



Here I Stand, I Can Do No Other?

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Preface:

This paper is born out of my desire to be faithful to God and to the calling that God has placed within me. I have found encouragement in the calling of the prophet Ezekiel and the proclamation of Paul. Ezekiel's story has encouraged me to be bold in warning that persons who live outside of covenant with God will die; while also imitating Paul by boldly proclaiming that God, in Christ Jesus, has done just that. In Christ, God has called us to repentance and died in our place. I am pushed by a desire to do my best to be certain that I am not wrong; that I am not ignoring a move of the Holy Spirit. That said, I exist in a state of uncertainty after the recent decisions of the 2020 General Conference of The United Methodist Church. I do not mean uncertainty in my faith, but in my calling. Or, more accurately, the location into which I am called. My first order understanding of my calling is that I have been called to preach the gospel, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. My second order understanding is that I am called to do so in this tribe of the Church. So, now that the 2020 GC has ended, this paper— which began months ago— has become even more important for me.

If I am to continue to retain my commitment to what I have previously understood to be the force of scripture, it is even more vital that I understand the intent of the scripture and (as best as possible) the context in which it was written. This is not to say that scripture is bound by its original context. Indeed, no. Scripture creates context. Because it is the container of the conditions of the covenants made by God with Abraham, the descendants of the man named Israel, and the new covenant made through the Lord, Jesus Christ. I am writing from the position that scripture is necessary to those covenants. Also, the documents that comprise our scriptures were retained by the early Church of Jesus Christ because she felt created and formed by them. The scriptures should therefore always be understood as the first context of the Church; and, therefore, its authority and rule of life.

In his Explanatory Notes on the New Testament, the Rev. John Wesley reflects on a list of sins in 1 Corinthians 6:9 saying, "We may learn hence, that we are never secure from the greatest sins, till we guard against those which are thought the least; nor, indeed, till we think no sin is little, since every one is a step toward hell."¹

When the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther was asked to repudiate his writings at the Diet of Worms, he responded with these closing words: "Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen." I do this work hoping to arrive at the same level of conviction.

Definitions

Homosexual: “adj. & n.”

“Sexually or romantically attracted to, or engaging in sexual activity with, people of one's own sex.”²

The first known use of the word was as an adjective in 1891 – as noted by the Oxford English Dictionary— and as a noun in 1894,³ as noted by the Merriam Webster Dictionary. The word homosexual was not part of the Koiné Greek lexicon (the common, ancient Greek language of the *New Testament*).

Love:

The Koiné Greek word “Agapē” is the word most often used for love in the *New Testament*. It means to work for the good of the other, as the other—a phrase associated with St. Thomas Aquinas and others. This does not indicate the mindless human affection that we so often mean when we say the English word, “love.” Instead, this is the love of action; the love that demonstrates and serves. This notion of love is all over the pages of the New Testament. Consider, for instance, this text from Romans 13 which has the Greek word (see bracketed text) transliterated in English and inserted in the place of the English word “love.”

⁸ Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to [agapan] one another, for he who [agapōn] his fellowman has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: " [Agapēseis] your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰ [Agapē] does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore [agape] is the fulfillment of the law. – Romans 13:8-10

God

This paper does not refer to a generic god. This paper is in reference to the God of Israel who gave his name as יהוה (I Am, That I Am), the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ. God is not the supreme being, God is unconditioned being itself.

Format

This document features scripture selections grouped according to topic. Commentary on the passages will follow. The quotations of scripture are longer than may seem necessary to capture, at minimum, the immediate context of the specific verses which relate directly to human sexuality or sexual immorality.

Scriptures:

Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from the Bibleworks text of the NIV, 1984 Edition.

A Reminder from Proverbs 17:15

¹⁵ Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent-- the LORD detests them both.

We must be careful not to condemn with words or actions those who disagree with us. This posture toward others leaves no room for discussion or learning from the other. It certainly does not conform to Christ's command that we *agape* one another.

Passages of Scripture that have challenged me to do this work:

Psalm 145:8-9

⁸ The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. ⁹ The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.

Ezekiel 3:18-22

¹⁸ When I say to a wicked man, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and **I will hold you accountable for his blood.** ¹⁹ But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin; but you will have saved yourself. ²⁰ "Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, and I put a stumbling block before him, he will die. Since you did not warn him, he will die for his sin. The righteous things he did will not be remembered, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. ²¹ But if you do warn the righteous man not to sin and he does not sin, he will surely live because he took warning, and you will have saved yourself." ²² The hand of the LORD was upon me there, and he said to me, "Get up and go out to the plain, and there I will speak to you."

Acts 20:17-27

¹⁷ From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. ¹⁸ When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. ¹⁹ I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. ²⁰ You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. ²¹ I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. ²² "And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. ²³ I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. ²⁴ However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-- the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace. ²⁵ "Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. ²⁶ **Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men.** ²⁷ **For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.**

Hebrews 10:11-27

¹¹ Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. ¹³ Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, ¹⁴ because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. ¹⁵ The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: ¹⁶ "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." ¹⁷ Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more." ¹⁸ And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin. ¹⁹ Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. ²⁵ Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-- and all the more as you see the Day approaching. ²⁶ **If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, ²⁷ but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.**

A Reminder from the Rev. John Wesley

The sermons of the Rev. John Wesley are a part of the doctrinal standards for the people of The United Methodist Church. In his sermon entitled *Free Grace* (April 1739), Wesley makes the following observation concerning the use of scripture to prove a predetermined outcome (in the case of said sermon, predestination by choice):

This is the blasphemy clearly contained in 'the horrible decree' of predestination. And here I fix my foot. On this I join issue with every assertor of it. You represent God as worse than the devil—more false, more cruel, more unjust. But you say you will 'prove it by Scripture'. Hold! What will you prove by Scripture? That God is worse than the devil? It cannot be. Whatever that Scripture proves, it never can prove this. Whatever its true meaning be, this cannot be its true meaning. Do you ask, 'What is its true meaning, then?' If I say, 'I know not,' you have gained nothing. For there are many scriptures the true sense whereof neither you nor I shall know till death is swallowed up in victory. But this I know, better it were to say it had no sense, than to say it had such a sense as this. It cannot mean, whatever it mean besides, that the God of truth is a liar. Let it mean what it will, it cannot mean that the Judge of all the world is unjust. **No scripture can mean that God is not love, or that his mercy is not over all his works;** that is, whatever it prove beside, no Scripture can prove predestination.

OLD TESTAMENT: CREATED FOR FRUITFULNESS

Genesis 1:24-28

²⁴ And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. ²⁵ God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. ²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "**Be fruitful and increase in number**; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Genesis 2:20-25

²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. ²¹ So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. ²³ The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." ²⁴ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. ²⁵ The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

Comment:

The very first commands of God were "be fruitful" and "you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." Being fruitful necessarily requires life. The condition of breaking the second command was death. We have all entered into that same death because we have all broken that same command by desiring to be like God, and consequently fallen into idolatry (See Romans 5). It could be said that the failure of humankind to live up to these commands which guaranteed our flourishing gives rise to the rest of our scriptures. For instance, the giving of the Ten Commandments could be seen as a way of restoring fruitfulness.

OLD TESTAMENT: THE SIN OF SODOM

Genesis 19:1-26

¹ The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. ² "My lords," he said, "please turn aside to your servant's house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning." "No," they answered, "we will spend the night in the square." ³ But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate. ⁴ Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom-- both young and old-- surrounded the house. ⁵ **They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them."** ⁶ Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him ⁷ and said, "No, my friends. Don't do this **wicked thing**." ⁸ Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don't do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof." ⁹ "Get out of our way," they replied. And they said, "This fellow came here as an alien, and now he wants to play the judge! We'll treat you worse than them." They kept bringing pressure on Lot and moved forward to break down the door. ¹⁰ But the men inside reached out and pulled Lot back into the house and shut the door. ¹¹ Then they struck the men who were at the door of the house, young and old, with blindness so that they could not find the door. ¹² The two men said to Lot, "Do you have anyone else here-- sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here, ¹³ because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the LORD against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it." ¹⁴ So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were pledged to marry his daughters. He said, "Hurry and get out of this place, because the LORD is about to destroy the city!" But his sons-in-law thought he was joking. ¹⁵ With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished." ¹⁶ When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them. ¹⁷ As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, "Flee for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!" ¹⁸ But Lot said to them, "No, my lords, please! ¹⁹ Your servant has found favor in your eyes, and you have shown great kindness to me in sparing my life. But I can't flee to the mountains; this disaster will overtake me, and I'll die. ²⁰ Look, here is a town near enough to run to, and it is small. Let me flee to it-- it is very small, isn't it? Then my life will be spared." ²¹ He said to him, "Very well, I will grant this request too; I will not overthrow the town you speak of. ²² But flee there quickly, because I cannot do anything until you reach it." (That is why the town was called Zoar.) ²³ By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land. ²⁴ Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah-- from the LORD out of the heavens. ²⁵ Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, including all those living in the cities-- and also the vegetation in the land. ²⁶ But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

Isaiah 1:7-17

⁷ Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire; your fields are being stripped by foreigners right before you, laid waste as when overthrown by strangers. ⁸ The Daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a hut in a field of melons, like a city under siege. ⁹ Unless the LORD Almighty had left us some survivors, we would have become like **Sodom**, we would have been like Gomorrah. ¹⁰ Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah! ¹¹ "The multitude of your sacrifices-- what are they to me?" says the LORD. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. ¹² When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? ¹³ Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations-- I cannot bear your evil assemblies. ¹⁴ Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. ¹⁵ When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; ¹⁶ wash and make yourselves clean. **Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong,** ¹⁷ learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.

