



(I wrote the piece for another project and it just wasn't a good fit. Honestly, if you are well read on the issue of the Bible and its take on homosexuality [or lack thereof], there is little new in here. For you, I hope this can be a quick reference. If you are not well read on such things, this may be a bit of a bumpy ride, but bumpy rides can be a lot of fun. Either way, I hope I was able to take what is sometimes thick reading, albeit important reading, and make it at least bearable and mostly straight forward).

Christianity and “Biblical” Hatred

We Christians are good at a lot of things. Helping others. Dressing up on Sunday. Quoting scripture. Pot luck meals. Taking care of church members. Weddings. Funerals. Worship. But perhaps the thing at which we are the most persistently exceptional is misinterpreting the Bible then running amuck in the world because of it. Honestly, mad skills. And history backs me up on this one.

We have used the Bible to support, promote and act upon some pretty un-Christian things: slavery, holocaust, segregation, subjugation of women, apartheid, the Spanish Inquisition (which, no one ever expects – shameless Monty Python reference; there will be another), domestic violence, all sorts of exploitation and the list could go on and on. Oddly, if you ask theologians to pick one biblical theme to rule them all, most of them would say “love”... well, love and grace. Okay, love, grace and forgiveness. Fine. They probably would not specifically agree on a single term, but they would most likely name something that is, in every way, the opposite of the oppression, belittlement, hatred and marginalization represented by the numerous atrocities committed by the Christian Church.

More times than not, these atrocities are the result of trying to play God, pretending as if one group of people has complete knowledge of God's will and is more blessed or chosen by God. Not surprisingly, the people who see the world this way are always exactly the people who also happen to belong in the group they believe to be the uber-blessed. Lucky them.

Time and time again, Jesus made it clear that we should not put ourselves in the place of playing God and that, unlike far too many humans, God welcomes and loves us all equally. Period.

But we keep doing it. We keep doing it even though each time after we argue, name-call, suppress others and fight for centuries, falsely playing the role of heavenly judge and jury, we slowly realize that we got it wrong. We realize that, in fact, Paul was not promoting slavery. We learn to contextualize his statements and letters. We become more skilled at interpreting the original Greek and, over time, we decide to stop quoting the Bible to support slavery (or the subjugation of women, or racism, etc.) because we finally come around to realizing that, as Rob Bell's book points out, biblically love wins. Always.

And so we find ourselves here again. Doing the thing we do best: misinterpreting the Bible and ruining lives with it. We are, once again, ignoring the biblical bias for those who are marginalized, abused, belittled and negatively judged. Ignoring the biblical directive to show all the children of God love (and grace... and forgiveness).

Hate By Any Other Name

Oh sure, this time around we have “softened” our approach, saying things like “hate the sin, love the sinner,” but we fail to recognize that what we are calling a “sin” and the person we are calling a “sinner” are one and the same. A person whose sexual orientation is homosexual, or bi-sexual, or queer can no more separate themselves from their sexuality than a heterosexual person can. It's like saying “hate the toppings, love the pizza.” It's just not the pizza without the toppings. We just aren't loving the person if we don't love the whole person.

I suspect the “softening” of the language we use has everything to do with making us feel better and very little with making LGBTQ folk feel better, because it certainly doesn't make them feel any better. As a matter of fact, the love/hate (emphasis on hate) relationship that the Church continues to push on this group of people only serves to push them into closets and into even darker places, which sometimes leads to suicide. The Church and its approach to this issue are at fault for most of the hurt, anguish, self-doubt, abuse and death associated with being LGBTQ. Not very loving. Not very grace filled. But it certainly leaves us in need of forgiveness.

Many Christians have lost their way in this twisty-turny maze of how to practice our faith. We would much rather reinforce the things we want to believe than believe the sometimes difficult teachings of Jesus. Who, on a side note, never said a word about homosexuality but did tell us to gouge out our lustful eyes. Which seems to me is more likely to leave us all blind than the “eye for and eye” thing.

