

## Holy Sexuality

Our sexuality is blessed by God, intertwined with our soul, as a sacred expression of our very identity. In other words, it is holy. It is something to be cherished and celebrated, and this is the message found in the Holy Bible. Many modern Christian religious leaders are embarrassed to talk about sex and sexuality, except to revile it, equating it with sin.<sup>1</sup> My family of origin embraced the northern European Protestant outlook of shying away from talk about feelings, including sexual ones. I was taught that feelings were something to be tamed, that must be submitted to fact and to faith, and to be kept in check at all times. The Bible is often cited as the authoritative source for this view, as if God is also too embarrassed to talk about feelings and sex. This belief has stolen the joy and love out of relationships, replacing them with unnecessary pain and suffering. In this paper the Christian Holy Scriptures<sup>2</sup> are examined to discover positive and loving perspectives on sexuality.

The Bible is a source of authority for the Christian faith, and its messages should be taken seriously on all subjects including sexuality.<sup>3</sup> Palmer and Haffner (2005) defined sexuality as “The sexual knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, values and behaviors of individuals. Its dimensions include the anatomy, physiology and biochemistry of the sexual response and reproductive systems; gender identity, sexual orientation, roles and personality; as well as thoughts, attachments, physical and emotional expressions, and relationships.” This definition is the one used in this paper. The first section of this paper will address the general treatment of sexuality in the Bible. The second section will provide my perspective surrounding today’s language concerning sexuality and gender. The third section will address specific scriptures that have

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<sup>1</sup> Robert E. Goss “Gay Erotic Spirituality and the Recovery of Sexual Pleasure” in Ellison, M. M., & Thorson-Smith, S., eds., (2007). *Body and Soul: Rethinking Sexuality as Justice Love.*, p. 201-216

<sup>2</sup> The New International Version (NIV) Bible is the primary translation used in this paper, and Biblical quotations and references come from that translation. If another translation is also used, it will be highlighted.

<sup>3</sup> Perry, T. D. & Swicegood, T.L. P. (1990). Appendix A.

been interpreted as condemning ‘different’ sexualities. The next section will look at scriptures that seem to be supportive of and positive towards different identifications and expressions of sexuality and gender. The last section concludes with a methodology to help Bible students interpret scriptures in a positive and encouraging light.

### **Beginning with the Word**

What is certain from my multiple reading of the holy text is that the inspired writers were mostly focused on God and interpersonal interactions, and what Jesus called the Greatest Commandment.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”<sup>4</sup>

Love underpins all scripture in our relationship with God and our relationships with each other. There are many Biblical chapters focusing on the goodness of sexuality in people’s lives, while other verses caution sex’s ability to hurt and exploit.<sup>5</sup> The treatment of sex in a loving relationship is clearly seen in the Book of Song of Solomon.<sup>6</sup> It flaunts a sexual relationship, and the book’s inclusion is an indication that God’s inspired Word is not embarrassed at all about sex. “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good”<sup>7</sup> and that includes every aspect of us, to include our sexuality.

The use of sex to hurt or exploit people takes the form of three basic Biblical injunctions that violate the commandments to ‘love God’ and “love your neighbor”. They are: rape<sup>8</sup> (sex to exert power, not kindness), adultery (unfaithfulness of a love pledge to another person); and, temple prostitution (idolatry and unfaithfulness to a love agreement with God). The Bible makes

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<sup>4</sup> Mark 12:30-31, Matthew 22:37-38, Deuteronomy 6:4-5

<sup>5</sup> Palmer and Haffner (2005) and Rev. Nancy Wilson’s *Our Tribe*

<sup>6</sup> See examples in Song of Solomon 1:2, 4:10-15, 5:2-6, 7:1-13, 8:1-4, 8:6-7

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 1:31

<sup>8</sup> Rape is a general term for all forms of non-consensual sex. It is about exerting power over someone

negative references to rape, adultery, and temple prostitution because they run counter to God's fundamental message of love for all people<sup>9</sup>. Unfortunately, over the centuries, legalistic authorities and scholars extracted more artificial rules from scripture against expressions of sexuality, probably to bolster their power or to reflect the cultural artifacts of their time.