Ezekiel 16:38-51

³⁸ I will sentence you to the punishment of women who commit adultery and who shed blood; I will bring upon you the blood vengeance of my wrath and jealous anger. ³⁹ Then I will hand you over to your lovers, and they will tear down your mounds and destroy your lofty shrines. They will strip you of your clothes and take your fine jewelry and leave you naked and bare. ⁴⁰ They will bring a mob against you, who will stone you and hack you to pieces with their swords. ⁴¹ They will burn down your houses and inflict punishment on you in the sight of many women. **I will put a stop to your prostitution, and you will no longer pay your lovers.** ⁴² Then my wrath against you will subside and my jealous anger will turn away from you; I will be calm and no longer angry. ⁴³ "Because you did not remember the days of your youth but enraged me with all these things, I will surely bring down on your head what you have done, declares the Sovereign LORD. Did you not add **lewdness** to all your other detestable practices? ⁴⁴ "Everyone who quotes proverbs will quote this proverb about you: "Like mother, like daughter." ⁴⁵ You are a true daughter of your mother, who despised her husband and her children; and you are a true sister of your sisters, who despised their husbands and their children. Your mother was a Hittite and your father an Amorite. ⁴⁶ Your older sister was Samaria, who lived to the north of you with her daughters; and your younger sister, who lived to the south of you with her daughters, was Sodom. ⁴⁷ You not only walked in their ways and copied their detestable practices, but in all your ways you soon became more depraved than they. ⁴⁸ As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, **your sister Sodom and her daughters never did what you and your daughters have done.** ⁴⁹ "Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: **She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy.** ⁵⁰ They were haughty and **did detestable things** before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen. ⁵¹ Samaria did not commit half the sins you did. You have done more detestable things than they, and have made your sisters seem righteous by all these things you have done.

Comment:

Lot defines the intended action of the men of Sodom to “know” his male guests as wicked. The word “know” here is a euphemism for “have sex with.” The prophet Ezekiel shows that arrogance, being overfed, and being unconcerned are at the very least equal to the wicked act that the men of Sodom intended when they came to Lot’s door. Ezekiel’s commentary does not erase the original force of the story of Lot in Genesis; nor does it decline the characterization of the intent of the men of Sodom as wickedness; however, it does show us that lewdness and serving the self (submitting to sexual immorality, sexual desire, and/or felt personal need) is endemic to the same wickedness that allowed the people of Sodom to ignore the poor and needy. We might also consider here that the force of God’s first command that we “be fruitful and multiply” must mean that sex acts are not an end unto themselves.

In the Isaiah text, the people of Israel are compared to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah in terms of their own idolatry, child sacrifice, as having “blood on their hands because they have not given justice to the oppressed, the orphan, and the widow.”⁴ Chapter 16 begins with the words: “The word of the Lord came to me: ‘Sone of man, confront Jerusalem with her detestable practices...’”⁵ Here we find use of the Hebrew word “tô’ēbâ” which means “abominable” or “detestable.”

In Ezekiel 16:49-50, the prophet Ezekiel names the sins of Sodom which are being allegorically compared to the sins of his contemporary Jerusalem. The sins of Sodom are listed in a way that gives some commentators reason to say that homosexual practices are specifically not listed. Ezekiel does use the word “tô’ēbâ” (see the section on Leviticus below) which may be taken to say that being arrogant, being overfed, being unconcerned, and not taking hold of the hand of the “poor and needy” are “detestable acts.”⁶ But, it seems to me that these are covered in the charge in v. 50 that they were “haughty” meaning that they exalted themselves, which sounds similar to Paul’s charges in the first chapter of “The Epistle to the Romans” that the pervasive human problem is, in fact, *worship of the creature* – possibly even of the *self* (both of which would properly be called idolatry). It seems likely that Ezekiel may have been aware of an account of the story of Sodom that has not been preserved elsewhere in the Hebrew scriptures. The theologian Robert Gagnon says it is worth noting that in Ezekiel 18:12 the words “He does detestable things” are used as a stand-alone offense in the catalog of several offenses including “He oppresses the poor and needy.” All of the offenses are then taken together and referred to as “he has done all these detestable things.”⁷ Gagnon sees this as evidence that the previous use of “detestable thing” in chapter 16 is a stand-alone event on par with not caring for the poor and needy.⁸

Gagnon also says this about the Ezekiel reference to the sins of Sodom:

The passage does not explicitly state that the “abomination” consisted of a failure to attend to the poor and needy. Since the Hebrew word for “abomination” (tô’ēbâ) is the same word used in the Levitical prohibitions for homosexual intercourse, it is conceivable that Ezekiel is alluding to the same. The overtone of sexual immorality in the surrounding allegory lends support for such an interpretation. However, this identification could be questioned. The plural “abominations” (tô’ēbâ) is applied elsewhere in Ezekiel to a wide array of vices, including sins of social injustice, so it is possible that “abomination” here does refer to failure to help the poor and needy. One must decide whether the progression in 16:49-50 consists of three steps or four. Is the progression: (1) abundance; (2) flagrant disregard of God’s will;

(3) callous indifference toward the poor (= abomination)? Or should the “abomination” be viewed as a fourth stage: (4) abominable same-sex intercourse? Alternatively, “abomination” may have in view the rape of helpless visitors sheltered by a resident alien, made doubly offensive by the inherent degradation of same-sex intercourse, as a particularly vivid instance of crimes against the “poor and the needy.”⁹

It seems to me that Gagnon has a fair point, there is room for interpretation in Ezekiel’s use of Sodom as an allegorical warning to Jerusalem. How one receives Ezekiel’s statements, and the use of the word abominations will likely be based on one’s current bias. If one wishes for the Church to normalize same-sex intercourse and marriage, then one will naturally decline to interpret Ezekiel as referencing anything other than the social justice offenses listed in v. 49. Meanwhile, a person interested in buttressing the traditional teachings of the Church regarding same-sex intercourse and marriage will see verse 50’s use of the word “abominations” as including the intention of the men of Sodom to forcibly rape the messengers in the Lot story who either presented themselves as male or were assumed to be male by the men of Sodom.

It is important to note that the text which contains the story of Abraham bargaining with God on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah and the story of the angels’ visit with Lot does not specifically name the sin of Sodom. In Genesis 18:20-21 were read, “The Lord said, ‘the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.’” The only specific wicked act mentioned is that intended by the men of Sodom against the angels who went to the home of Lot.

In Genesis 13:12-13 we read, “¹² Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. ¹³ Now the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD.” There is no specific mention of exactly what the sins against the Lord were, but it is clear that they are mentioned because Abram is living within their community. Abram is intended to be the father of many nations, to be the origin of a covenant people who will live in a way that sets them apart from the people who do not follow יהוה (the name of God, to be, possibly pronounced as Yahweh) and are not born of a covenant with Yahweh. This is expressed in Genesis 17:1-2, “When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.”

Sodom is mentioned again at the conclusion of Deuteronomy when Moses assembles the people to make the covenant between them and God. Moses gives them a warning as to what will be (come to pass) if the commands of the covenant are not kept. It is not clear if the following quotation represents the words of Moses himself or those of the later editors of Deuteronomy who sought to give an explanation for how the children of Israel landed themselves in exile in Babylon; but, it is clear that there is a parallelism between the fate of an idolatrous Israel and Sodom who did not know Yahweh through an intentional covenant relationship— or bow down to Yahweh alone.