The Bible As A Sex Manual

So, as others have pointed out before, we use the Bible as if it is a sex manual, telling us what is and isn't acceptable in the eyes of the Lord your God. Thereby delineating out those whom it is okay for us to judge, and toward whom it is okay to direct all kinds of nastiness and holier-than-thouisms.

The reality is that the Bible is not a sex manual. I know, shocker. Right? Actually, it's a good thing (depending on your particular level of sexual prudishness – personally, compared to the Bible, mine is pretty high). You see, the Bible not only promotes marriage between a man and a woman, but it insist that that marriage be within the same faith. Not only should a wife be subordinate (Ephesians 5:22), but she should also prove her virginity... lest she be stoned (Deuteronomy 22:20-21). Oh, and the whole thing would probably be much better if it were arranged (Genesis 24:37-38). And that's just the warm up act.

According to the Bible, if a woman's husband dies and she hasn't had a son, she must marry his brother and have intercourse with him until she has a son (Mark 12:18-27). Sometimes, biblically wives are good, but concubines are better. Many of the “men of God” were not only married, but at least three of them had more than one concubine (Abraham, Caleb, Solomon) and they remained “men of God.” But like I said, “biblically wives are good” and there's no such thing as too much of a good thing. Right? So, why not have may wives? God frequently blessed polygamists (Esau, Jacob, Gideon, David, Solomon, Belshazzar).

As far as sexuality and the Bible's perspective on woman as property and as slaves... well, as you can imagine, it does not get any better.

Making Choices

The point is this: most of us have matured enough theologically to recognize that we need to contextualize the writings of the Bible, and because of it we have moved passed using these examples as the end-all-be-all on acceptable practices of sexuality. However, somehow, we have not managed to apply the very same understanding to the Bible verses that have become known as the “clobber verses” in the Bible. “Clobber” because they are the verses most used to clobber people who are gay or who support gay rights.

That is really interesting when you consider that, of all the topics I just mentioned, sexual orientation is the only one that is not a choice. Polygamy, concubines, marrying your brother's widow? All choices, and we have decided to “get over” the biblical directives for them. Sexual orientation? Not a choice. (There are those who still argue otherwise, but the science is clear, so I'm not even having that discussion). So many Christians just aren't able to get past that one. Equally interesting to consider: it is actually more of a choice to judge and marginalize people over being homosexual, or, bi-sexual, or queer; than it is a choice to be homosexual, or, bi-sexual, or queer. Yet we judge them and not ourselves.

Since we clearly have a difficult time letting go of the clobber verses, let's take them one by one and very briefly consider what is really going on in them. It should help us arrive at a clearer picture of what the writers of these scriptures were trying to tell us. What we will find is this: as we get caught up in judging others over what we want the verses to say, we miss the opportunity to understand how to be the people God is calling us to be.

As we get started, we all need to be on the same page on one thing. When the Bible was written, the earth was flat, the sun orbited the earth and the idea of a person having a sexual 'orientation' was completely foreign. There is some debate about who actually kick-started the understanding of sexual orientation (Heinrich Hoessli or Karl Heinrich Ulrich - personally, I am on Team Heinrich), but it is clear that the concept of people having a sexual orientation was first introduced in the 1800's making it a thoroughly modern construct.

Clearly, there are a few Bible verses that involve same-sex acts (and of those, almost all of them are male-male sex), but given the modern advent of recognizing the existence of sexual orientation, we must accept the reality that the writers of those verses were in no way trying to, let alone capable of, acknowledging, understanding and addressing homosexual orientation. What then, might they have been trying to tell us in the clobber verses? Let's take a look.

