



Liberating ourselves & others from the Bible as a weapon of exclusion

Weaponizing Scripture Against LGBTQ People Is A Thing



Exhibit A:

An email I was tasked with responding to on behalf of All Saints Church, Pasadena after our then Rector Ed Bacon stated that “being gay is a gift from God” on the Oprah Winfrey Show in 2009:



From: XXXXX@hotmail.com]

Sent: Monday, January 12, 2009 4:10 PM

Dear "Reverend,"

I saw you on the Oprah Winfrey Show and I just have one question for you.

Do you even read the Bible?

The crux of my email that I will prove with scripture, and scripture alone, that homosexuality is NOT a gift from God. It is a horrible, horrible sin.

Following are six scriptures; they are taken from the King James Version of the Bible. I prefer it as it has been in existence for almost 400 years ...



Dear XXXX,

Thank you for taking time to write regarding Ed Bacon's recent appearance on The Oprah Winfrey Show.

We recognize that there are differences of opinion among people of faith on many issues and that homosexuality is one of them -- and we appreciate your interest in finding out more about where we stand at All Saints Church and why.

While we may continue to come to different conclusions on this and other issues, but our prayer is that we strive to treat each other with respect in the dialogue. Again, thank you for taking time to write.

Blessings,

The Reverend Susan Russell, All Saints Church



Where We
Stand at
All Saints
Church in
Pasadena

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Let's look at those six scriptures --
AKA the "clobber passages" so often
used as "proof-texts"
to condemn LGBTQ people.

But first ... a couple of definitions:



exegesis: an exposition or explanation of a text based on objective analysis. [Greek, 'to guide out of.' "ex" means "from" or 'out of']

not to be confused with:

eisegesis: an interpretation of a text that expresses the interpreter's own ideas or bias rather than the meaning of the text. [Greek. Same root as exegesis with different prefix. "eis" means "into."]

- ▶ Reading modern homophobia into ancient texts is abuse of scripture.
- ▶ And it leads to abuse of people.



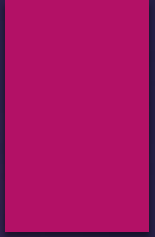


And for the record, not everyone who quotes scripture knows scripture. From a Barna study:

- ▶ 38% of Americans polled were certain the Old Testament was written a few years after Jesus' death.
- ▶ 10% believed Joan of Arc was Noah's wife.
- ▶ And 10% thought the epistles were the wives of the apostles.



BREAKING NEWS



**The Bible
is a book about God—**

**Not a book about
human sexuality.**

Here are a few biblical texts that did NOT make the clobber passage list:

DEUTERONOMY 22:13-21

- ▶ If it is discovered that a bride is not a virgin, the Bible demands that she be executed by stoning immediately.