Deuteronomy 29:23-26 ²³ The whole land will be a burning waste of salt and sulfur-- nothing planted, nothing sprouting, no vegetation growing on it. It will be like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the LORD overthrew in fierce anger. ²⁴ All

the nations will ask: "Why has the LORD done this to this land? Why this fierce, burning anger?" ²⁵ And the answer will be: "It is because this people abandoned the covenant of the LORD, the God of their fathers, the covenant he made with them when he brought them out of Egypt. ²⁶ They went off and worshiped other gods and bowed down to them, gods they did not know, gods he had not given them.

The story of Sodom is being used to warn covenant Israel of the dangers of idolatry and not keeping the commands of the Law that were given for the purpose of setting them apart from their neighbors. We will see in Leviticus 18 and 20 that same-sex intercourse is identified as *tô'ēbâ* (abomination) and behavior related to those who are outside of the covenant, those who worship other gods (particularly those of the Canaanites including Baal and Baal's companion-goddess Asherah). Later in this paper we will see that the *New Testament* book of "Jude" makes explicit connection between the sin of Sodom and sexual immorality. In defining sexual immorality for the purposes of a covenant people, including Jesus, the Law which defines behavior appropriate and necessary to that covenant is the only authoritative source that we have.

The Church of Jesus Christ is comprised of all those who have believed in his name and have therefore been given the "power to become children of God". It is this Church that is in a new covenant with God, through Christ, instituted in his blood. Like the children of Israel into which the Church is grafted, the Church is also called to be a community that is set apart (the meaning of the word "holy") from the world, for the purposes of God. The Church of Jesus Christ is holy community set apart for God in the covenant effected through the blood of her Lord, Jesus Christ. Therefore, most of the Church has understood that the new covenant through Jesus also intends that we be different from the cultures in which we live, meaning that behaviors or values that may be normative for those cultures will not necessarily be congruent with, or in harmony with, the behaviors and values that are the fruit of being in Christ as wrought in us by the Holy Spirit. Scripture speaks of this as being conformed to the image of Christ and being given the righteousness of Christ.

It is not possible to support the idea that either Isaiah or Ezekiel was ignoring the wickedness of the men of Sodom, but they do give us pause to consider that the actions of those men were on the same plane as harming the vulnerable. Even so, the warnings of the prophets should give us great pause before we continue and then suggest that the Church must change its stance on same-sex intercourse out of the simple desire to be relevant to the culture that surrounds her. This is particularly true if we think this is somehow being faithful to the way of Jesus, which is the way of love and righteousness. How could I ever tell someone that X is not sin— when scripture succinctly says that it is— and think that I am somehow loving that person? In *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote these words:

Where defection from God's Word in doctrine or life imperils the family fellowship and with it the whole congregation, the word of admonition and rebuke must be ventured. Nothing can be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to his sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that calls a brother back from the path of sin.¹⁰

Ezekiel's words tell me that I would not just be cruel, but that I would also be liable for that person's destruction.

OLD TESTAMENT: LEVITICUS

Leviticus 18:1-30

¹ The LORD said to Moses, ² "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'I am the LORD your God. ³ **You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices.** ⁴ You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the LORD your God. ⁵ Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the LORD. ⁶ "'No one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations. I am the LORD. ⁷ "'Do not dishonor your father by having sexual relations with your mother. She is your mother; do not have relations with her. ⁸ "'Do not have sexual relations with your father's wife; that would dishonor your father. ⁹ "'Do not have sexual relations with your sister, either your father's daughter or your mother's daughter, whether she was born in the same home or elsewhere. ¹⁰ "'Do not have sexual relations with your son's daughter or your daughter's daughter; that would dishonor you. ¹¹ "'Do not have sexual relations with the daughter of your father's wife, born to your father; she is your sister. ¹² "'Do not have sexual relations with your father's sister; she is your father's close relative. ¹³ "'Do not have sexual relations with your mother's sister, because she is your mother's close relative. ¹⁴ "'Do not dishonor your father's brother by approaching his wife to have sexual relations; she is your aunt. ¹⁵ "'Do not have sexual relations with your daughter-in-law. She is your son's wife; do not have relations with her. ¹⁶ "'Do not have sexual relations with your brother's wife; that would dishonor your brother. ¹⁷ "'Do not have sexual relations with both a woman and her daughter. Do not have sexual relations with either her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter; they are her close relatives. That is wickedness. ¹⁸ "'Do not take your wife's sister as a rival wife and have sexual relations with her while your wife is living. ¹⁹ "'Do not approach a woman to have sexual relations during the uncleanness of her monthly period. ²⁰ "'Do not have sexual relations with your neighbor's wife and defile yourself with her. ²¹ "'Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molech, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the LORD. ²² **"Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.** ²³ "'Do not have sexual relations with an animal and defile yourself with it. A woman must not present herself to an animal to have sexual relations with it; that is a perversion. ²⁴ "'Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. ²⁵ Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. ²⁶ But you must keep my decrees and my laws. The native-born and the aliens living among you must not do any of these detestable things, ²⁷ for all these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled. ²⁸ And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you. ²⁹ "'Everyone who does any of these detestable things-- such persons must be cut off from their people. ³⁰ Keep my requirements and do not follow any of the detestable customs that were practiced before you came and do not defile yourselves with them. I am the LORD your God.'"

Leviticus 20:1-24

¹ The LORD said to Moses, ² "Say to the Israelites: 'Any Israelite or any alien living in Israel who gives any of his children to Molech must be put to death. The people of the community are to stone him. ³ I will set my face against that man and I will cut him off from his people; for by giving his children to Molech, he has defiled my sanctuary and profaned my holy name. ⁴ If the people of the community close their eyes when that man gives one of his children to Molech and they fail to put him to death, ⁵ I will set my face against that man and his family and will cut off from their people both him and all who follow him in prostituting themselves to Molech. ⁶ "I will set my face against the person who turns to mediums and spiritists to prostitute himself by following them, and I will cut him off from his people. ⁷ "Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the LORD your God. ⁸ Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the LORD, who makes you holy. ⁹ "If anyone curses his father or mother, he must be put to death. He has cursed his father or his mother, and his blood will be on his own head. ¹⁰ "If a man commits adultery with another man's wife-- with the wife of his neighbor-- both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death. ¹¹ "If a man sleeps with his father's wife, he has dishonored his father. Both the man and the woman must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads. ¹² "If a man sleeps with his daughter-in-law, both of them must be put to death. What they have done is a perversion; their blood will be on their own heads. ¹³ **"If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.** ¹⁴ "If a man marries both a woman and her mother, it is wicked. Both he and they must be burned in the fire, so that no wickedness will be among you. ¹⁵ "If a man has sexual relations with an animal, he must be put to death, and you must kill the animal. ¹⁶ "If a woman approaches an animal to have sexual relations with it, kill both the woman and the animal. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads. ¹⁷ "If a man marries his sister, the daughter of either his father or his mother, and they have sexual relations, it is a disgrace. They must be cut off before the eyes of their people. He has dishonored his sister and will be held responsible. ¹⁸ "If a man lies with a woman during her monthly period and has sexual relations with her, he has exposed the source of her flow, and she has also uncovered it. Both of them must be cut off from their people. ¹⁹ "Do not have sexual relations with the sister of either your mother or your father, for that would dishonor a close relative; both of you would be held responsible. ²⁰ "If a man sleeps with his aunt, he has dishonored his uncle. They will be held responsible; they will die childless. ²¹ "If a man marries his brother's wife, it is an act of impurity; he has dishonored his brother. They will be childless. ²² "Keep all my decrees and laws and follow them, so that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out. ²³ You must not live according to the customs of the nations I am going to drive out before you. Because they did all these things, I abhorred them. ²⁴ But I said to you, "You will possess their land; I will give it to you as an inheritance, a land flowing with milk and honey." I am the LORD your God, who has set you apart from the nations.