The Clobber Verses

Let me just say right off the top, three of the verses that are sometimes considered clobber verses have nothing to do with the question of homosexuality. Putting Genesis 2:21-25, Deuteronomy 23:17 and Jude 1:6-7 in the category of anti-gay verses is nothing more than an attempt to beef up the number of verses that are supposedly “against” homosexuality. They have nothing to do with it. So, I am simply going to ignore them. If someone attempts to use them as proof of the “abomination” of homosexuality, I suggest you simply ignore them as well.

Genesis 19:1-11

The great thing about defending the Bible against people who want to use Genesis 19:1-11 to gay bash is that you really don't have to do any work. The Bible does it for you. For better or for worse, this is also the verse with which the general population is probably most familiar in terms of what they think of as verses about homosexuality. Even the term “sodomy” is linked to this Bible passage.

It is the story of two travelers (messengers from God) being given shelter by Lot and his family. Hospitality was a very big deal in those days. In this story, the men of Sodom decided to approach Lot's home and to make less than hospitable demands on him and his guest. To get a sense of how important hospitality was, when the men of the town say they want to force themselves (most likely sexually) on Lot's guest, Lot actually offers up his daughters instead. Despicable, deplorable, a great way to permanently damage your relationship with your daughters and the rest of your family (to say the least), but a sure sign that hospitality was a big deal.

In the end, the men of the town did not get what they wanted. They wanted to exert their dominance of the guests. They wanted to humiliate them, as warriors after conquering a foe might do in those days, sexually putting another male into the position of a woman (who after all was thought of as property, as weak, and as soft and therefore less than a man).

Even though the men never actually exerted their power over Lot's guests in a male-male sex act, people still insist on using this text as proof that homosexuality is an “abomination.” Well, like I said, “the great thing about defending the Bible against people who want to use Genesis 19:1-5 to gay bash is that you really don't have to do any work. The Bible does it for you.”

Sodom is referenced multiple times in the Bible as an example of great sinning. And what might that sin be?

In Isaiah 1:10-17 it is thought to be injustice, not rescuing the oppressed, defending the orphan, pleading for the widow. In Jeremiah 23:14 it is adultery. In Ezekiel 16:48-49 it is the sin of not aiding the “poor and needy.” In Zephaniah 2:8-11 the sin is bullying, boasting and pride. In the Wisdom of Solomon it is “the bitter hatred of strangers.”

The sin is not about being gay. It is not about non-straight sexual orientation. The sin of Sodom was lacking hospitality, not being just, bullying, hating strangers, not caring for those marginalized. Funny, they are all things Churches (and individuals for that matter) sorely need to keep in mind and be better at practicing when it comes to how we do or do not welcome LGBTQ folk into our lives. After all, in today's society, who is more marginalized, more bullied, more treated like a “stranger,” than them? Come to think of it, not so funny.

Leviticus 18:22 & 20:13

If someone were to canonize a buzz-kill, it would look remarkably, and uncomfortably, like the book of Leviticus. Honestly, this three-thousand plus year old holiness code is not exactly a big ball of fun. For starters, just try reading it. On second thought, I like you, so don't. Fortunately for you, I've done it for you. (I know, nice. Right? I'm just that kind of guy).

Among the jewels you'll find in it are a mandate to kill disobedient children, a dietary restriction to not eat shellfish (God Hates Shrimp!), a law that would prevent bowl-cuts (or “rounding off the side-growth of your heads” – and to think I liked the Beatles), direction to not touch or eat the flesh of a pig (no bacon and cheddar soup for you!), and a prohibition on the rhythm method of birth control (you know who you are!). Oh, and presumably, gay sex (which, of course, is why I bring it up).

The section of Leviticus where we find the clobber verses is often called the Purity Code. “Purity” was mostly about two things. First, it was about keeping things the way they “should” be. “Should” is in quotes because the guidelines they used for what should and shouldn't be were mostly made up. Said differently, they arrived at their conclusions in a time that didn't have any science or at least not science like we have today. Which is to say, they didn't have any science.