Religions have debated sexuality issues since their creation, as evidenced in the ancient Jewish writings in the Talmud, and the early Christian ecumenical councils' proceedings.<sup>10</sup> Sexuality issues continued to be debated into the Reformation (should clergy be celibate?), and more recently over the ordination of women and status of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals.<sup>11</sup> Attempts by scholars to devise their own sexual regulations from scripture have been unsuccessful over time, and I believe current efforts to demonize homosexuality, bisexuality, and the transgendered will also fail.

Early in Genesis God makes it clear that humans are made 'good' and they should not be alone.<sup>12</sup> The first three chapters of Genesis are NOT about the superiority of heterosexuality over all others (aka heterosexism), but God's recognition that all humans need each other in loving, committed relationships to survive. The belief that a factual Adam and all the Old Testament Patriarchs only had one wife becomes problematic when faced with attempts to explain population growth, and the many references to the Old Testament Patriarchs having multiple wives within the holy text itself.<sup>13</sup>

The use of current translations of the Bible as literal word of God (as if nothing else happened, but what was recorded in the modern English Bible) is nothing more than a form of

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<sup>9</sup> For Rape see - Deuteronomy 22:25; for Adultery see - Exodus 20:14, Leviticus 20:10, Matthew 5:27-28; for Temple Prostitution see - Deuteronomy 23:17

<sup>10</sup> Palmer & Haffner (2005)

<sup>11</sup> Palmer & Haffner (2005)

<sup>12</sup> Genesis 1:31 and Genesis 2:18

<sup>13</sup> For example see Abraham-Genesis 16 and 25; Jacob- Genesis 29-30; Moses-Numbers 12:1; David- 1 Samuel 25:43 & 1 Chronicles 14:3; Solomon-1 Kings 11:3 (BiblicalPolygamy.com)

idolatry<sup>14</sup>, that takes the place of God in a person's life, and even supplants Jesus Christ (who is called the Word of God). Our understanding of scripture has changed over time by applying objective analysis and cultural context.<sup>15</sup> I am not saying that the original scriptures are false or in error, only our understanding of the words has become an idol itself, worshiped like no other.<sup>16</sup> The original scrolls are lost to time, perhaps because God did not want us to worship scrolls as idols (God knows us all too well). But the existing scriptures still contain the inspired and valuable messages of God, and must be taken seriously. To take the Bible seriously means you cannot take it literally.<sup>17</sup> I believe the Bible to be the best guidebook on how to live a better life that has ever been published, but it has been mistranslated, and is constantly misinterpreted by scholars trapped in the biases of their culture. Instead of trying to fit the scriptures in our time to justify our cultural beliefs, we should let God speak to each individual through scripture in God's timelessness unbounded by culture.

### **Three in One**

Before proceeding further into scripture, I need to make clear some of the language used about sexuality. The percentage of sexual minorities in our population is small. Most research points to less than five percent of the population identifying as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, while transgender identification is about one percent.<sup>18</sup> I think of a person (like the nature of God) consisting of three (yet one) major identities: body, mind, and soul (or spirit). All three are equally important in defining who you are, and each one plays a part in a person's sexuality. The

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<sup>14</sup> The First Commandment is "You shall have no other gods besides me." Exodus 20:3 Do not let a book become your god

<sup>15</sup> Kugel, J. L. (2007). *How to read the Bible: A guide to Scripture then and now*. New York, NY: Free Press, a division of Simon and Schuster, Inc.

<sup>16</sup> Soulforce.org (2012). <http://www.soulforce.org/resources/what-the-bible-says-and-doesnt-say-about-homosexuality/>

<sup>17</sup> Chellew-Hodge, Candace (2008). *Bulletproof Faith: A spiritual survival guide for gay and lesbian Christians*.

<sup>18</sup> Palmer and Haffner (2005) and APA website (2012).

three, like the Trinity, are intertwined. Science and medicine have trouble breaking them down independent of each other.