Comment:

The Hebrew word תועבה which is transliterated in English as tô'ebâ mean abominable or detestable. It is used here to say that an act is detestable or an abomination, not the person. In Genesis 43:32 it is used to speak of Egyptians eating with Hebrews (it is said to be an abomination for the Egyptians). In Deuteronomy 14:3 the word is used to speak of eating unclean food. In Deuteronomy 32:16, which reads: "They made him jealous with their foreign gods and angered him with their **detestable** idols," the word is associated with the practice of idolatry. Thus, there may be a connection to Paul then speaking of same

sex relations as “shameful lusts” (Romans 1:26) that are a product in us of worshiping the creature rather than the Creator. “Because of this,” Paul says, “God gave them over to shameful lusts.” (Romans 1:26) Leviticus is reflecting disapproval of those who “lie with a man as one lies with a woman.” (Leviticus 18:22)

The word used for “lie” as in “lie with a man” in Leviticus 18:22 is **תִּשְׁכַּב** which is a form of **שָׁכַב** transliterated as šākab which means “to lie down”¹¹ and is used as an euphemism for sexual intercourse. This word is followed by the noun **מִשְׁכָּב** which means “a place of lying, couch, or act of lying.” So we could literally translate the phrase as “to lay on a couch with a man as with a woman.” This is a description of an intimate act. There is no indication in the Hebrew that domination or subjecting the recipient to anal intercourse for the purpose of humiliation, is either implicit or explicit. In fact, the notion is not found in the words themselves. The so-called attempt to contextualize the verse by suggesting that the prohibition of same sex relations in the covenant is due only to the actions or laws of the surrounding cultures who used anal penetration for the purpose of domination and humiliation, would necessarily require that all heterosexual activity denoted in the use of the phrase “as one lies with a woman” intends that the woman is to be dominated or humiliated by the sexual act. In other words, since the Law uses the phrase “as with a woman” then sex with the woman would have to be for the purpose of humiliating her, not loving intimacy. Given a literal interpretation akin to “lie down on a couch as with a woman,” that hardly fits. It is inconceivable that the author, who is coaxing a covenant people into correct use of their covenant bodies, would call them to use their bodies to humiliate their spouses... ones to whom they are instructed to cling in oneness.

Immediately clear from the initial verses of chapter 18 of Leviticus (which are bold type above) is that one of the presenting reasons for the “Do not” in “Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman” is that this is a practice associated with and possibly approved by the people from whom they had been removed (Egypt), and the people into whose midst they are moving (Canaan). A second thing to notice is that the prohibition of lying with a man as with a woman is the only act that is specifically labeled as **תֹּעֲבָה**. Which again means that the act is detestable, or an abomination. It is important to note that Leviticus does not say that the person is an abomination to God, though the result of breaking the covenant with **יְהוָה** (Yahweh) is being cut off from the people.

The verse in bold type in chapter 20 uses the same Hebrew word, **תֹּעֲבָה**. The most significant difference here is that an active penalty is specifically spelled out. That penalty is death. As Christians engage with people in our society who may be practicing things for which Leviticus requires death, it is vital that we remember the Gospel which we profess. Namely, Christ has met the demands of the Law through his death. Christ has taken the penalties for the Law onto himself. In his death, Christ Jesus has fulfilled the requirements of the Law. We must not, we cannot, use these texts to justify treating a person who is guilty according to the Law as if that person herself has become a detestable abomination and is unloved by God. I will not commend the inane “hate sin, love the sinner” to you even though it comes from a Church father. Instead, I remind us that Christ has died even for the person who may find themselves committing abominable acts. Let all remember the hope professed by St. Paul in Romans 5:6-9,

⁶ You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! –

It is important to remember that Jesus himself said both that he had come to fulfill the requirements of the Law, and that we must repent. The *Old Testament* does not allow for vigilantism, neither should the follower of Jesus stand for the kind of vigilantism that would ostracize people who may be practicing homosexuals while also seeking to be faithful to God through celibacy. Our Lord instructed us that the Holy Spirit will convince/convict the world of sin. We must trust that. We must be diligent in teaching Christian ethics that respect the authority of the scriptures. We must also allow the love of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5) to be visible to other people. All along we must remember that the love in question is not emotional sensitivity but working for the good of the other, as other. This is the love that compels us to “Lift High the Cross” so that Christ might draw all people to himself.

Some say that we can eliminate the prohibitions in Leviticus 18 because they belong to a holiness code that was only intended to be followed by Israel’s priests. They claim that the prohibitions of Leviticus are intended only for those who hold a priestly office. Others say that this also does not pertain to the office of pastor as the cultic sacrifices of the law (an action reserved for certain of the priests) are no longer in effect. But verse 18:1 specifically states that “The Lord said to Moses, ‘speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘I am the LORD your God. 3 You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices.’” It is abundantly clear that the decrees which follow are not simply for the priests but for each person who would enter into covenant with יהוה (the God of Israel). Later, verse six uses the words “No one.” This is a reference to any Israelite who wishes to remain in covenant with יהוה. Gagnon reminds us that “the witness of these two laws from Leviticus has to be tested against the New Testament witness.” I agree. The relationship of Jesus to the Law, as described by Jesus himself, would seem to require that we do so. So, I will do so when I get to the New Testament passages included in this document.

OLD TESTAMENT: JUDGES AND KINGS

Judges 19:1-25

¹ In those days Israel had no king. Now a Levite who lived in a remote area in the hill country of Ephraim took a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. ² But she was unfaithful to him. She left him and went back to her father's house in Bethlehem, Judah. After she had been there four months, ³ her husband went to her to persuade her to return. He had with him his servant and two donkeys. She took him into her father's house, and when her father saw him, he gladly welcomed him. ⁴ His father-in-law, the girl's father, prevailed upon him to stay; so he remained with him three days, eating and drinking, and sleeping there. ⁵ On the fourth day they got up early and he prepared to leave, but the girl's father said to his son-in-law, "Refresh yourself with something to eat; then you can go." ⁶ So the two of them sat down to eat and drink together. Afterward the girl's father said, "Please stay tonight and enjoy yourself." ⁷ And when the man got up to go, his father-in-law persuaded him, so he stayed there that night. ⁸ On the morning of the fifth day, when he rose to go, the girl's father said, "Refresh yourself. Wait till afternoon!" So the two of them ate together. ⁹ Then when the man, with his concubine and his servant, got up to leave, his father-in-law, the girl's father, said, "Now look, it's almost evening. Spend the night here; the day is nearly over. Stay and enjoy yourself. Early tomorrow morning you can get up and be on your way home." ¹⁰ But, unwilling to stay another night, the man left and went toward Jebus (that is, Jerusalem), with his two saddled donkeys and his concubine. ¹¹ When they were near Jebus and the day was almost gone, the servant said to his master, "Come, let's stop at this city of the Jebusites and spend the night." ¹² His master replied, "No. We won't go into an alien city, whose people are not Israelites. We will go on to Gibeah." ¹³ He added, "Come, let's try to reach Gibeah or Ramah and spend the night in one of those places." ¹⁴ So they went on, and the sun set as they neared Gibeah in Benjamin. ¹⁵ There they stopped to spend the night. They went and sat in the city square, but no one took them into his home for the night. ¹⁶ That evening an old man from the hill country of Ephraim, who was living in Gibeah (the men of the place were Benjamites), came in from his work in the fields. ¹⁷ When he looked and saw the traveler in the city square, the old man asked, "Where are you going? Where did you come from?" ¹⁸ He answered, "We are on our way from Bethlehem in Judah to a remote area in the hill country of Ephraim where I live. I have been to Bethlehem in Judah and now I am going to the house of the LORD. No one has taken me into his house. ¹⁹ We have both straw and fodder for our donkeys and bread and wine for ourselves your servants-- me, your maidservant, and the young man with us. We don't need anything." ²⁰ "You are welcome at my house," the old man said. "Let me supply whatever you need. Only don't spend the night in the square." ²¹ So he took him into his house and fed his donkeys. After they had washed their feet, they had something to eat and drink. ²² While they were enjoying themselves, some of the **wicked men of the city** surrounded the house. Pounding on the door, they shouted to the old man who owned the house, "**Bring out the man who came to your house so we can have sex with him.**" ²³ The owner of the house went outside and said to them, "No, my friends, don't be so **vile**. Since this man is my guest, don't do this disgraceful thing. ²⁴ Look, here is my virgin daughter, and his concubine. I will bring them out to you now, and you can use them and do to them whatever you wish. But to this man, don't do such a disgraceful thing." ²⁵ But the men would not listen to him. So the man took his concubine and sent her outside to them, and they raped her and abused her throughout the night, and at dawn they let her go.

Comment:

The similarity between this story and the story of Lot from Genesis is striking. It is conceivable that it is a retelling of the exact same story. The host makes plain that both the act intended to be perpetrated against the man's guest and the resultant violation of the man's hospitality are disgraceful. It is helpful to remember that the book of Judges is moving toward its last verse which reads, "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit." Each person, essentially, is their own authority. There is no submittal to the Laws of the covenant, no submittal to the Lordship of God. For an action to be just (right in their own eyes), it need only suit the desires or felt need of the person who seeks personal justice. The men of Benjamin who come to the old man's house are representative here of people detached from covenant who think of themselves as their own source of accountability, and their own judge. Again, this is an elevation of the self above God, which is properly called "idolatry."