What they had was mostly superstition based on observation. A big part of this purity code was the idea that the world is consistent or follows particular preset rules. For the Israelites this meant things like: all fish have fins, animals with divided hooves chew cud, and male sperm contains the whole of life (women provided the incubation chamber). When things didn't adhere to this particular three-thousand year old way of understanding the world, they were considered an abomination or more precisely impure.

The second thing the purity code did was define the Israelites as purely not Canaanites. That is, much like many Christians receive the mark of a cross on their forehead on Ash Wednesday or give something up for Lent, the codes in Leviticus helped define the people of Israel as the people of Israel. For the Israelites it was particularly meant to define them as not Canaanites. Basically, it's a way of showing “we are not them.”

It is true that there are other reasons for many of the laws (just like there are many other reasons to give something up for Lent), but these are two of the larger ones, and they are ones that most directly apply to these clobber verses.

So what do we, presumably enlightened Christians of a scientific age, do with this code? Clearly shrimp are good to eat (for most of us). For that matter, as far as I'm concerned, to borrow from an old Benjamin Franklin quote, they are proof that God loves us* – that's just how darned delicious they are.

What we do is recognize Leviticus for what it was: a good thing for the people of God based on how they understood the world some three-thousand years ago. Interestingly enough, when it comes to things like shellfish, eating and touching pigs, cutting our sideburns and beards, and stoning children who mouth off to their parents, we have already managed to do exactly that. Why? Because we understand that they are just flat out silly laws. Not all “fish” have fins. Some come in the shape of pink commas and are delicious with a nice Riesling. Because not all split hooved animals chew cud. Some roll around in the mud and make breakfast just that much better. For that matter, wrap them around a shrimp, throw them on the grill. I promise you, God will not smite you and once you bite into them you'll agree, they are not an abomination (they might, however taste slightly “impure” if you do not devein them well).

What many people have not been able to do is extend that simple understanding to these clobber verses. We have already established that it would have been impossible for these texts, or any biblical text, to be about sexual orientation. However, they do clearly describe a male-male sex act (sorry ladies, this

one's just for the guys). But what we have to begin to understand is that the issues which these specific laws presumed to address within their society, much like the other laws I've mentioned here, are no longer recognized as true.

Scholars have pointed to various reasons for ancient Israel's seeing male-male sex as taboo in Leviticus. It may be the same reason the rhythm method was thought to be wrong in the eyes of God, which presumably is that, as I have mentioned, they thought sperm contained the whole of life (how typically male-dominated-society of them). Therefore, in their way of seeing it, [“Every sperm is sacred. Every sperm is great. If a sperm gets wasted, God gets quite irate.”](#) On the other hand, it may be that they thought it was taboo because it went against their understanding that mixing of kinds, just like the mixing of two kinds of cloth was taboo. Male-male sexual relationships, in that way of seeing things, mixes up their understanding of gender roles.

Whatever the reason, the perspective in these clobber verses were based on an understanding of sex and sexuality that was just as misinformed as their understanding of the earth in relationship to the sun, of fish, of pork and of reasons for stoning children. In our scientific age, it is time to let go of archaic perspectives and start recognizing the things that are truly an abomination in the eyes of God: lacking in compassion and love, exercising judgment against others, and practicing and encouraging hate.

(*The actual quote attributed to Benjamin Franklin is, “Beer is proof that God loves us and wants us to be happy.” Sadly, while Ben most probably enjoyed a mug of beer from time to time, the actual quote is, “Behold the rain which descends from heaven upon our vineyards, there it enters the roots of the vines, to be changed into wine, a constant proof that God loves us, and loves to see us happy.” In a happy coincidence, the same rains nourish the barley and hops that are changed into beer. In an even happier coincidence, wine and beer both pair exceptionally well with shrimp. God is good).

Romans 1:26-28

Good news ladies! Up until now, all of this clobbering has been about the guys. In Romans, you get to join in. Lucky you.