The physical part (biological sex) of our identity has the largest influence on a society's views of a person's sexuality and gender. Because a majority (over 90%) of the human race is heterosexual and not transgender, a physical inspection of a person's biological sex would provide a high probability of correctly guessing other aspects of their sexuality, such as their sexual orientation and gender identity. However, there are those who are different. In fact some people think this minority has a physical defect similar to people born with other physical challenges.<sup>19</sup> Studies have mapped out genetic regions and neural circuitry that may determine variations in sexual orientation, but have not found any "defect".<sup>20</sup>

The second personal identity is the "mind". Psychology and psychiatry are the major sciences that deal with the mind, and there are still efforts to make sexuality and gender assignment out as mental disorders.<sup>21</sup> These people believe that therapy holds the answer to "fixing" the abnormal minority who do not match the majority's societal roles and perspectives.<sup>22</sup> However, the American Psychological Association (APA) has determined that variations in sexual orientation or gender identity<sup>23</sup> are not a result from unhealthy early childhood experiences, nor are they addictions.<sup>24</sup> Therapy or counseling may be needed for societal rejection, but not for who they are.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Palmer & Haffner (2005)

<sup>20</sup> Palmer & Haffner (2005)

<sup>21</sup> American Psychological Association website (2013)

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> There should be no presumption of a person's sexual orientation because they are transgendered from Shanor, R. (2001). *Finding Common Ground*

<sup>24</sup> Kundtz, D. J. & Schlager, B.S. (2003). *Ministry Among God's Queer Folk: LGBT Pastoral Care*; also Palmer & Haffner (2005) and the APA website (2013)

<sup>25</sup> Shanor, R. (2001). *Finding Common Ground*

The third part of an individual's identity is based on the soul or spirit. The soul is the center of feelings and emotion. This is also dissected by science in the form of physiology and biochemistry, which seems to also have strong connections to the physical and to the psychological. Parental hormones before birth have been hyped as to why people identify with a certain sexuality or gender identity.<sup>26</sup> Even ex-gay ministries admit that no one chooses his or her same-sex attractions.<sup>27</sup> It is in this soul identity where spirituality and sexuality become even more entwined, and I believe scientists can only speculate on something so divine.

It is easier for the general population to deal with variations in sexuality if they view these differences as physical defects, mental disorders, or hormonal imbalances. Instead they should consider them wonderful variations of God's good creation. Some medical researchers (e.g. Dr. Kinsey, Dr. Klein) have postulated a continuous rating scale for sexual orientation.<sup>28</sup> Sexual health must be pursued for a fulfilling lifestyle and there are unpleasant consequences of denying sensual and erotic pleasure.<sup>29</sup> Chris Paige tells us, "Each of us has a gift to bring when we live with integrity. Yet we can discover the nature of the gift only if we do live in a way that is authentic to who we are."<sup>30</sup> Sexuality is a life-fulfilling blessing from God, part of our unique physical and emotional DNA.

### **The Bible Told Me So**

Many of those that reject the beauty of variations in sexuality rely primarily on six biblical texts to support their views. These texts have been called the "clobber" texts because they have been used to bash LGBT individuals.<sup>31</sup> The first one is Romans 1:26-27, and at first

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<sup>26</sup> Palmer & Haffner (2005)

<sup>27</sup> Gay Christian 101. Found on Love Won Out website, acquired by Exodus International

<sup>28</sup> Kundtz, D. J. & Schlager, B.S. (2003). *Ministry Among God's Queer Folk: LGBT Pastoral Care*

<sup>29</sup> Sylvia Thorson-Smith, "Becoming 'Possessed': Toward Sexual Health and Well-Being," in *Body and Soul*, pp. 232-50

<sup>30</sup> "OtherWise" by Chris Paige Retrieved from <http://www.transfaithonline.org/articles/other/tos/>

<sup>31</sup> Whosoever Ministries website, (2007)

glance it appears to condemn gay and lesbian activity.<sup>32</sup> But the verses need to be read in context of the Book of Romans itself and the Roman culture; the writer is actually condemning the self-righteousness of those who prejudicially exclude and judge others for being different. Many modern scholars believe this specific verse is a reference to non-consensual same-sex acts done by heterosexuals in temple (idol) worship common in the Greco-Roman culture.<sup>33</sup> The underlying lesson of the text is that being a heterosexual doesn't make you any better than a homosexual, but everyone, even heterosexuals, needs God's grace, as the rest of the Book of Romans makes clear.