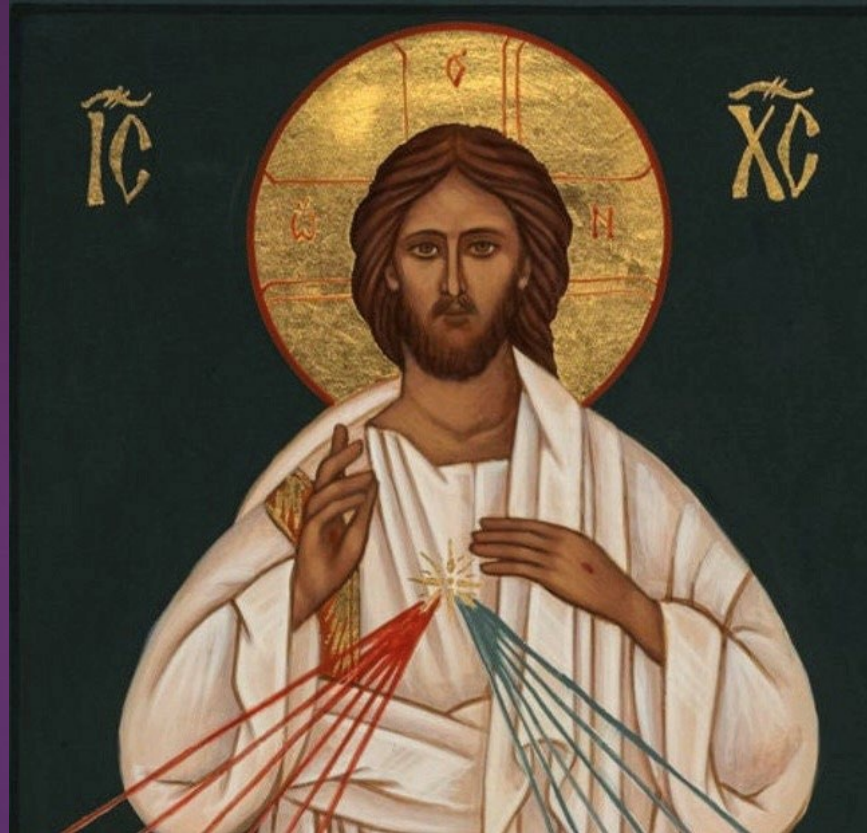
DEUTERONOMY 22:22

- ▶ If a married person has sex with someone else's husband or wife, the Bible commands that both adulterers be stoned to death.

LEVITICUS 18:19

- ▶ The Bible forbids a married couple from having sexual intercourse during a woman's period. If they disobey, both shall be executed.

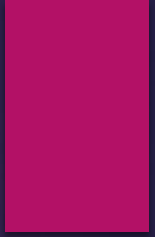
And Jesus ...?????



... said exactly zero about homosexuality. Ever.

Yet the assumption that the Bible condemns homosexuality is passed down from generation to generation with very little personal study or research.





So let's look at the
BIG SIX ...

“THE CLOBBER PASSAGES”

▶ OLD TESTAMENT/ HEBREW SCRIPTURES

- ▶ Genesis 19
- ▶ Leviticus 18:22
- ▶ Leviticus 20:13

▶ NEW TESTAMENT/ CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES

- ▶ Romans 1:26
- ▶ I Corinthians 6:9
- ▶ I Timothy 1:9

GENESIS 19:1-14

THE STORY OF SODOM





Here's what Ezekiel tells us:

*"This is the sin of Sodom;
she and her suburbs had pride,
excess of food, and prosperous ease,
but did not help or encourage
the poor and needy.
They were arrogant
and this was abominable
in God's eyes."*

Ezekiel 16:49-50

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- ▶ The sexual act that occurs in the story of Sodom is one of gang rape and – in spite of being used *ad nauseum* to the contrary – it has absolutely NOTHING to do with homosexual orientation as we understand it.
 - ▶ It has to do with domination, power and the violent, disgraceful treatment of strangers.
 - ▶ On to Leviticus ...

LEVITICUS 18:22 & 20:13

- ▶ Leviticus 18:6: *“You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female. It is an abomination.”*
- ▶ Leviticus 20:13: *“A man who sleeps with another man is an abomination and should be executed.”*

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- ▶ Leviticus is a **holiness code** written 3,000 years ago.
 - ▶ In addition to the prohibitions quoted above it also includes prohibitions against:
 - ▶ round haircuts,
tattoos,
working on the Sabbath,
wearing garments of mixed fabrics,
eating pork or shellfish,
getting your fortune told,
playing with the skin of a pig

(So much for the Super Bowl!)





So what *IS* a holiness code?

A holiness code is “a list of behaviors that people of faith find offensive in a certain place and time.”

In the case of Leviticus, the code was written for priests -- and its primary intent was to set the priests of Israel over and against priests of other cultures.



It is also important to understand the context for the word ***abomination*** that comes up in both passages.

In Hebrew, “abominations” (TO’EBAH) are behaviors that people in a certain time and place consider tasteless or offensive. They were behaviors held out as “just not done” in order to keep the community **ritually clean** – separate – from the Gentiles around them.

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- ▶ So cherry picking items from an ancient Jewish holiness code and using them to condemn sexual or gender minorities is a perfect example of weaponizing Scripture by projecting contemporary human bias onto ancient, sacred texts.