1 Kings 14:21-31

²¹ Rehoboam son of Solomon was king in Judah. He was forty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city the LORD had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel in which to put his Name. His mother's name was Naamah; she was an Ammonite. ²² Judah did evil in the eyes of the LORD. By the sins they committed they stirred up his jealous anger more than their fathers had done. ²³ They also set up for themselves high places, sacred stones and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree. ²⁴ **There were even male shrine prostitutes in the land; the people engaged in all the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites.** ²⁵ In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem. ²⁶ He carried off the treasures of the temple of the LORD and the treasures of the royal palace. He took everything, including all the gold shields Solomon had made. ²⁷ So King Rehoboam made bronze shields to replace them and assigned these to the commanders of the guard on duty at the entrance to the royal palace. ²⁸ Whenever the king went to the LORD's temple, the guards bore the shields, and afterward they returned them to the guardroom. ²⁹ As for the other events of Rehoboam's reign, and all he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah? ³⁰ There was continual warfare between Rehoboam and Jeroboam. ³¹ And Rehoboam rested with his fathers and was buried with them in the City of David. His mother's name was Naamah; she was an Ammonite. And Abijah his son succeeded him as king.

Comment:

The highlighted verse above also uses the same Hebrew word, "tô'êbâ," found in Leviticus 18 and 20. Some say that this word is used to describe acts committed by temple prostitutes. Here, the abominations or detestable practices are being committed by the people. We cannot make the sole issue in Leviticus to be "male shrine prostitutes" when here in 1 Kings the people are also named as participants in the sins, and are also liable for the sins which "stirred up [God's] jealous anger."

The sins that are named are marks of idolatry in the hearts of the people as evidenced by the mention of "high places, sacred stones, and Asherah poles." Asherah was considered a goddess of fertility. Asherah poles were devices used for worship of the Canaanite goddess Asherah who was thought to be the spouse of the highest god. He was referred to as "El."¹² This word "El" was adopted by the ancient Hebrews as a generic word for God, you may have heard it said as Elohim. A widely known use is found in Deuteronomy 6:4 which says "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God [Elohim -- plural], the LORD is one." On rare occasions,

you may encounter the suggestion that Asherah was the wife of Yahweh. The study notes in the *Life Application Bible* indicate that she is better understood as the “mistress of Baal.”¹³ From this text in 1 Kings, we can glean that the presence of the Asherah pole was considered a pollution and the Asherah pole is clearly condemned. Why? Idolatry. There is no other god. “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

It is also important to remember that, for this covenant people (and therefore for Christians), the sin of one person affects the holiness (set-apartness) of the whole. This is why the sentence specifically speaks of the male shrine prostitutes being “in the land.” They were, by their actions, defiling the land of the covenant, just as had been warned against in Leviticus 18 and 20.

1 Kings 15:8-13

⁸ And Abijah rested with his fathers and was buried in the City of David. And Asa his son succeeded him as king. ⁹ In the twentieth year of Jeroboam king of Israel, Asa became king of Judah, ¹⁰ and he reigned in Jerusalem forty-one years. His grandmother's name was Maacah daughter of Abishalom. ¹¹ Asa did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, as his father David had done. ¹² **He expelled the male shrine prostitutes from the land and got rid of all the idols his fathers had made.** ¹³ He even deposed his grandmother Maacah from her position as queen mother, because she had made a repulsive Asherah pole. Asa cut the pole down and burned it in the Kidron Valley.

Comment:

Again, we see that potential male with male sexual acts are linked to idolatry just as Paul links same sex desires as conditions that result from turning to worship of the creature in the first chapter of the “Epistle to the Romans.” Asa, who was the grandson of Rehoboam, removed his grandmother for worshiping the goddess Asherah. The entire issue here seems not to be specifically the sexual act, but the sexual act performed by persons who had been set apart for God, in a covenant. Robert Gagnon, speaking to the context of religious *qedesim* (“men whose masculinity had been transformed into femininity by a goddess,”¹⁴), writes, “The Mesopotamian evidence explored at the beginning of this chapter makes clear that the most acceptable form of same-sex intercourse—not least acceptable—was precisely the same-sex intercourse conducted in a religious context. Otherwise, for a man to want to be penetrated by another man was generally regarded as disgraceful.”¹⁵ He goes on to say, “The bottom line for biblical authors: it did not matter why people willingly engaged in same-sex intercourse, just as it was unnecessary to parse the motivations of those who participated willingly in incest, bestiality, adultery, fornication, or heterosexual prostitution.”¹⁶ The motivation is not relevant to the disavowal of God’s command to “be fruitful and multiply.” As such, the misuse of the body translates to worshiping the other person. We hear this expressed in our culture when someone says something akin to “he was worshiping her body.”

2 Kings 23:1-8

¹ Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. ² He went up to the temple of the LORD with the men of Judah, the people of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets-- all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the LORD. ³ The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the LORD-- to follow the LORD and keep his commands, regulations and

decrees with all his heart and all his soul, thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant. ⁴ The king ordered Hilkiah the high priest, the priests next in rank and the doorkeepers to remove from the temple of the LORD all the articles made for **Baal and Asherah and all the starry hosts**. He burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron Valley and took the ashes to Bethel. ⁵ He did away with the pagan priests appointed by the kings of Judah to burn incense on the high places of the towns of Judah and on those around Jerusalem-- those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun and moon, to the constellations and to all the starry hosts. ⁶ **He took the Asherah pole from the temple of the LORD** to the Kidron Valley outside Jerusalem and burned it there. He ground it to powder and scattered the dust over the graves of the common people. ⁷ **He also tore down the quarters of the male shrine prostitutes, which were in the temple of the LORD and where women did weaving for Asherah.** ⁸ Josiah brought all the priests from the towns of Judah and desecrated the high places, from Geba to Beersheba, where the priests had burned incense. He broke down the shrines at the gates-- at the entrance to the Gate of Joshua, the city governor, which is on the left of the city gate.

Comment:

That the practice of male shrine prostitutes is idolatrous is explicit here. It is directly related to taking up the religious/devotional practices of the people who surrounded the Israelites. Burning incense to Baal (Canaanite god), reverence toward Ashera (Canaanite goddess), and use of male shrine prostitutes are presented as offenses and not right praise. It is counterfeit worship. What is at stake is the covenant. The covenant that Yahweh made with Abraham and the covenant made with the children of Abraham through the prophet Moses both carried conditions. If the people keep the commands of the covenant, they will be Yahweh's people and Yahweh will be their God.

The worship of Baal, the worship of Ashera, and the worship of the human creatures are all violations of the conditions of covenant. It is for this reason that Josiah reads from the "Book of the Covenant" and then removes them—perhaps especially the quarters of the *qedesim*, the male prostitutes. It seems that Josiah linked using the prostitutes to worship of Asherah, who had supposedly caused them to possess femininity, and to offer themselves in worship of Asherah. Josiah is told by God that he will not fall under the judgement of Israel's failure because he tore his robes and humbled himself, he wept in God's presence. These are indications of submitting himself to the terms of the Covenant, what Christians call "repentance." The actions that he takes are necessary to this submission.

I do not get to serve on my own terms. To be licensed, commissioned, and then ordained I repeatedly made vows that indicated that I approved, accepted, and would uphold the doctrine and discipline of The United Methodist Church. Again, I do not get to serve on my own terms. Neither did Josiah, he is bound by the covenant that his ancestors made with Yahweh. The covenant I have made is also with God and I was charged to "look after the concerns of God above all."¹⁷

NEW TESTAMENT: THE GOSPELS

Mark 6:10-12

¹⁰ Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. ¹¹ And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them." ¹² **They went out and preached that people should repent.**

Comment:

And what is it that the people were to repent of if not the conditions of the covenant given through Moses? Of course, the rhetoric supporting challenges to the language of *The Book of Discipline* rarely speaks of repentance for anything except a failure to be completely inclusive of persons who refuse to repent of sin, especially sin defined by Leviticus 18.