Romans is the one place the Bible speaks specifically about a female-female sex act. If you listen to Bible Thumpin' Gay Bashers, you'd be surprised to learn that, while the counts vary on how many places the Bible directly address heterosexual relationships, it is a lot. Then again, compared to the precisely one verse the Bible has about female-female sex, even two is one hundred percent more.

The number of heterosexually oriented verses isn't exactly clear. One thing is really clear, there's plenty of them and, much like the Levitical purity code, we've managed to ignore many of them. So, if you aren't also denouncing the divorced, then get off your lesbian judging high-horse, because otherwise you are just picking and choosing who to judge out of your own accord, and then quoting the one Bible verse that seems to support your choice. And even then, as we will see, it doesn't actually support your argument. It actually does just the opposite.

In Romans, we have the most extensive discussion of same-sex intercourse in the Bible, a whole two seemingly specific verses – astounding.

There are plenty of approaches to understanding what Paul is trying to teach us in these texts. Any good exegesis ultimately points to the reality that what Paul is talking about and what people who use these verses as clobber verses want Paul to be talking about aren't the same thing. That is, this is not about homosexual people having consenting homosexual relationships.

One convincing analysis of these texts looks at the fact that one of the most prevalent forms of same-sex sex in the Greco-Roman world was male prostitution which frequently involved boys. In that analysis, the texts become a condemnation of pederasty and prostitution, things of which most Christians (conservative to liberal) disapprove even today. There is also the perspective that Paul's pointing to same sex intercourse as being idolatrous could be referring to the practices of priests and priestesses of Mediterranean fertility gods who regularly practiced that type of prostitution but elevated it, within a religious context, to the state of idolatry. Those approaches are valid and mostly convincing perspectives, but they do require a small leap of logic to arrive at their conclusions. Much less of a leap of logic, mind you, than believing that these texts are about something of which people at that time had absolutely no comprehension, but slight conjecture all the same.

The analysis that I find the most convincing concerns itself with the word “natural.” It is the word that has led many to speak of LGBTQ behavior as “unnatural” acts even though they occur throughout nature (in one study they were found in more than fifteen-hundred species).

As it turns out, the word is actually not “natural.” Not surprisingly, Paul did not speak English. While Paul performed a number of miraculous things, speaking English (which wasn't around even in its earliest Prehistoric Old English form yet) was not one of them. Not to bore you too much, but the word Paul used was the Greek word, *physikos*. (Now that didn't hurt too much, did it?).

It's important to know the word in Greek because when it is translated into English, it loses a little of its original meaning. Without even knowing it, Lady GaGa has provided a better modern and contextual translation of *physikosthan* the frequently used translation of “normal.” We will get to that in a minute. It doesn't mean “natural” or “nature” so much as it means “produced by nature.” Those who use these verses as clobber verses tend to understand “natural” to mean something closer to “normal” than “produced by nature.” Not surprisingly, they also then define what is and isn't “normal” based on their personal biases rather than on science or the reality of the world around them (e.g.: “I think gay people make me feel creepy, so I henceforth do hereby dub it as an act of not-natural.”).

In reality, *physikos* has more to do with how things naturally occur in God's Creation. At this point, you may have begun to guess that *physikos* is based on the same root word from which we get the word “physics” which is, of course, the study of the realities of nature. Conveniently, the way Paul uses *physikos* here in Romans, it also means something very similar to “the realities of nature.” It is concerned with what is of our nature and not with what is defined as acceptable. That is to say, Paul is concerned with how God created something or someone to be. He is concerned with people going against their nature or in the words of Lady GaGa herself, if they are “born that way” he's concerned with them behaving as if they were not.

That is the sin here in Romans, acting against the very nature of who God created you to be. In this case he seems to be addressing the idea of a same-sex sex act in which at least one of the two are not attracted to someone of the same sex; they just are not born that way.