So holiness codes aside, what do the Leviticus passages
say about homosexuality?

Nothing as we understand it today.

Some more context: Consider this single Bible passage
that was used for centuries to condemn masturbation:

*“He spilled his seed on the ground... And the thing which Onan did
displeased the Lord: wherefore he slew him also”*

(Genesis 38:9-10)

A historical note:

It is important to know that the Hebrew pre-scientific understanding was that the male semen contained the whole of life.

With no knowledge of eggs and ovulation, it was assumed that the man's sperm contained the whole child and that the woman provided only the incubating space.

Therefore, the spilling of semen without possibility of having a child was considered murder – no matter *how* it happened.



Remembering that the Hebrew people were a small tribe struggling to survive, it makes sense that an ancient people felt it was an abomination to risk “wasting” even a single child.

But – like the others we’ve looked at -- the passage says nothing about homosexuality ... no matter how often it shows up on the picket signs.

Romans 1:26-27

“Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. 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. “



This verse appears to be clear: Paul sees women having sex with women and men having sex with men, and he condemns that practice.

But let's go back 2,000 years and try to understand why.



Paul is writing this letter to Rome after his missionary tour of the Mediterranean.

On his journey Paul had seen great temples built to honor Aphrodite, Diana, and other fertility gods and goddesses of sex and passion.

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- ▶ Their priests and priestesses engaged in various sexual behaviors to honor the gods of sex and pleasure.
 - ▶ So the people Paul was calling out in this letter to 1st century Romans were those who were engaged in a ritualistic cultic prostitution.
 - ▶ These practices have literally nothing to do with 21st century LGBTQ people making homes and lives and families together.



1 CORINTHIANS 6:9 | 1 TIMOTHY 1:10

These are the final two texts on the Big Six Clobber Passage list.

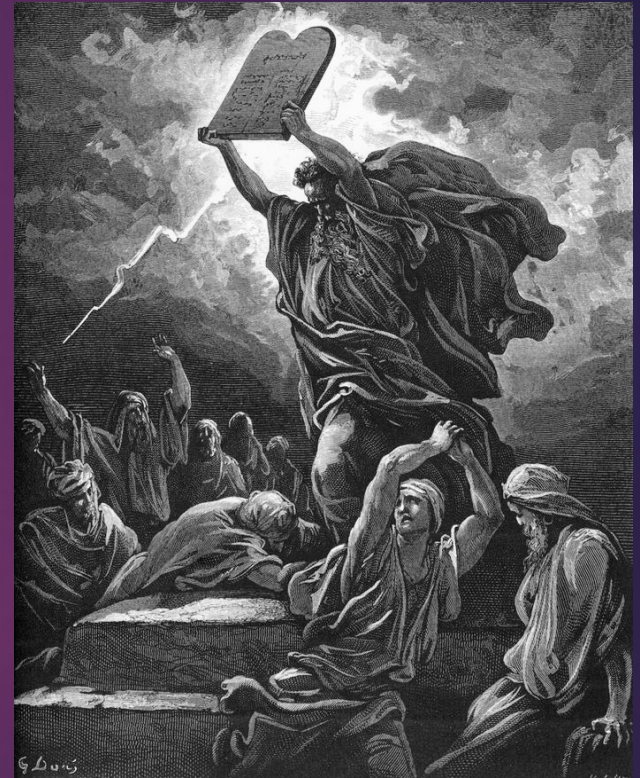
And here's the context:

The Christians in Ephesus and Corinth are fighting among themselves. (Sound familiar?)

In Corinth they're even suing one another in secular courts. Paul writes from across the miles with a letter which basically says: "You are breaking God's heart by the way you are treating one another."

Anticipating their first question: "Well, how **are** we supposed to treat one another?"

Paul answers, "You know very well how to treat one another from the Jewish law written on tablets of stone."





And then Paul recites examples from the Jewish law:

Don't kill one another.

Don't sleep with a person who is married to someone else.

Don't lie or cheat or steal.

The list goes on to include admonitions against fornication, idolatry, perjury, drunkenness, revelry, and extortion.

