

Doesn't the Bible say, "Man shall not lie with man"?

On Sunday, we began a 3-part sermon series exploring what the Bible says about gay relationships, beginning with Moses' famous declaration that "man shall not lie with man."

1. Warm-up Question: Tell us about something fun you plan to do this summer.
2. Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest . . . commandment." Matthew 22:37.
 - a. What do you think it means to love God that way? On a practical level, what are the signs that someone loves God like that?
 - b. Jeff suggested that one of the signs that a person loves God with all their heart is a willingness to do what is good and beautiful even when it's costly. Can you think of an instance in recent weeks when you felt called to do something (large or small) that required self-sacrifice?
 - c. In your own journey of life, when did the question of "what God says about gay people" first become important to you? At that time, what did you believe God thought about gay relationships? How did that affect your life and faith?
 - d. If you became convinced (hypothetically) that to be in relationship with God, you could not be in relationship with a spouse, which choice would you make? Would you forswear the opportunity to have a spouse if that sacrifice was required to be in relationship with God? (This is a tough question, but one that LGBT people have often been asked to make.)
3. The Good News, Jeff said, is that the Bible, properly understood, doesn't condemn loving, committed gay relationships. To reach that conclusion, though, we first have to realize how important context is to the meaning of words.
 - a. In 1804 Vice President Aaron Burr killed former Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton in a duel. It's hard for us today to imagine a time and culture where respectable people thought it was honorable to settle their disputes that way. Hamilton's story just goes to show how profoundly things change over time. In your own lifetime, what are some profound changes that have occurred?
 - b. Since the meaning of words is affected by the context in which they are spoken, as culture shifts and changes, so does the meaning of words. Consider several examples:
 - When someone steeped in football culture says, "Get the quarterback?" what do they mean? When someone who knows nothing of football says "Get the quarter back?" what do they mean?
 - When someone tells an actor to "break a leg," what do they mean? When someone tells an elderly person to "break a leg," what do they mean?
 - In the 1960s, when we sang that line in the Flintstones theme song that says, "Have a gay old time," what did we mean? When the same phrase is used

today, what meaning leaps to mind?

4. As the forgoing examples illustrate, context profoundly affects the meaning of words. If we don't keep this basic rule of linguistics in mind, we can end up radically misinterpreting the Bible. For example, the Apostle Paul says, "Any woman who prays . . . with her head unveiled disgraces her head. . . . For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but . . . it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off." I Corinthians 11:5ff.
 - a. If you were simply reading these words in black and white on the page without any historical and cultural context, what would you think they mean? Have you ever known someone who refused to cut her hair because of this Bible passage?
 - b. The Interpreter's Bible Commentary tells us that in Paul's culture, prostitutes often advertised themselves by discarding their veils and cutting their hair short. How does that cultural fact affect the meaning of Paul's words?
5. Read the selections from Leviticus 18-19 printed on p. 3. In Leviticus 18:22, Moses says, "Thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind; it is an abomination."
 - a. If you were simply reading the words of Leviticus 18:22 in black and white on the page without any historical and cultural context, what would you think they mean?
 - b. Leviticus 18:2 says, "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them . . . , 'You shall not do as they do in . . . the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you.'" The same point is repeated two more times in this passage (Lev. 18:24 and 20:23). What does this tell us about the purpose of the rules found in this passage?
 - c. Historians like David Greenberg and Marti Nissinen, in their books on the history of homosexuality, tell us that in the primitive tribal/agricultural culture of Canaan and Israel in Moses' time, the modern paradigm of two men (or two women) forming a household to live as a family unit was not happening, due to strict rules about men and women's work and the necessity of procreation to survival. Instead, the predominant paradigm of homosexual behavior was men having sex with temple priests to gain the favor of gods or goddesses in pagan fertility rites. How do these cultural facts affect the meaning of Leviticus 18:22?
 - d. Jeff recounted the story of the 21-year relationship between John Arthur and James Obergefell, two plaintiffs in the Supreme Court Case upholding marriage equality. James tenderly cared for John until he died of ALS. Tell us about a beautiful LGBT relationship you've observed. Is it fair to compare that relationship to temple prostitution?
6. Of course, there are a bunch of rules in Leviticus about many different aspects of life. Leviticus 19:28 says, "You shall not . . . tattoo any marks upon you; I am the Lord."
 - a. If you were simply reading these words in black and white on the page without any historical and cultural context, what would you think they mean? Have you ever known someone who refused to get tattoos because of this Bible verse?
 - b. The Interpreter's Bible Commentary tells us that in ancient Canaanite culture, tattoos were used to mark the followers of various pagan gods and goddesses. How does that cultural fact affect the meaning of Moses' words?
 - c. Given all we've discussed, if we want to be serious, not stupid, about the Bible, what principles should guide our interpretation of its ancient words?

Example Excerpts from Exodus chapters 18 and 19

Chapter 18

¹ THE LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ²Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: I am the LORD your God. ³You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not follow their statutes.

¹⁹ You shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness while she is in her menstrual uncleanness. ²⁰You shall not have sexual relations with your kinsman's wife, and defile yourself with her. ²¹You shall not give any of your offspring to sacrifice them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD. ²²You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.

Chapter 19

²⁴ Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, for by all these practices the nations I am casting out before you have defiled themselves. ²⁵Thus the land became defiled; and I punished it for its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants.

²⁶ You shall not eat anything with its blood. You shall not practice omens or witchcraft. ²⁷You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard. ²⁸You shall not make any gashes in your flesh for the dead or tattoo any marks upon you: I am the LORD.