Mark 10:2-9

² Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" ³ "What did Moses command you?" he replied. ⁴ They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away." ⁵ "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied. ⁶ "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' ⁷ 'For this reason **a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife,** ⁸ and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. ⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

Comment:

Here, the question is "what is permissible?" This, in my mind, is the same question that continues to be asked every time someone says, "Hey, preacher, what does the bible say about x?" Jesus turns their quest for permission into his own quest for their repentance; repentance from having hard hearts. Some who want to move The United Methodist Church to what they term as "full inclusion" would say to someone who resists full inclusion: "Repent of your hatred, your hard-heartedness." The question must then be raised if it is hard-hearted to remind someone that the scriptures that Jesus quotes have a very singular view of marriage which harkens back to its original purpose, human flourishing. Likewise, what shall we make of Ezekiel's charge that if we do not warn a person of sin then God will hold us accountable for their blood, i.e., their destruction.

Matthew 5:27-32

²⁷ "You have heard that **it was said,** 'Do not commit adultery.' ²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell. ³¹ "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' ³² But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.

Comment:

Here we see an indisputable example of Jesus using the scriptures of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) to speak to sexual immorality. This section on divorce is likely Matthew's addition to Jesus' teaching on divorce in Mark. Matthew shows that Jesus defined permissible divorce as that grounded not in adultery but sexual immorality; a much more general term that we should, at the very least, suspect harkens back to all of the commandments around sexual use of the body included in the Torah, including the holiness code from Leviticus. The Greek word *πορνεία* is translated in the NIV as "marital unfaithfulness" which is an interpretation provided by the translators. The word is literally translated as something akin to "sexual immorality." It has several definitions in the definitive Greek-English Lexicon known as BDAG: "1. unlawful sexual intercourse, *prostitution, unchastity, fornication*"; "2. participation in prohibited degrees of marriage, *fornication*"; "3. Immorality of a transcendent nature."¹⁸ The question must be asked, "What source would Jesus have used to define "*πορνεία*"? Is there any remote chance that the answer would be anything other than the scriptures of his own tradition—the basis of covenant between Israel and God, a covenant of which he himself was a part?

Another interesting thing to note is that Jesus' indication that we would be better off to remove our hand than engage in *πορνεία* is hardly a softening of his tradition's view on human sexuality.

Matthew 10:9-15

⁹ Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; ¹⁰ take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep. ¹¹ "Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave. ¹² As you enter the home, give it your greeting. ¹³ If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. ¹⁴ If anyone will not welcome you or **listen to your words**, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. ¹⁵ I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

Comment:

It has become quite fashionable to mention that Jesus himself supposedly argued that the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was only a lack of hospitality. This might remind us of Ezekiel's commentary on the Sodom story. It is quite clear that Jesus is being critical of people who will not welcome the disciples that he has sent into ministry to proclaim repentance in light of the Kingdom of God having come near. However, those who say that this passage clearly eliminates sexual desire of any sort from being the source of Sodom's guilt seem to conveniently forget that Jesus also said, "or listen to your words." Similarly, the words of the visitors to Sodom were ignored. No matter how noble our intentions, we must always be careful not to limit our use of Jesus' words to those we like; or worse, those that support an outcome we want more than we want to submit to Jesus' actual language.

Matthew 19:3-12

³ Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" ⁴ "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' ⁵ and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?" ⁶ So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." ⁷ "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command

that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" ⁸ Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. ⁹ I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery." ¹⁰ The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry." ¹¹ Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. ¹² For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."

Comment:

The reader will certainly recognize that Matthew has included information from Mark 10:2-9 in this passage, if it is true that Matthew relies on Mark and not vice versa. You may have also noticed that the disciples complain about Jesus' strict stance on marriage. At least, it seems like a complaint to me. Clearly, they have been forced to wonder how anyone could live up to Jesus' standard which does not include simply a lack of divorce. What is also included is the strict notion that the man leaves the mother and disavows any other woman by submitting to the category of marriage that is between a man and a woman—according to Jesus and to the Hebrew text that he is quoting.

Some say that this text offers a definition, as in: "Jesus defined marriage as between a man and a woman." It could also be said that since Jesus didn't mention a man leaving his mother and clinging to another man, then this text itself is a prohibition against same-sex marriage since Jesus does not present such as an option. But both are suppositions based on the text. What is clear is that the disciples question whether people can realize the fulfillment of Jesus' strict standard. And then, Jesus declares that those who cannot do so find themselves in another category, that of the eunuch. Jesus says some are born eunuchs. Jesus also says that some have made themselves eunuchs by renouncing marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

To my reading, Jesus offers a critique of marriage and the system of divorce for personal purpose rather than immorality. This critique is based on the ancient Hebrew understanding of marriage as a means of ensuring flourishing and fruitfulness. Divorce works against both. For most of its consideration of the matter, the Church has objected to homosexual relations because they do not have the capability to produce offspring, which is what is meant by "Be fruitful and increase in number,"¹⁹ or flourish (see Genesis 1:24-28 on page 5).

If we consider that, here in this text, Jesus does give instruction about proper marriage and the permanence of proper marriage, then Jesus is also saying that those who cannot adhere to his strict standard should consider joining with those who have submitted their sexuality to being in covenant with God through the Lordship of Christ. These are those who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom, which necessarily includes those who have entered into a state of repentance. It is not true to say that Jesus has not spoken about matters of sexuality or marriage apart from his cultural norm. What I mean is this: we cannot say that Jesus has not said anything that would suggest that a homosexual, non-binary, or any other modern-term marriage is inappropriate for those who would be in covenant with God when he is describing marriage using terms from that very covenant.

NEW TESTAMENT: THE EPISTLES

Romans 1:21 - 32

²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. ²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator - who is forever praised. Amen. ²⁶ Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. **Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷ In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.** ²⁸ Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹ they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³² Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Comment:

Paul is equating misuse of our bodies, and the use of other bodies, with idolatry. The NIV quoted above indicates that the men received the penalty for their perversion. In my opinion, the word would be better translated as "error." Idolatry is errant allegiance. The primary problem experienced by the people that Paul is commenting on is that they could not approve of the knowledge they had of God (see verse 28).

Verse 24 says that God did not prevent them from following the shameful impurity of their hearts. The NIV is interpreting that the impurity necessarily has sexual connotation due to the context in which the word is used. But the greater issue is idolatry, seeking to honor the desires of the body over and against honoring God or our knowledge of God. It is also worth noting that the threat of being impure is not the same as being sinful. Impurity can be a result of sin, but it is more noteworthy for causing a person (or even the whole community) to not be eligible to approach the temple.

Paul is listing sexual sin as being equitable to other sins that would fall into the rabbinical category of weighty matters of the Law, meaning those parts of the Law that are prime if a person's circumstance would force them to choose which commandment to observe. For instance, this is the teaching mode that Jesus was in when he chose to heal a man on the Sabbath. Sabbath observance, he deemed, was not as weighty a matter as working for the good of the other, loving the man by healing him.

On a personal note, one of my deepest struggles in accepting the growing trend of normalizing uses of the body that are contrary to nature, especially those which require mutilation of the body under the guise of care, is that Paul has clearly asserted that I am as guilty as those who have engaged in idolatry if I give approval to their practice of idolatry. There is a fine line between receiving a person in love and giving

approval of their actions. Unfortunately, it seems that our society is quickly forgetting this. It is now charged by some in our society that, if I am unwilling to approve of an eight-year-old girl receiving puberty blockers or genital mutilating surgery because she thinks she likes “boy things,” then I must hate that eight-year-old girl. This is nonsense. So is the idea that I cannot be in relationship with, or work for the good of, a person who is engaged in idolatrous practices without somehow granting my approval of their practices by simply being present with them. This is insanity.

For a simple example of why Christians should not think this way, consider the story of Naaman from chapter 5 of the book of 2 Kings in the *Old Testament*. Naaman has been sent to the king of Israel who sends him to Elisha whom Naaman had been told could heal his leprosy. After following Elisha’s instructions to bathe in the Jordan river seven times, Naaman was healed. He came to realize that there was no other God other than the God of Israel. In response, Naaman offers gifts to Elisha who refuses them; and then, he makes a request of Elisha that is very relevant for us.

¹⁸ But may the LORD forgive your servant for this one thing: When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow down and he is leaning on my arm and I bow there also-- when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD forgive your servant for this." ¹⁹ "Go in peace," Elisha said.

Rimmon was a foreign, false god. Naaman now realizes this, and he wants God’s forgiveness for what will appear to be idolatry. For, he must go in with his master to support him when he bows before Rimmon. In essence he is saying that he will have to be in relationship with a person who is guilty of idolatry. Did you notice that the prophet of the one true God did not tell Naaman that if he bowed down alongside his master, he would also be guilty of idolatry? In fact, the prophet merely says “Go in peace.”