Two more of the “clobber verses” are closely related. In First Corinthians 6:9 and First Timothy 1:9-10 there are two words that many modern translators have deemed mean ‘homosexual’.<sup>34</sup> The original Greek is “malakos” and “arsenokoitai”.<sup>35</sup> The first word means ‘soft’; the meaning of the second word probably means ‘man plus bed’ (male copulation), but its exact meaning remains unknown since this is the first known occurrence of the word in all Greek literature.<sup>36</sup> From the reformation to the 20th century this text was translated as ‘masturbators’.<sup>37</sup> Without any clarifying text, many of today’s culturally biased translators (since 1958) are suggesting it refers to homosexuals.<sup>38</sup> The words must be slang and likely refer to participants in temple prostitution.<sup>39</sup> Boswell (1980) pointed out that there were a number of Greek words during this time period that described homosexual acts, and ‘malakoi’ and ‘arsenokoitai’ were

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<sup>32</sup> Romans 1:26-27, “Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual 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 shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.”

<sup>33</sup> Scroggs, R. (1983). *The New Testament and Homosexuality*. Philadelphia, PA: Freedom Press.

<sup>34</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:9 – “...nor men who have sex with men...” and 1 Timothy 1:9-10 “...for those practicing homosexuality...”

<sup>35</sup> Perry, T. D. & Swicegood, T.L. P. (1990). Appendix A; Boswell (1980)

<sup>36</sup> Boswell (1980)

<sup>37</sup> Helminiak, Daniel A. (2000). *What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality*. San Francisco, CA: Alamo Square Press.

<sup>38</sup> Whosoever.org and soulforce.org

<sup>39</sup> Perry, T. D. & Swicegood, T.L. P. (1990). Appendix A; Boswell (1980)

never used in that manner.<sup>40</sup> In fact, the known Greek words for homosexual acts are not used in the Bible.<sup>41</sup> One of the early Christian preachers, John Chrysostom (A.D. 345-407), wrote extensively against homosexual acts and never used these verses to bolster his position.<sup>42</sup>

Another text constantly cited is the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis chapters 18-19. The text would indicate that men intended to rape angels. Rape is a horrible and violent crime that is the opposite of God's commandment to love one another. Ezekiel 16:49 makes it clear that the sin of Sodom is inhospitality, and rape is certainly one of the ultimate and cruelest examples of this.<sup>43</sup> To inflate this story to include other sex acts as sex offenses is not being faithful to the text. The verse Jude 1:7<sup>44</sup> is also sometimes cited concerning this story, but the actual Greek means "strange flesh", and seems to refer to a story in the apocryphal Naphtali 3.3.4-5 where the women of Sodom had intercourse with angels.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, the foremost "clobber" texts used against homosexuals are Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.<sup>46</sup> Here is a broad statement causing much speculation by scholars. It did not seem right or fair to ancient scholars that a man raped by another man would also have to be put to death, if the verse is interpreted strictly and broadly.<sup>47</sup> The Book of Deuteronomy (the second reading of the law), does NOT have this exhortation, although it has other Levitical holiness rules.

Deuteronomy does address male temple prostitution; therefore the ancient Jewish scholars decided the verses in Leviticus also must only refer to male temple prostitution, where it was

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<sup>40</sup> Boswell (1980) and Helminiak (2000)

<sup>41</sup> Boswell (1980) and Helminiak (2000)

<sup>42</sup> Boswell (1980)

<sup>43</sup> Read Cheng P. S. (2011) Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology. Ezekiel 16:49 "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." Most other references to Sodom throughout the Bible specifically mention inhospitality (Luke 10:12)

<sup>44</sup> Jude 1:7 "In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion."

<sup>45</sup> Boswell (1980)

<sup>46</sup> Leviticus 18:22 "Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable." And Leviticus 20:13 "If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads."

