concerns about purity, pagan cults, the distinctiveness of Israel as a nation, violations of male honor, and anxieties concerning procreative processes in ancient near-eastern cultures where the family was necessary to survive¹. These prohibitions do not speak directly to lifelong kinship bonds of same-sex relationships, and they notably give no prohibition of lesbian relationships. Even if these passages should be read plainly and do prohibit same-sex activity, they do so with a penalty of death, along with adulterous relationships. But we know that the death penalty for adultery/same-sex relationships is not consistent with Jesus (i.e. woman caught in adultery, John 8:1-11)
- The references to same-sex eroticism found in two New Testament vice lists (1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10) focus attention on the ancient practice of pederasty - the use of boy prostitutes in male-male sex.

¹ When interpreting Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 we must also examine the context of these passages. Leviticus 18 starts with the warning "You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you; you shall not walk in their statutes" (v.3). Same-sex sexual activity was a part of the cultic rituals and societal practices in Egypt and Canaan. For instance, Egyptian culture would have found it acceptable for a master to sexually violate (rape) his male slave. The author of Leviticus might also be saying, you were once slaves, you will not violate your slaves the way you were violated, or the way others violate their slaves.

As such, they also do not address committed and mutual same-sex relationships today.

- *Malakoi* literally means “soft” and is used elsewhere in scripture to talk of fine clothing of the rich (Matt 11:8, Luke 7:25).
- *Arsenokoitai* is a compound word made up of *arsenos* and *koiten* translated as sodomites (Lev. 20:13), or literally “soft” “men-bedders”.
- It wasn’t until 1946 that the word “homosexual” first appeared in RSV English translations.
- We know that from Greek literature outside of the Greek NT, this term is used in four instances concerning economic exploitation, abuses of power, trafficking, and violence in the sex business (i.e. pimping, forced prostitution) –not same-sex behavior. This argument can be made of the occurrence in 1 Timothy 1:10 as well. The meaning here more resembles what happened in Sodom (Gen 19), and has more to do with exploitation and power, not attraction and love.
- Regardless of how you come down on what you think this means: the point is that it is highly debated and not “plainly stated.”

Genesis 1& 2 (NRSV)

- Genesis 1:26 Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' 27 So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. 28 God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'
- Genesis 2:18 Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.' 19 So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. 21 So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.' 24 Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

Engaging Genesis 1&2:

- *Claim:* Women are blamed for sin entering the world and to legitimate the subordination of women to men. The problem is that both Adam and Eve participated in sin together, whether it was the initiative to sin or the passivity in sinning. Also, “who-done-it?” isn’t the point, but human disobedience and sin. Also, subordinating women to men is not part of the ideal world that God created—notice that he gave dominion to humanity over all things but each other. Subordination, or patriarchy, as it soon existed, was a result of sin, not of God’s good ordering of creation.
- *Claim:* Gay relationships violate divinely intended complementarity. We need to be careful to say two things here: there is creative genius to God’s creation. And the focus in Genesis 2 is not the different genitals of males and females (not mentioned) but on what they have in common:
 - Created in the divine image (Gen. 1:27). They share in the divine image and form a community, a likeness, and a mutuality, not a dominance over one another.
 - One-flesh union in Genesis 2:24 - This text has been used to “mean” a great many things, including patriarchy and complementarianism—but what the text says is that this is about a lifelong kinship bond². “It is not good for man to be alone.” (Gen 2:18) and not to be torn apart, as Jesus taught.³
 - We must not diminish the beauty of procreation in these accounts as part of the creative genius to “be fruitful and multiply,” and reducing this ancient Hebrew poem concerned with existence, meaning, and life—to mere genitals.
- What is given here? (more week 5)
 - We are made in God’s image: So, who we are loved, not accidents, imbued with value (which is not determined by our sexuality).

² The prophetic tradition in the Old Testament deepens the Bible's understanding of this bond by speaking of God's faithfulness to Israel as a marriage bond, emphasizing grace and lifelong faithfulness.

