

Discerning Same-Sex Marriage in the PC(USA)

Session 3

Homosexuality and the Bible:

Two Views

Dan O. Via and Robert A.J.

Gagnon

Old Testament

There are only 4 passages in the OT that explicitly deal with homosexuality.

Sodom and Gomorrah – Genesis 19:1-19

The Levite in Gibeah – Judges 19:22-26

And two texts from the Levitical Law

Levitical Law

Leviticus 18:22 –

“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman;
it is an abomination.”

Leviticus 20:13 –

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

Dan O. Via –

On Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:1-29) and Gibeah (Judges 19:22-25)

- *“These stories have no direct bearing on the validity of contemporary consensual homosexual relationships but rather are told in such a way as to condemn homosexual gang rape.” p.5*
- Via suggests that according to ancient Israel, there are **two kinds of human evil that are against God:**
 1. **Sin** – conscious, intentional, personal attitude and act – originates in a corrupted heart. *(Calvin defines sin as a disease that affects all of creation – Via doesn’t use this terminology)*
 2. **Uncleanness or Impurity** – occurs from contact with some physical object or process – certain animals or foods, corpses, pagan rites, sexual processes. It is like a contagion; it gets on you. It has nothing to do with motive, intention, or the disposition of the heart. *The consequence is that one may not enter the sanctuary to worship God (Lev. 12:4; Num. 19:13)*

Via continued...

- **Via suggests that homosexuality is understood as uncleanness/impurity rather than sin, based on the understanding that uncleanness goes against the requirement of completeness or perfection as it pertains to the holiness of God.**
- Holiness requires that individuals conform completely to the class to which they belong. (Sea creatures that don't have fins and scales are unclean (Lev. 11:9-12). This means that an individual cannot belong to two different classes or enact two different fundamental roles at the same time – a man cannot be both male and female, sexual intercourse with an animal forbidden (Lev. 18:23), incest forbidden (Lev. 18:6-18), and homosexuality (Lev. 18:22; 20:13) are condemned as defiling.
- ***“In other words, being unclean is a disorder confusion, the mixing of what should not be mixed – a lack of wholeness, unity, and integrity that contradicts what makes God God – holiness.” P.7***
- Therefore, homosexuality in Leviticus categorizes **it as a source of uncleanness, rather than a sin**. This is based on the context of various manifestations of impurity. It states that homosexuality “defiles or makes unclean” (Lev. 18:24; 27)

Via continued

- Homosexual practice makes one unclean – negative mark on the person that limits one’s ability to associate with other people and one’s access to God.
- In a patriarchal society, homosexuality compromises purity in the production of male heirs to hold the land.
- Homosexuality violates the boundaries that separate Israel from the pagan nations (Lev. 18:3, 24, 27)
- Homosexual practice in a patriarchal society is an affront to male honor.
- Via suggests that in the two narratives (Genesis and Judges) that a man would have been put in a position to be a passive partner – the “penetrated one.” This is considered a violation of his masculine honor that should be protected at all costs – thus, giving a virgin daughter or one’s concubine.

Question raised by Via:

Should Christians accept a rule that is justified in the way the Old Testament justifies the condemnation of homosexuality?

Robert Gagnon

On Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:1-29) and Gibeah (Judges 19:22-25)

- *“Most pro-homosex scholars agree that the OT speaks to the issue of homosexual practice on only four occasions: the twin stories of Sodom, the Levite at Gibeah, and the two Levitical proscriptions. Then they discount each set, claiming that the two narratives refer only to homosexual gang rape, while the two Levitical proscriptions are antiquated purity rules. **However, the OT has a web of additional interconnecting texts that establish an indictment of same-sex intercourse per se and provide a reasonable basis for rejecting such behavior.**”* p. 56

Gagnon continued...