<sup>47</sup> Boswell (1980) and Helminiak (2000)



sensible that both men were complicit.<sup>48</sup> In fact the Hebrew word for abomination used in these verses ‘toevah’ is reserved for idolatry and ritual uncleanness, not something malevolent (sinful?) like rape.<sup>49</sup> It is interesting to note that there are no records of anyone, ever, being accused of violating this Levitical law.<sup>50</sup>

Over the course of time Christians have learned from the Holy Spirit that particular scripture verses should not be understood as God’s law for all time and places, and it is not appropriate or just to apply them beyond a specific culture and time.<sup>51</sup>

### **Word of God, Speak**

Not only does the Holy Scriptures not condemn God’s variations in sexuality and gender identity, they actually provide positive examples of the treatment of sexual minorities.<sup>52</sup> Jesus in the Gospels seems to be silent on sexuality issues.<sup>53</sup> However, there is one story that provides a clue. A Roman Centurion came to Jesus to ask for healing of his “pais” in Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7: 1-10.<sup>54</sup> The Roman Emperor Augustus had instituted a ban on heterosexual marriage for serving Roman soldiers before the birth of Jesus that lasted until AD 197.<sup>55</sup> It was not unusual for Roman centurions and soldiers to have male servants with whom they had a sexual relationship.<sup>56</sup> The “pais” in the first century Greek and Roman culture was equated to "same sex lover" in contemporaneous texts.<sup>57</sup> Jesus did not condemn this Gentile, his lifestyle, or his varied sexual practices that would run counter to Jewish culture. In fact Jesus commended the

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<sup>48</sup> Boswell (1980)

<sup>49</sup> Perry, T. D. & Swicegood, T.L. P. (1990). Appendix A.

<sup>50</sup> Boswell (1980)

<sup>51</sup> Soulforce.org

<sup>52</sup> Goss, R. E. & West, M., eds. (2000). *Take Back the Word: A Queer Reading of the Bible* and Rev. Nancy Wilson’s *Queer Tribe*

<sup>53</sup> Perry, T. D. & Swicegood, T.L. P. (1990). “Jesus said nothing...Jesus was more interested in love.”

<sup>54</sup> GayChristain 101 website, (2012).

<sup>55</sup> GayChristain 101 website, (2012).

<sup>56</sup> GayChristain 101 website, (2012).

<sup>57</sup> GayChristain 101 website, (2012).

Centurion for having greater faith than all Israel!<sup>58</sup> This is a very different response than those “Christians” who today continue to condemn variations in sexuality and lifestyles.

Another example of Jesus’ dealing with sexual minorities is his unusual statement on eunuchs in Mathew 19:11-12.<sup>59</sup> Jesus said the eunuchs can be born that way, which was a belief supported by other Judaic and Roman texts.<sup>60</sup> Eunouchizo (Greek) or Saris (Hebrew) is translated as “eunuch” in English; however, today it means something very different than it did to ancient Rabbis, to those in Roman times, and even to early Christian preachers.<sup>61</sup> Clement of Alexandria writing around 190 AD stated that “born” eunuchs are “not unable but unwilling” to indulge in pleasure with a woman and have “a natural sense of repulsion from a woman”.<sup>62</sup> They were physically intact men who could be entrusted to care for the women because they had no sexual attraction for women. Eunuchs were considered more spiritually whole than heterosexual men because they were loyal and trustworthy.<sup>63</sup>

During the Middle Ages the Roman Catholic Church changed the meaning of “eunuch” to mean someone who was castrated.<sup>64</sup> Of note, in Acts 8:38 the first recorded Christian convert outside of Israel was an Ethiopian eunuch (a sexual minority). The subsequent Christian conversion of Ethiopia and much of Africa could have begun with a gay black man.

The Old Testament had references to eunuchs too. The prophet Daniel is one of the most famous. Daniel 1:9 refers to Ashpenaz, the chief of the court officials of Nebuchadnezzar, the

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<sup>58</sup> Matthew 8 and Luke 7

<sup>59</sup> Matthew 19:11-12 “Jesus replied, ‘Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.’”