How does this relate to the Romans text above, particularly the end of v. 32? Paul says that the people are doing things they know they should not do, ignoring the knowledge they have of God, and that they also approve of those who are practicing idolatry. Some who read Paul would say that being friends with, or serving someone who does such things, is tantamount to approving of their idolatry, or participating in it. The story of Naaman and the blessing of Elisha show us that this is pure nonsense. Nothing in Paul’s words says that we cannot be friendly with or work for the good of those to whom Paul’s words may refer.

ἀρσενοκοίτης, ἀρσενοκοίται

The following texts use Paul's Koinē Greek word ἀρσενοκοίτης. In its plural form used in the following texts it looks like this: ἀρσενοκοίται. The comment section will include an explanation of the origin, and thus the meaning, of the word.

1 Corinthians 6:7-13

⁷ The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? ⁸ Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers. ⁹ **Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders** ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. ¹² "Everything is permissible for me"-- but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible for me"-- but I will not be mastered by anything. ¹³ "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food"-- but God will destroy them both. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

Other Translations of ἀρσενοκοίται 1 Corinthians 6:9

New Living Translation

⁹ Don't you know that those who do wrong will have no share in the Kingdom of God? Don't fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, who are idol worshipers, adulterers, male prostitutes, **homosexuals**,

English Standard Version

⁹ Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor **men who practice homosexuality**,

Revised Standard Version

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 **sexual perverts**,

New Revised Standard Version

⁹ Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites,

1 Timothy 1:8-11

⁸ We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. ⁹ **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,** ¹⁰ for adulterers and perverts, for slave

traders and liars and perjurers-- and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine ¹¹ that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

Other Translations of ἀρσενοκοῖται 1 Timothy 1:10

New Living Translation:

¹⁰ These laws are for people who are sexually immoral, for **homosexuals** and slave traders, for liars and oath breakers, and for those who do anything else that contradicts the right teaching

English Standard Version:

¹⁰ the sexually immoral, **men who practice homosexuality**, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine,

Revised Standard Version

¹⁰ immoral persons, **sodomites**, kidnapers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine,

New Revised Standard Version

¹⁰ fornicators, **sodomites**, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching

Comment:

In both verses, Paul uses an obscure word not found elsewhere in the New Testament. The word is obscure enough that it is not featured in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* which is a widely used scholarly resource providing information on the origins and history of various ancient Greek words, including their use in works outside of the *New Testament*. There are no other known uses of the word. That word is ἀρσενοκοίτης (or ἀρσενοκοῖται in its context) which is transliterated in English as arsenokoitēs and is a word Paul created by combining two other words in the Septuagint.

The Septuagint, known as “LXX” because it was purportedly produced by 70 translators, is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible which originated sometime in the mid-third century B.C. It was well known in the first century context in which the Apostle Paul lived and certainly would have been used by him. It is also known to have been quoted by the gospel writers such as in the Gospel According to Matthew’s birth narrative. There Matthew uses the Greek word “*parthenos*” from the prophet Isaiah’s proclamation that the virgin will conceive and bear a son.

In the LXX, the Greek of Leviticus 18:22 as translated from the Hebrew, looks like this:

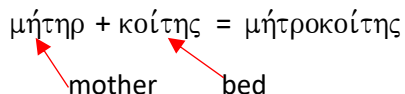
²² καὶ μετὰ ἄρσενος οὐ κοιμηθήσῃ κοίτην γυναικός βδέλυγμα γάρ ἐστιν

1 male

2 bed

The two words that Paul used to form $\acute{\alpha}\rho\sigma\epsilon\nu\omicron\kappa\omicron\iota\tau\eta\varsigma$ are visible in this sentence. They are marked with the labels “1” and “2.” $\acute{\alpha}\rho\sigma\epsilon\nu\omicron\varsigma$ means “male” and $\kappa\omicron\iota\tau\eta\nu$ means “bed.” Thus it is clear that in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10, Paul is making reference to the prohibition in the Septuagint translation of Leviticus 18:22. He takes two words in the LXX that lie adjacent to and on opposite sides of the words $\omicron\upsilon\ \kappa\omicron\iota\mu\eta\theta\acute{\eta}\sigma\eta$ (a phrase which means “sleep” and is used as a euphemism for sexual intercourse) and forms the word $\acute{\alpha}\rho\sigma\epsilon\nu\omicron\kappa\omicron\iota\tau\eta\varsigma$ that would later be translated as “homosexual” even though it is clear in Leviticus 18 that what is being referenced is not a personal state of being (i.e., “I am a homosexual person”) but a specific action of a person.

The lexicon entitled *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG) defines the word this way: “a male who engages in sexual activity with a person of his own sex.” It also offers this commentary on Paul’s use of the word: “Paul’s strictures against same-sex activity cannot be satisfactorily explained on the basis of alleged temple prostitution... or limited to contact with boys for homoerotic service.”²⁰ As in the Hebrew of Leviticus 18 and 20, there is nothing here of the requirement for the circumstances of intending domination or humiliation to be in place for the act to qualify as an abomination, but rather, the simple, willing act of two persons who engage in sexual intimacy together. The word for having sexual intercourse with one’s mother was formed in this same way:

$\mu\acute{\eta}\tau\eta\rho + \kappa\omicron\iota\tau\eta\varsigma = \mu\acute{\eta}\tau\rho\kappa\omicron\iota\tau\eta\varsigma$


One may wonder why this matters. Simply put, the most common objection I hear to traditional reactions to the question of allowing same-sex marriages or the ordination of persons in same-sex marriages is that the word homosexual (or homosexuality) is not in the Bible. As previously noted, the word was not available to the person who originally wrote the letters the church has codified as scripture. As far as I know, the first use of the word homosexual in English Bibles was in the 1980’s edition of the Revised Standard Version. The lack of a modern word in the Koiné Greek language of the text does nothing to eliminate the clear evidence that Paul created a word to use it to describe a specific action as being incompatible with the practice of following Christ.

One other note: many people seem to enjoy that slave owners and slave traders used the words of Christian scripture to justify slavery. Please take note that in 1 Timothy 1:9 Paul specifically lists “slave traders” as among those for whom the law is made, they are not among the righteous. Being a slave trader is among those things which are expressly stated to be contrary “to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God...” So much for saying that our scriptures condone slavery.

1 Corinthians 6:15 - 20

¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” ¹⁷ But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. ¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Do you not

know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

Comment:

I once heard an Elder in The United Methodist Church say: “why is it our business what people do in their bedrooms?” Well, the text above should give some idea why. When we come to receive the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, we die to self and are raised to new life in Christ. We no longer live, scripture says; but Christ lives in us. When we come to the Lord’s Table to receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion, we pray this prayer:

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them to be for us the body and blood of Christ, **that we may be for the world the body of Christ**, redeemed by his blood. By your Spirit, make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at his heavenly banquet.

This prayer is reflective of the words written in the letter to the church at Ephesus (Ephesians 4:4-7)

⁴ There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called--
⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷ But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

Through the grace received in our baptism and the Sacrament of Holy Communion we are made one with Christ. Because there is but one Lord, one faith, and one baptism, we are all one with Christ and one with each other. This is what we ask the Holy Spirit to work in us as we receive the broken body and blood of Christ. We are all members of the same body, the Body of Christ. If something happens to one member of the body, it happens to the entire body. So saith the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:26, “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.” If we reject this idea, we are rejecting Christianity itself. Christianity is not about rugged individualism nor is it only concerned with the salvation of the individual. Christianity is a person, Jesus Christ. Christianity is the Body of Christ. As my professor of Ethics and Methodist Studies told us, “If one member of the Church lies with a prostitute, the whole Church lies with a prostitute.” We do not suffer sin in isolation.

1 Thessalonians 4:1-7

¹ Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. ² For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. ³ It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that **you should avoid sexual immorality**; ⁴ that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, ⁵ not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; ⁶ and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. ⁷ **For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.**

Hebrews 13:1-8

¹ Keep on loving each other as brothers. ² Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. ³ Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering. ⁴ **Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.** ⁵ Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." ⁶ So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" ⁷ Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. ⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Revelation 21:1-8

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." ⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶ He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. ⁷ He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. ⁸ **But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars-- their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."**

Comment:

It is important for us to be reminded that the scriptures do not hold the act of sexual contact with a person of the same gender as being somehow more reprehensible than sin itself. In fact, the description of sexual immorality in these three texts as a general category of sin would include same-sex intimacy as same-sex intimacy is included in chapter 18 of the book of Leviticus which codifies sexual immorality.