And the list includes these two words: "*malokois*" and "*arsenokoitai*."

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- ▶ Greek scholars range in their opinions on what the first century Greek words *malaokois* and *arsenokoitai* actually meant ... from “effeminate call boys” to “male prostitutes” to customers of “the call boys.”
 - ▶ The fact that Greek scholars don’t know exactly what they mean is a big part of this tragic debate ... leaving the way clear for homophobic projection to find its way into biblical translations.

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- ▶ We know that in the past, Paul's writings have been used to support slavery, segregation, and apartheid. People still use Paul's writings to oppress women and limit their role in the home, in church, and in society.
 - ▶ So knowing that – and looking at the original Greek of the texts in front of us – it makes sense to ask: “Is it happening again?” Are words in Greek that have no clear definition being used to reflect society's prejudice rather than communicate God's love and justice?

So there you have it:

- ▶ Those are “the clobber passages” -- the six biblical texts used repeatedly to condemn homosexuality.
- ▶ But perhaps more important than what they say is what the Bible does NOT say about what we understand about sexuality.

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- ▶ The Biblical authors knew nothing of homosexual orientation as we understand it, and therefore said nothing to condemn or approve it.
 - ▶ The authors of the Bible wrote about matters of faith – about their experience of the Living God.
 - ▶ **So it makes as much sense to consider them the final authorities on sexual orientation as it does to look to them regarding space travel, gravity, or the Internet.**

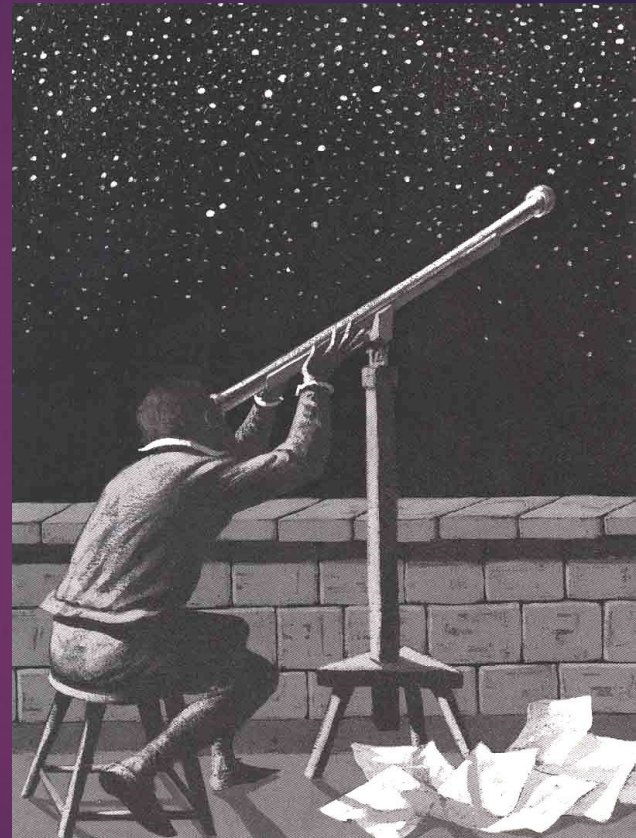
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- ▶ Since God is the God of truth,
since Jesus himself told us
that the truth would set us free,
one way that we love God
and love one another
is by seeking the truth
about sexual orientation and
gender identity
wherever we can find it.