³ Matthew 19:4-6 (referring to Genesis 2:24).

- Our bodies matter: How we use our bodies matters, how we treat the bodies of others, matters. What we do with our bodies speaks of either God’s good creation or of sin’s brokenness.
- We can appreciate that Scripture assumes that it takes a man and a woman to make children.
- God giving the command to “be fruitful and multiply” is given to the animals as well, and thus not a directive given uniquely to human marriage. It leads us to see the greater blessing given to creation as a gift, not a burdensome “chore.”⁴ It is an invitation to community with God, and others to participate in the joy of his creative work through a lifelong kinship bond (more next week).
- Further, “be fruitful and multiply” is used elsewhere in scripture⁵, and in every case is meant as a blessing rather than as a command.
- So we must hold it as a gift, with gratitude, reverence, and mercy, not as a tool against those who do not look like Adam and Eve. Otherwise, is Christ (who was single) less human? Is his family not problematic (unwed teenage pregnancy)? Or what of marriages that struggle to conceive children, or who choose not to have children, or who use birth control, get vasectomies, or participate in sex not intending to conceive, or those divorced and remarried, and those in committed gay or lesbian marriages.
- Bearing children is a *good* of marriage, not what makes a marriage. Making the headline of Gen 1&2 something other than God’s creative genius or our need for lifelong bonds, leads us to make the text say more than it does and accomplishes the opposite point of the story, “saying, well actually, it is good for some to be alone.”⁶

⁴ Courtney’s term

⁵ Gen 8:17; 9:1,7;35:11; Lev26:9;Jer 23:3;Ezek. 36:11)

⁶ Brownson, 115.

Romans 1

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; 21 for though they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools; 23 and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.

24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen.

26 For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, 27 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.

28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. 29 They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious towards parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

Romans 1 - Lust, Passion, and Self-Seeking Desire

- What is the problem in view for Paul in Romans 1? Is it gay relationships as we know them today and in our community? Let's take a closer look. Paul is concerned with an expression of idolatry in a very specific sense and with a very specific example in mind.
 - He is addressing people seeking to avoid right relationship with God and instead pursue lustful passions that end up dominating and destroying their lives.
 - We need to be careful not to "read into" the text modern concepts like sexual orientation, or the possibility of same-sex relationships apart from gender role assumptions of the first-century (i.e. patriarchy, social/cultural norms)
 - Paul is not addressing the modern concept of same-sex orientation. Rather, what is likely in view, especially evident in the literature of that time, is an example of over-indulgent and self-centered lusts. He describes this behavior as an expression of sex as driven by "passions" and as "consumed, of "burning, "with passion" (1:27).
 - Paul clearly expects his readers to join him in outrage over the sexual behavior he describes in Romans 1:24-27 as an expression of excessive, self-centered desire.
 - What is "natural" and "unnatural" in V.27 is not a reference to a modern conception of orientation or attraction but concerns being so overcome with passion that one is not content with women alone but is driven to ever more exotic and unnatural forms of pleasure.
- Referencing the horrors of the Imperial House, Caligula - In Romans 1:24-27, Paul may be alluding to the notorious excesses of a former Roman emperor, Gaius Caligula, whose idolatrous patterns involving sexual excesses, incest, rape - including same-sex eroticism involving the men and women in his company - were well known.
 - His idolatry involved worship gods "resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles." (v.23)

- This explains Romans 1:27: "receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error." because he was murdered by being stabbed in the genitals.
- While we may not know exactly what Paul has in mind here, what is clear is that he intended to depict an over-the-top lust, self-centeredness, and self-seeking desire that exploited others. All of this in contrast to the true vocation of humanity to worship God in His ordered and good creation.
- Finally, early church leaders and theologians such as Aristides, Justin Martyr, and Philo of Alexandria all believed verse 26 was talking about non-procreative temple prostitution.
- What's the point of Paul's writing overall? It's a warning for the hypocrites who judge others and not themselves. "2:2 Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things."
 - If we read this literally, the church in Rome was full of the most perverse expressions of lust and same-sex eroticism as well.
 - However, his point is that self-centered desire, self-seeking lusts, drive us toward disobedience of God and the new community he is setting up in Jesus Christ.

