

The Bishop's Dialogue Group in the Diocese of Toronto said, in their *Emerging Common Ground* statement, "We agree that scripture is not to be used as a 'hammer' against those with whom we disagree. We also agree that scripture is not to be mined for 'proof texts' ..." Integrity agrees wholeheartedly. Unfortunately, "proof texts" continue to be cited against lesbians and gay men in the church.

The Bible knows nothing of persons of same-sex affectional orientation, living in mutual, equal, consensual, relationships. It says nothing about homosexuality because it knows nothing about homosexuality. In spite of this, people still point to certain texts in the Bible and say that they "prove" that the Bible "condemns" "homosexuality". Let's look more closely at each of them.



The Story of Sodom

(Genesis 19: 1-29)

After a careful reading of this story, the reader will probably wonder why it has been used to condemn homosexuals. The meaning of the story turns on the use of a Hebrew word *yada* that is translated "to know". Lot, a foreigner, lives in the city of Sodom. Two angels come to visit the city to investigate rumours of great evil and Lot offers them the hospitality of his home. When this ancient story was written, offers of hospitality were very solemn duties. They required the host to protect his guests and show them the greatest possible respect.

The men of the city, hearing that Lot has two strangers as guests, gather at his door and demand that the angels (who they take for ordinary mortals) come out. "Bring them to us that we may know them." Lot refuses and attempts to satisfy them with the offer that they may know his two virgin daughters instead.

The Hebrew word *yada* has several meanings. Another translation of the demand of the men of Sodom is "Send them out to us. Let's rape them." Frequently the word "to know" means sexual intimacy, but that is not the case here. In this context it is what the Criminal Code of Canada calls sexual assault.

Sodom is referred to many times in Scripture as a symbol of the utter destruction caused by great sin. But nowhere in Scripture is this sin identified as homosexuality. Jesus appears to call it the sin of inhospitality (*Luke 10:10-12*) Ezekiel calls it "pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease." (*Ezekiel 16:49-50, NRSV*) Isaiah says it is injustice (*Isaiah 1:10ff*) Jeremiah calls it moral laxity (*Jeremiah 23:14*) In the New Testament, Peter says it is licentiousness and ungodliness (*2 Peter 2:6 ff.*)

But nowhere in the Bible is homosexuality stated as the cause of Sodom's destruction.



The Holiness Code

(Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13)

These are the only two passages in the Old Testament where homosexual acts are mentioned. They are in a list of rules and prohibitions (known as the Holiness Code), which were written after the exile in Babylon, and were intended to distinguish Israel from her pagan neighbours.

Among Israel's neighbours, fertility rites were common, and worshippers used male and female temple prostitutes for this purpose. These sexual acts are forbidden as abominations, a word in Hebrew that does not mean morally wrong, but unclean or disgusting to the Hebrews -- like eating pork or having intercourse with a menstruating woman. However, the Holiness Code is not binding upon Christians.



St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, and Timothy

(1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:9-10)

The Greek words which are often translated as "homosexual" or "sodomite" in these passages are uncertain in their meaning. *Malakoi*, the word used in Corinthians, literally means "soft". It is used elsewhere to describe dissolute or wanton behaviour in general, but is not used elsewhere in association with homosexuals. The word *arsenokoitai* (used in Timothy) is quite rare and very probably referred to a male prostitute who serviced either sex.

What is really striking is that there were specific words in first-century Greek which were commonly used to describe homosexuals; words which would have had an unequivocal meaning. If the author's intention was to refer to homosexuality, it is almost certain he would have used one of those.



St. Paul's Letter to the Romans

(Romans 1:26-27)

In this letter, Paul discusses the Gentiles who, abandoning the true God, turned to idols and as a result abandoned their natural heterosexual behaviour for homosexual acts. We should not read our twentieth-century concept of nature or natural law into Paul's writing. In this passage, "against nature" means "unusual" or "uncharacteristic". The difference is clear when we see that Paul also says that God acts against nature by grafting the Gentiles onto the cultivated tree of the Jewish Covenant. We should also not make the mistake of reading modern concepts of homosexuality into the

writings of Paul, or indeed, any of the Bible. The main point is that nothing like respectful and loving peer homosexual relationships were known to biblical authors. Paul is not talking about modern homosexuals.

The point of Paul's argument is against idolatry. He uses the reference to homosexuality as an illustration that one of the results of idolatry is confusion in both sexual matters and matters relating to God. Paul's point is that each person must be true to God's purpose for that person; and that one can do this only in communion with God.



In this short paper, we have examined all the references traditionally presumed to address the subject of homosexuality. A scholarly and reasoned approach shows that Scripture gives us no specific guidance on homosexuality that is applicable to our times. However, Christian faith proclaims God as the creator of all things (including homosexuals) and the lover of all things created (including homosexuals).

See also Integrity's pamphlet *Does the Bible actually say Anything about Homosexuality?*

There is no record of Jesus having said anything on the subject. Any legitimate conclusion that can be reached about the place of homosexuals in God's Kingdom must come from a clear understanding of the Gospel message; the message of God's eternal love for all of us.



Integrity

Integrity is a justice ministry by gays, lesbians, bisexuals and their friends in the Anglican Church of Canada. We believe that there is an equal place at God's table for all

God's children. We are affiliated with similar organisations in the United States, in Africa, and in Australia. For more information, get in touch.

This pamphlet, and the related pamphlet, *Does the Bible Actually Say ANYTHING about Homosexuality?*, was published by Integrity.

A more in-depth discussion of these biblical passages, *Challenging Conventional Wisdom*, has been written by Steve Schuh of Integrity/ Vancouver

The text of these documents, along with all Integrity's pamphlets, is available online at:

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What the Bible really says about lesbians & gay men