Understood this way, it would be equally sinful for someone who is only attracted to someone of the same sex to have sex with someone of the opposite sex. It goes against their nature; they just weren't born that way. Ironically, those telling LGBTQ folk that these verses mean they have to stop being LGBTQ folk are actually telling them to commit the very sin against which these verses warn, going against their nature. God has a wicked sense of humor.

Because these texts have been used so much to address homosexuality, it was important to address the issue directly, but the worst thing we could do is to think it is primarily about homosexuality. It is not.

Immediately following verse 28, Paul provides an extensive list of sins. It is so extensive that we all fall into at least one of the categories. “So there you have it,” says Paul, “we all sin. Don't try to deny it.” And let's face it, we all go against who we know we were created to be. How many times have you done something, felt guilt or shame, and then said, “I shouldn't have done that. That's not who I am.”?

As Paul says in the very next chapter, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” As he also says to start that chapter, “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.”

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 & 1 Timothy 1:9-10

So, remember back a few paragraphs ago when we talked about a Greek word? And remember how it didn't even hurt one little bit? Good. We are going to do it again.

I have put the 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy clobber verses together because they both use a particular Greek word in a particularly similar way. The word is *arsenokoitēs* and it means “male prostitute.” (Behold the Greek scholarship. See that it is good and rejoice). Actually, it could also mean “the customer of a male prostitute,” or “boy molester” or “someone who abuses themselves with a man” or “using sexual manipulation to acquire money” or ... (eh hem, “Behold the great and powerful Greek Interpretation!” <insert flashing light and crashing thunder>).

So, the word in these two verses, that is frequently interpreted as “homosexual” (which is absurd because, in Greek, it is clearly only a word referring to men) or “sodomite” (which is absurd, among other reasons, because that was not the sin of Sodom, as we have already discussed), is really difficult to translate. Why? In part, because it is only found in these two places and also, in part, because it is entirely possible that it is a made up word. It is very likely that Greek speaking Jews created this word to port a Hebrew word to Greek and over time the meaning has been lost. So, it is just hard to translate. So difficult, in fact, that scholars can't agree on a single best translation. What most biblical Greek scholars can agree on is that it is not meant to be a blanket statement about a male-male sex act. Moving on.

There is another word used in 1 Corinthians 6:9: *malakos*. The good news about this word is that it is found in lots of literature, so there are plenty of references about its typical intended meaning. It literally means “soft.” Some say it means “soft” as in “effeminate, but not in terms of sexual orientation.” Others, say it is connected with being wasteful of sexual and financial resources. Still others convincingly point to it singling out a particular type of male prostitution involving young boys.

Also in the list of contenders: sexual perverts, sodomites, weaklings, the self-indulgent. (“Behold the great and powerful Greek Interpretation!” <insert flashing light and crashing thunder>). Like with *arsenokoitēs* there really is no expert consensus on this.

Malakos was a word that could be used to refer to things as diverse as men who were weak in battle (or who were “soft”), to men who lived extravagant and pampered lives (or who were... well, “soft”). It was not specifically about sexual relationships. If Paul was actually trying to describe something about a submissive male in a male-male relationship (which is still not the same as homosexuality as we understand it today), it's very likely that he would have used *kinaedos*, which was frequently used to describe that very relationship. But he didn't. So, stop acting like he was.

Clobbered

In summary of my look at the Christian Church's use of the clobber verses, the bottom line is this, if you want to call homosexuality a sin, go ahead. But you are going to have to admit that it is not biblically a sin. Which means you are also going to have to admit that you are calling it a sin simply because that's what you want to do. Because of that, you are going to have to admit that you are a sinner for using God's name for false pretenses (it's a little thing we like to call using God's name in vain). And then, Paul has something to tell you, “...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.” (Romans 2:1).

“Clobbering 'Biblical' Gay Bashing”

Written by: Rev. Mark A. Sandlin

Originally Published on The God Article



The God Article

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/thegodarticle>

<http://www.facebook.com/thegodarticle>

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/thegodarticle/2011/10/clobbering-biblical-gay-bashing/>