Contemporary Issues Series: Human Sexuality - Session 1  
Focal Point: Homosexuality, the Bible,  
and the ELCA's Social Statement

- Secondary Texts: The Book of Concord, The ELCA’s Social Statement - Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust which led to the 2009 decision on homosexuality as it relates to clergy and marriage

The Purpose of this Bible Study: The purpose of the bible study is to explore what the bible says about homosexuality. The topic of homosexuality has been a contentious one in the church and in society. Homosexuality is a very public topic, it is depicted both positively and negatively in the media, and has been the cause of great dissension in the church. All churches that have endorsed homosexuality have suffered membership decline, but it is unclear as to whether or not homosexuality is the primary cause for loss. That being said, there are currently 17 states that allow for same-sex marriage while 33 states ban it (as of April, 2014). As I understand it, the topic of homosexuality has not been formally discussed in a Bible Study nor in Zion Lutheran Church. Since the topic of homosexuality is one that is likely to become a larger part of public discourse, and since the ELCA has passed a Social Statement on sexuality, it seems to make sense to discuss the issue of homosexuality as it relates to the Bible and the ELCA’s social statement. That being said, it was a difficult decision for me to propose Homosexuality as a topic for Bible Study given how divided Christians are on the subject. But, in the end, I firmly believe that it is better to talk about the difficult things because it is through difficult conversations that we grow and learn.

My hope for this study: By this study's end I hope that we are better able to articulate what we believe concerning homosexuality in the Bible as well as clearly state the ELCA’s position on the subject. It is not enough to say, "The Bible says that homosexuality is an abomination" nor is it enough to say that, "Jesus died for all sinners." The former charge that homosexuality is an abomination reduces a person's confession to either legalism or biblicism. That is, the "Purity Code" found in Leviticus is full of commandments that the church does not and has not ever kept. So, to quote one command and dispense with the others is at a minimum inconsistent. Secondly, in saying, "The Bible says that homosexuality is an abomination" is essentially to say that, "the Bible says it so that settles it." The church has only begun to be used this way, that is biblical literalism, in the early 20th century in the United States as a response to Darwinian Evolution in an attempt to defend the "truth of the bible" from a scientific perspective. The great tradition of the church both ancient and modern is and should be wary of "proof texting" scripture. In using the bible in this way we divorce quotes from scripture from their context and larger narrative. On the other hand, when we say that "Jesus died for all" the entirety of the Law is reduced to naught. Does such a statement imply that we are to continue sinning even
though we know that sinning is wrong? Does the Law even matter? The Apostle Paul answers this in Romans 6, "Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means!"

It is my sincere hope that by the end of this bible study you will be better able to express your opinion more articulately, no matter what opinion you have. As a matter of course, I will not present my personal opinion on homosexuality until the end of the Bible Study in order to attempt to maintain balance during our conversations and wrestling with scripture (this is open to debate).

**Introductory Conversation Questions**

- What is your opinion about homosexuality?
- Why do you hold the convictions that you do?
- Do you have any homosexual friends or family?
- What is the ELCA's position on homosexuality? Clergy? Marriage?
- What is Zion Lutheran Church's position?
- How many people have left the church over the issue?
- Have you considered leaving the church over the issue?
- Is the issue of homosexuality a central issue in the church's history, tradition, or confession?

**Biblical References to Homosexuality Considered in Some Detail**

- The first biblical text for our consideration: Genesis 19:1-11, "Sodom and Gomorrah."
- Let's read Genesis 18 first.
  - What is the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah that the LORD refers to in 18:20?
- Now lets read Genesis 19:1-11 +
- Initial comments on the text?
  - The word "Sodomy" comes from this text, i.e., anal sex.
  - Who stayed with Lot?
  - What does "know them (19:5)" mean? In Hebrew, yada. Used in Genesis 4:1, 17, 25; 1 Samuel 1:19.
- Why would the men of Sodom want to "know" Lot's guests? What purpose does it serve?
- How does Lot handle the situation?
  - Read Genesis 19:30-38
    - Ruth was a Moabite. And King Solomon's wife and mother of his successor, Rehoboam was an Ammonite woman named Naamah. A rabbi once said, "A seed of messianic redemption lies in the squalid events of Genesis 19:30-38."
  - The long and short of it is that Lot offers his daughters up to pacify the men of Sodom, and as a repayment, Lot is raped by his daughters.
  - Read Genesis 18:1-15
    - How is Abraham's reception of visitors different than Lot's? Does Abraham see The Lord? Does Lot? If not, who does he see? Abraham runs to meet his visitors whereas Lot only rises. Abraham offers a sumptuous feast and Lot offers unleavened bread.
    - How are Abraham and Lot being compared and contrasted in Genesis 18-19?
  - What is the fate of Sodom (and Gomorrah)? Gen. 19:24...
• If the sin of the men of Sodom is homosexuality, then what, if taken this way, is Lot's proposal for averting sin?
• Consider Genesis 18:20-21 and 19:13, the word "outcry" is used. The outcry is not coming from The Lord, it comes from a community outside of Sodom. 19:13, "For we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against is people has become great before The Lord..."

What is the sin of the men of Sodom?
• The outcry, as noted by Mishnah (the commentary by early Rabbis on the oral tradition of the Torah, the first five books of the Bible), is summarized in the phrase, "What is mine is mine; what is yours is yours." Put another way, a lack of generosity.
• Refer to Isaiah 1:10; 3:9 - the sin is named as injustice, Ezekiel 16:49 - the sin is named pride, excessive food, and indifference to the needy.
  • Matthew 10:15 - the reference is made as a judgement upon those who do not welcome Jesus' disciples. In particular, a lack of hospitality.
  • Matt. 11:23-24 is in reference to a lack of repentance.
  • Luke 10:12 - lack of welcome/hospitality
  • Romans 9:29 - lack of faith as opposed to the law, see Romans 9:30
  • 2 Peter 2:6 - for "ungodliness" related to false teachers who slander Christians 2 Peter 2:10b, eyes of adultery insatiable for sin v14, greed v.14, "wages of doing wrong" v. 15, licentious desires of the flesh v. 18, corruption v. 19.
  • Jude 7 - sexual immorality and unnatural lust - Question, was the sexual immorality of the men of Sodom that they wanted to have sex with men, or with angels? see Jude 6 in reference to angels, the preceding verse. The greek words used here for "unnatural lust" in v. 7 are not "homosexuality (often the Greek word is porneia for homosexuality)," but rather, "heteras," which is literally "other flesh", see footnote "g" in the NRSV. A literal translation of the verse would be, "went after flesh other than their own." This does not mean homosexuality, it means, "went after flesh other than men's flesh." If men want to have sex with men wouldn't it have made more sense to use a word that describes the "same flesh" as opposed to "other flesh" which implies something other than men, or, angels. In Jude 5 & 7 the point is that people did not believe in God, like the Israelites in the wilderness who demanded things from God after they had been freed. In v. 6 the angels did not believe in God, as the text states plainly.
  • Revelation 11:8 - harming others.

How does Jesus describe the sin of the men of Sodom?
• Luke 17:28-29 - What does Jesus says was the sin of the men of Sodom in the days of Lot? People’s indifference to God, that is, people were going about their lives as business as usual as if there was no God or as if God was marginally important in their life.

Historical Context:
• The purpose of gang rape, i.e., not consensual sex, is to disgrace and humiliate a victim. It is not a matter of expressing sexual attraction.

Debrief:
• Is Sodom and Gomorrah, Genesis 19:1-11, about homosexuality?
• What might this story say about rape and violence?