<sup>60</sup> See <http://www.gaychristian101.com/Homosexual-Eunuchs.html>, and Justinian and Ulpian [a famous Roman legal writer] who also listed the same three classes of eunuchs

<sup>61</sup> GayChristain 101 website, (2012) and Malik, F. (1999). “Born Eunuchs.”

<sup>62</sup> GayChristain 101 website, (2012) and Malik, F. (1999). “Born Eunuchs.”

<sup>63</sup> GayChristain 101 website, (2012) and Malik, F. (1999). “Born Eunuchs.”

<sup>64</sup> Malik, F. (1999). “Born Eunuchs.”

King of Babylon as chief eunuch.<sup>65</sup> The Hebrew words which describe the relationship between Daniel and Ashpenaz are “chesed v'rachamim”.<sup>66</sup> ‘Chesed’ means mercy and ‘V'rachamim’ means "physical love".<sup>67</sup> A more reasonable translation would be that Ashpenaz "showed mercy and engaged in physical love" with Daniel.<sup>68</sup>

The Old Testament also gives us an example of women with an intimate and close relationship. A great positive example is in Ruth 1:16 and 2:10-11 revealing a special bond between Ruth and Naomi. In fact Ruth 1:16 is often read out during heterosexual marriage ceremonies, but the words are actually from one woman to another.<sup>69</sup> And the same Hebrew word used in Genesis 2 that describes women leaving families of origin and “cleaving” to a man, (even used as a definition of marriage) is used to describe Ruth’s “cleaving” to Naomi in Ruth 1:14.<sup>70</sup>

Probably one of the most powerful positive examples of same sex relationships in scripture is the story of David and Jonathan in the books of First and Second Samuel. Close attention should be paid to the following verses: 1 Samuel 18:1-4, 1 Samuel 20:41-42 and 2 Samuel 1:25-26. Jonathan was the son of King Saul, and next in line for the throne, but “...the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.”<sup>71</sup> First Samuel 18 continues on to describe how David becomes part of the family of King Saul, with Jonathan as his protector and benefactor. In fact the text says, "And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. Jonathan took off the robe he was

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<sup>65</sup> King James Version (KJV), Daniel 1:9 "Now God had brought Daniel into favor and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs"

<sup>66</sup> Gay Christian 101 website (2012). "Gay Couples in the Bible" and Religious Tolerance website (2012).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid

<sup>68</sup> Ibid

<sup>69</sup> Read Wilson, N. (2000). *Our Tribe: Queer folks, God, Jesus, and the Bible*. P. 107-108

<sup>70</sup> Gay Christian 101 website (2012) and Religious Tolerance website (2012).

<sup>71</sup> KJV, 1Samuel 18:1

wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt."<sup>72</sup> Jonathan stripped himself naked in front of David, which is extremely unusual conduct (then and now) unless their relationship was sexual. Also, the Hebrew word for "covenant"<sup>73</sup> is used here, a powerful and rarely used word, outside of references to God's loving covenants with humans. King Saul later proclaims of David, "Today, you are son-in-law with two of my children" after David married Saul's daughter Michal, but who did he marry first?<sup>74</sup> Perhaps the covenant was a marriage ceremony between them, recognized by King Saul himself.

In 1 Samuel chapter 20, it is recorded that Jonathan and David "...kissed one another and wept with one another, until David 'gadal'."<sup>75</sup> "Gadal" is the Hebrew word for "to physically grow, enlarge."<sup>76</sup> This suggests a sexual reaction and relationship. And, in 2 Samuel Chapter one, after Jonathan's death, David stated, "Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women." It was not proper in ancient Israel for men and women to have platonic relationships, only sexual.<sup>77</sup> I contend that David spoke of a romantic and sexual love with Jonathan.

Over the centuries, the actual Hebrew and Greek words in the Bible have been purposefully mistranslated and misinterpreted to portray this relationship and other beautiful variations of sexuality as something less than moral and abnormal. Attempts continue to manipulate the Greek and Hebrew words to fit the modern, predominant culture instead of letting them stand on their own. Somehow, the actual words have still survived allowing us to see the love of God more fully in the Creator's multiple variations of sexuality.