Story of Ham's act against Noah – “seeing the nakedness of his father and the impending curse” Gen. 9:20-27

1. Ham is the father of the Canaanites – the story is not just dealing with incestuous homosexual rape, but showing how bad the ancestor of the Canaanites was by multiplying heinous offenses: not just rape but also a case of incest and male-male intercourse.
1. The Ham story connects the Levitical connection, since both texts attribute God's judgment of the Canaanites to their egregious sexual practices – which are not explicitly just coercive acts. (Leviticus is in the context of “not doing as they do in Egypt and as they do in Canaan” 18:3)
1. It's likely that the narrator of Gen. 9:20-27 (the Yahwist) viewed incest and same-sex intercourse, as compounding factors in the heinous quality of Ham's aggression. In turn, this increases the likelihood that the Yahwist understood his other story of homosexual rape (Sodom and Gomorrah) in the same light.

Gagnon continued...

Ezekiel 16:49-50 – Sodom “*did not take hold of the poor and the needy. And they grew haughty and committed an abomination before me.*”

- *Pro-homosex scholars usually interpret “abomination” to refer to economic injustice. This is not likely for 3 reasons:*
 1. *In the list of vices in Ezekiel 18:10-13, Ezekiel distinguishes “commits an abomination” (singular) from both “oppresses the poor and the needy” and the concluding summary statement, “committed all these abominations” (plural)*
 2. *Ezekiel shows strong links with the Holiness Code (Lev. 17-26), especially in Ezekiel 18. It’s not a coincidence that Lev. 18:22 states male-male intercourse is an abomination (singular), even as it summarizes all the offenses as “abominations” (plural v. 24-30)*
 3. *Because Ezekiel uses abomination in a singular use twice in reference to sexual sins (22:11; 33:26) it is likely that Ezekiel intends abomination in 16:50 and 18:12 as a metonym or substitute for male-male intercourse.*

In other words Ezekiel read the Sodom story in the light of the Levitical prohibitions of male-male intercourse; he interpreted male-male intercourse as an abomination.

Gagnon continued...

- Jude 7 alludes to the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah as “in a manner similar to these (angels who copulated with women), having committed sexual immorality and gone after other flesh.” In other words, the men of Sodom put themselves in a sacrilegious position of pursuing sexual intercourse with angels, in their lust for sexual intercourse with other males.
- 2 Peter 2:7 refers to Jude and Sodom, saying, “sexual licentiousness of conduct of the lawless” and in v. 10 that the “defiling desire of the flesh” is the desire to “know – in Hebrew means “to go in/penetrate” Lot’s male visitors, whom they did not recognize as angels.
- Jude and Peter both understood the Jewish texts of the period and associated Sodom’s primary offense as having sex with males.

Gagnon continued

- The Deuteronomistic History references the “qedeshim” the homosexual cult prostitutes, many times. The labeling of this recurring in unfaithful periods of Judah’s history is referred to as an “abomination”, which connects it with the Levitical prohibitions.
- The revulsion of the qedeshim has nothing to do with rape and is not limited to idolatry or the exchange of money. Thus, the Deuteronomistic historian would have interpreted the attempt at penetrating the Levite in Gibeah as a degrading act, regardless of consent.
- Therefore, the Deuteronomistic historian would see both Sodom and Gibeah as cases that go against the Levitical proscriptions as men, “lying with a male as though lying with a woman” and not simply as gang rape.

Summary

- Via suggests that the stories of Sodom and Gibeah are not about consenting homosexual relationships, but merely about gang rape. Thus, gang rape is a sin and these texts offer nothing about contemporary consensual relationships.
- Via also suggests that the Levitical holiness code is simply about being “unclean” and not about sinful behavior. It is violating the masculine honor and separates one from God and neighbor.
- Gagnon suggests that the practice of homosexual behavior is not about being unclean, but considered sinful and an “abomination” against God.
- Gagnon suggests that the stories of Sodom and Gibeah are not limited to gang rape, but that the act of male-male intercourse violates the holiness code, and associates those Jews who do so with the Canaanites and the other “Gentiles” who do not follow God’s commands. He suggests that other OT texts (Noah, Ezekiel, Deuteronomy and I and II Kings) as well as a few NT texts (Jude, 2 Peter) affirm ancient Israel’s prohibition against such acts.