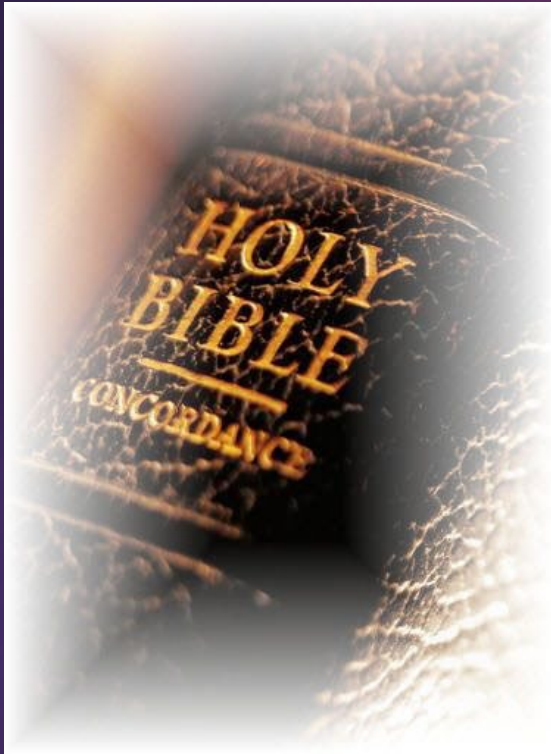
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- ▶ And the truth is science, psychology, history, psychiatry, medicine, and personal experience concur:

Homosexuality is neither a sickness nor a sin.

- ▶ Unfortunately, the church has always been slow, if not at the end of the line, to accept new truth.

In 1632 Galileo dared to support the radical 15th-century idea of Copernicus that all planets, including the earth, revolve around the sun. Immediately, Galileo was proclaimed a heretic by the Pope who quoted Scriptures in his attempt to disprove what science was proving





Protestant leaders – including Martin Luther -- joined in quoting Scriptures condemning Copernicus.

This is what happened when the Bible -- a book about God – was confused with a book about astronomy— a pattern we are seeing today with those who confuse the Bible with a book about human sexuality.



And we owe the precious gift of the scriptures that are our heritage as Christian people TOO much to allow them to be hijacked and used as weapons of oppression rather than as means of grace.

And it has perhaps NEVER been more important for us to KNOW our story enough to claim it AND proclaim it ...

A Closing Story from Mel White

Clergyman, author, activist and founder of the LGBTQ social justice organization Soulforce, Mel was a ghostwriter for the Religious Right until he came out in 1994. He told this story in his pamphlet "What the Bible Says and Doesn't Say About Homosexuality."



I love the Bible. I read God's Word in it and hear God's Word through it. But the United States is not a nation governed by the Bible. Our nation is governed by the Constitution and the Bill of rights. Our laws were created to protect an individual's right to disagree.

If the Bible (or someone's view of the Bible) replaces the Constitution as the law of the land, we undermine the great foundation upon which this country was built.



When I was a guest on a talk show in Seattle, I saw what might happen to me and to millions like me if a genuine literalist gained political power over this country.

The other guest on the show was an independent Presbyterian pastor. When I told him that I was gay, he said without hesitation, “Then you should be killed.”

A Christian brother sentenced me to death, guided only by his literal understanding of Leviticus 20:13.



I asked him, “Who should do the killing, you church folk?” He answered, “No, that’s the civil authorities’ job. That’s why we need to elect more good men of God into government.”

I sat there in stunned silence, until he added, “I know it must be hard for you to hear it, Dr. White—but God said it first and it’s our job to obey.”

This was in the 1990’s.

- ▶ As a colleague on social media put it more recently:



Rev. Benjamin Cremer @Brcremer · 14h ...

Imagine claiming that a few Bible verses on human sexuality are literal divine commands from God for all of society, all while claiming the +3,000 verses calling for the care of immigrants, the marginalized, the oppressed, and the poor should just be a personal choice.



We not only can – we must – do a better job of liberating ourselves & others from the tragic truth that the Bible not only has been, it continues to be, deployed as a weapon of mass discrimination against God's beloved LGBTQ people.

THE END

Sources:

Portions of the content of this presentation adapted from:

- ▶ “What the Bible Says and Doesn’t Say About Homosexuality”
by Mel White (Soulforce.org)
- ▶ “The Bible and Homosexuality” by Candace Chellew
(Whosoever.org)

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- ▶ *What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality*
by Daniel Helminiak, Ph.D.
- ▶ *Homosexuality and the Christian Faith*
edited by Walter Wink, Ph.D.
- ▶ *Steps To Recovery From Bible Abuse*
by the Rev. Dr. Rembert S. Truluck
- ▶ *Clobber the Passages*
by Mel White