NEW TESTAMENT: THE SIN OF SODOM

Jude 1:5-8 ⁵ Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. ⁶ And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home-- these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. ⁷ **In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.** ⁸ **In the very same way, these dreamers pollute their own bodies, reject authority and slander celestial beings.**

Comment:

Various dates are proposed for the writing of the Epistle of Jude. Some say as early as 50 AD and others as late as 65 AD. Duane F. Watson notes "the use of the Epistle of Jude as an authoritative document by the author of 2 Peter (around 80-90 CE) indicate[s] a date closer to the mid-first century."²¹ If it was not composed by Jude, the brother of Jesus and James, then it represents, at the latest, a second-generation witness to the teaching of the Apostles as that teaching would have been received from Jesus. If Jesus provided instruction to the Apostles which stated that the sin of Sodom was the lack of hospitality to the messengers that were sent to them, then Jude 1:7-8 would never have been written.

CONCLUSION:

On June 10th of 2013 I was ordained by Bishop L. Jonathan Holston, the resident Bishop of the South Carolina Annual Conference. Prior to his laying hands on me and speaking the words of ordination, the bishop asked the examination questions which are required to be answered in the affirmative by each ordinand. The seventh question was this:

Will you be loyal to The United Methodist Church,
accepting its order, liturgy, doctrine, and discipline,
defending it against all doctrines contrary to God's Holy Word,
and committing yourself to be accountable with those serving with you,
and to the bishop and those who are appointed to supervise your ministry?²²

I answered: "I will, with the help of God." I meant that. I was not feigning agreement for the sake of receiving authority or the potential for a greater income in exchange for my services.

After having done the work that is included in this document, I am not certain that I could now answer the above question in the affirmative and be completely truthful. The 2020 General Conference of The UMC has, in effect, changed its order, doctrine, and discipline. It has not forcibly said that sexual practices with a person of the same sex are congruent with scripture, but it has ceased to say that they are not. What does that require of me as I seek to be faithful to my ordination vows?

It is hard to say. On the one hand I could say that The UMC has endorsed the practice of homosexuality by removing its former prohibitions against the practice, but that is not actually true. It seems to me that what The UMC has actually done is to arrive at no stance at all.

While we are a connectional church, it is also true that The UMC only exists as a legal entity when the General Conference is in session. When it is not in session, we are a connection of local churches bound by a common discipline, the sending and receiving of clergy, and the sharing of ministry. If I remain in The UMC, then I am agreeing to be bound by its discipline, even though I disagree with the current changes. It is hard to see how I will be able to fulfill my oath to defend The UMC against a doctrine “contrary to God’s Holy Word” when The UMC has already assented to it. But to be fair, I recognize that The UMC has not specifically said, “the practice of homosexuality is compatible with Christian teaching” or, “scriptures which speak against same-sex intimacy are invalid.” The General Conference did not pass legislation that “changed the Bible” as some are charging. Again, it did ignore the Bible. Legislation that specifically said that the scriptures have no authority for the modern Church would necessitate my departure from The UMC. Indeed, I would have already turned in a notice of my intent to leave.

The decisions that have been made relating to human sexuality can be summarized with the following list:

- The following was deleted from a list of chargeable offenses for clergy: “practices declared by The United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teachings, including but not limited to: being a self-avowed practicing homosexual; or conducting ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions; or performing same-sex wedding ceremonies.”²³
- The following was adopted: “No clergy at any time may be required or compelled to perform, or prohibited from performing, any marriage, union, or blessing of any couple, including same-sex couples. All clergy have the right to exercise and preserve their conscience when requested to perform any marriage, union, or blessing of any couple.”²⁴
- The UMC will not “require any local church to hold or prohibit a local church from holding a same-sex marriage service on property owned by a local church.”²⁵
- “[D]elegates affirmed “marriage as a sacred, lifelong covenant that brings two people of faith (adult man and adult woman of consenting age or two adult persons of consenting age) into a union of one another and into deeper relationship with God and the religious community.”

Some will contend that The UMC has effectively accepted same-sex relationships and normalized them. That, I think, is true. It is also true that The UMC has changed who it understands to be candidates for Christian Marriage to “two people of faith.” There is now no limitation to a hetero-sex marriage. This allowance of same-sex marriage constitutes a doctrine of a sort. That statement now exists in our Social Principles which are not church law. So, has The United Methodist Church changed its doctrine to the degree that I can no longer certify or defend it? In a sense, yes. And also, no. It is a difficult situation for me to parse. It would be much easier if I were not committed to not being wrong or if I was unconcerned with being faithful to Christ’s call (especially considering that I believe I have been called to this particular tribe of his Church). It would also be easier if I could clearly see the future and know how

the publication arm of The UMC will treat these changes. Will it now use the Sunday school materials to disseminate information to children that is contrary to scripture? I can't know that.

That said, I will not teach that the scriptures do not say that the practice of one man entering into sexual practices with another man are unacceptable for a person seeking to be in covenant with the God of Israel. I will not preside at a same-sex wedding, union, or the blessing of a previous civil union. I will not say that the scripture is out-of-date or on the wrong side of history. These are nefarious statements that reek arrogance and a distrust of those who have passed the scriptures along to us. They suppose that the God of Israel has allowed us to have scriptures that are harmful or damaging. I cannot reconcile that with the scriptures themselves, the tradition of the Church of Christ, the experience of the Church that has seen millions of lives transformed through the witness of scripture, or with simple reason. I will not teach that homosexual practice is compatible with going on to a Wesleyan understanding of Christian Perfection, or an acceptable form of holiness (being set-apart through a covenant with God).

What I will do is continue to be faithful to Jesus Christ, using the Mosaic and Apostolic traditions conferred to us in the scriptures, as guarded by Christ's holy Church, in order that I might faithfully transmit the faith to those to whom I am appointed.

As his hand was placed on my head, the Bishop said:

Almighty God, pour upon David Dean McManus, Jr. the Holy Spirit,
for the office and work of an elder in Christ's holy church.

I then placed my hands on a Bible as the bishop once laid hands on my hands and said:

David Dean McManus, Jr., take authority as an elder
to preach the Word of God,
to administer the Holy Sacraments
and to order the life of the Church,
in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Frankly, it is true that the ordination spoken of in the bishop's words is not just to The United Methodist Church. Therefore, I can only conclude that I must now enter into a time of discernment. The questions that I have to continue to pray about and ask myself are these:

Can I continue in acceptance of the order, liturgy, doctrine, and discipline of The United Methodist Church? Can I continue to defend it against all doctrines which are contrary to God's Holy Word?

After completing the work of this paper, I am convinced that The United Methodist Church has entered into error. I am not yet certain that this requires that I leave.

May Christ be merciful as I, like Naaman, must hold the hand of a master who has entered a temple I do not favor, while also striving to be faithful to him.

NOTES:

- ¹ <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/john-wesleys-notes-on-the-bible/notes-on-st-pauls-first-epistle-to-the-corinthians/#Chapter+VI>
- ² https://www.oed.com/dictionary/homosexual_adj?tab=meaning_and_use#1515332 viewed 5/20/24
- ³ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/homosexual>
- ⁴ Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 79.
- ⁵ Ezekiel 16:1-2
- ⁶ Ezekiel 16:49-50
- ⁷ Ezekiel 18:10-13
- ⁸ Gagnon, 82
- ⁹ Gagnon, 81.
- ¹⁰ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together* (pp. 84-85). Hymns Ancient and Modern Ltd. Kindle Edition.
- ¹¹ William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 368.
- ¹² <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Asherah-Semitic-goddess>
- ¹³ Life Application Study Bible, 648.
- ¹⁴ Gagnon, 102
- ¹⁵ Gagnon, 108-9
- ¹⁶ Gagnon, 110
- ¹⁷ This is taken from the Ordinal used in “The Service of Commissioning and Ordination” by the South Carolina Annual Conference and published for the service held on June 10, 2013. The language is altered from that published in the *The United Methodist Book of Worship*. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1992), 675. There, the original reads “to look after the concerns of Christ above all.”
- ¹⁸ Danker, Frederick W., Walter Bauer, and William F. Arndt. *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 854.
- ¹⁹ Genesis 1:28, NIV.
- ²⁰ Danker, Frederick W., Walter Bauer, and William F. Arndt. *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 135.
- ²¹ Watson, David F., “The Letter of Jude” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: Volume XII*. ed, Leander E. Keck, 473-480. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 474.
- ²² <https://www.bomlibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/2013-2016OrdinalFINAL.pdf>
- ²³ <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/united-methodists-remove-same-sex-wedding-ban>
- ²⁴ <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/united-methodists-remove-same-sex-wedding-ban>
- ²⁵ <https://twkumc.org/gc-faq/>