Appendix

What about the Christian Tradition and History?

Claim: Supporting same-sex relationships would require us to overturn 2,000 years of Christian tradition.

Challenge: The Christian tradition doesn't address sexual orientation.

In the ancient world, same-sex attraction and behavior were widely considered vices of excess that might tempt anyone—like gluttony or drunkenness. Same-sex attraction was not understood as the sexual orientation of a small minority of people.

Q. Does this mean the biblical writers were ignorant or wrong about same-sex relationships? No. The dominant forms of same-sex behavior in the ancient world fit a pattern of lustful self-indulgence: sex between masters and enslaved men, prostitution, and pederasty.

Q. But surely there were some LGBTQ people in committed relationships as well?

Sexual identity was defined not by sexual orientation but by conformity to patriarchal gender roles. People didn't come out as gay, lesbian, or bisexual because the sex of one's partners mattered far less than the gender role one took with those partners.

Landing - Christ, singleness, celibacy, ...

Set up the next week, asking if Christ is these things, what does this provide for us moving forward in constructing a sexual ethic?

Complementarianism & Patriarchy

- **Complementarians** believe that men should lead and women should follow. We do see certain patriarchal norms reflected in Scripture. But

notice two things: in Genesis, before sin entered the world, human beings were given a charge to care for all of creation but not given charge over each other. Follow the storyline of redemption into the New Testament, which casts a vision of God's kingdom in which the hierarchy between men and women is overcome in Christ (Galatians 3:28).

- Paul's work in Galatians is the most sweeping rearrangement of identity, gender roles, saying that baptism clothes us with Christ which overwhelms every other identifier, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." It is an identity for the community more grounded in the future of God's people than it is their past. More of this in the next class. See the chapter titled "Patriarchy" in *Bible, Gender, Sexuality* by Jim Brownson.
- **Patriarchy** was the norm in ancient Israel, where women are subject to men, typically don't own property, do not choose a husband but are given in marriage in exchange for a price, may not divorce their husbands (Deut 24:1-4), and are ritually impure (Lev. 12).
 - *Q. Is patriarchy more reflective of ancient social norms or the good ordering of God's Kingdom?*
 - Through the OT we find evidence of egalitarian glimpses in the sister of Moses, Miriam the prophet (Ex 15:20); Deborah the prophet (Judges 4:4-5); Hildah the prophet (2 Kings 22, 2Chron. 34). Patriarchy is not absolute or universal. God raises up both men and women as leaders for his covenant people, often in contrast to traditional societal expectations.⁷
 - In the NT we find a similar pattern, where Paul gives specific instruction regarding women's roles (1 Cor 11), head-coverings, speaking in the church (1 Cor 14), fearing her husband (Eph. 5:33), submitting to their husbands (Titus 2:5, 1 Peter 3:1). While at the same time, we see in Acts women included with the disciples in Jerusalem speaking in tongues (Acts 1,2); Pentecost is

⁷ Gushee, 59.

the enactment of Joel 2 that talks of sons and daughters prophesying (Acts 2:17); Women hosted the earliest church meetings in their homes (Mary Acts 12, Lydia Acts 16, 40), Euodia and Syntyche in Philippi were likely prominent leaders in the church (Phil. 4); Priscilla is widely known in the church and hosted it (Romans 16, 1 Cor. 16:19); Junia is “great among the apostles” (Romans 16:7), Phoebe is a deacon (Romans 16:1-2).

- Jesus of Nazareth stood in drastic contrast to the patriarchal norms of his day. He allowed menstruating women to touch him (Mark 5), let women put their hair down in public (Luke 7:36), counted women as his disciples and were invited to be taught by him (Luke 10:38), which was unthinkable in the synagogue, and they were there at the cross, and first to witness and preach of his resurrection
- Genealogy of Matthew - Women who are in the lineage