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<sup>72</sup> 1 Samuel 18

<sup>73</sup> Gay Christian 101 website (2012). "David and Jonathan" and Religious Tolerance website (2012).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid

<sup>75</sup> Ibid

<sup>76</sup> Ibid

<sup>77</sup> Gay Christian 101 website (2012). "David and Jonathan" and Religious Tolerance website (2012).

## How can I Interpret Scripture?

The Bible itself tells us how to interpret the Holy Scriptures concerning what is right and good. Romans 13:8-10 says,

“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,” and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”

Many of the so-called moral and legal codes distilled from various texts by culturally biased translators do not comply with this verse. Love fulfills the law. Unloving legalistic frameworks for sexuality are not valid. Rape, adultery, and temple prostitution are also not acceptable because they are also unloving toward God and fellow human beings. Even those who hurt others in these ways may still find forgiveness and grace in Christ Jesus.<sup>78</sup> Christians are part of a new covenant with God; it is one of grace (which means unearned love) in Jesus Christ. It is not concerned with gender roles or sexual orientation for in Christ there is "neither male nor female".<sup>79</sup>

The Bible contains good news for everyone. “Whosoever” believes will find eternal life with a loving God, and there is nothing that can separate anyone (and all aspects of their sexuality) from the love of God.<sup>80</sup> One of the most offensive phrases being used by many Christians today is to say they ‘Love the sinner but hate the sin’. It basically says that ‘you’ are sinner and ‘we’ are qualified to sit in judgment of you and your relationship with God.<sup>81</sup> Added to this is the difficulty of ‘hating’ a nebulous concept like sin, and not transferring those

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<sup>78</sup> For pastoral help see Haffner, D. (2005). *A Time to Heal: Protecting Children & Ministering to Sex Offenders*.

<sup>79</sup> Galatians 3:28

<sup>80</sup> John 3:16 and Romans 8:39

<sup>81</sup> Kundtz, D. J. & Schlager, B.S. (2003). *Ministry Among God's Queer Folk: LGBT Pastoral Care*

emotions to the physical object of the hate (a sinner).<sup>82</sup> The Book of Romans makes clear that all have sinned, and heterosexuals do not hold a moral high ground.<sup>83</sup> Theology is not solely based on scripture but also on traditions, reason, and experience.<sup>84</sup> Each of the four helps to interpret the other three. To base theological views solely on scripture does a disservice to God, who gave us the ability to reason, and still desires us to experience God throughout our daily lives.

One of the stories in scripture opened my eyes to how much God loved me. In Acts Chapter ten Peter is struggling with sharing the gospel with Gentiles (specifically a centurion), who do not follow the Judaic culture and the rules found in Leviticus.<sup>85</sup> God spoke “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean”<sup>86</sup>, revealing to Peter that he had to put aside his prejudice and that could he no longer condemn and exclude others because they did not follow the Judaic codes making them unclean. I realized that I had declared myself (my sexuality in body, mind, and soul) unclean based on sketchy translations and biased interpretations of a handful of verses in scripture. Now I look at scripture through the lens of love<sup>87</sup> and Jesus’ greatest commandment, to discern the true messages of God, including the holy blessings of variations in sexuality.

“Our religious traditions affirm that sexuality is a divinely bestowed blessing for the purposes of expressing love, generating new life, and providing companionship and pleasure. They recognize the unique role that a faith community can play in helping adults live in manner that reflects the holiness within each person and within relationships. They celebrate the goodness of creation, including our bodies and our sexuality.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Kundtz, D. J. & Schlager, B.S. (2003). *Ministry Among God’s Queer Folk: LGBT Pastoral Care*

<sup>83</sup> Romans 3:9-27 “There is no one righteous, not even one”

<sup>84</sup> Chellew-Hodge, Candace (2008). *Bulletproof Faith: A spiritual survival guide for gay and lesbian Christians.*

<sup>85</sup> Acts 10

<sup>86</sup> Acts 10:15

<sup>87</sup> Romans 13:8

<sup>88</sup> A quote from *A Time to Build* by Rev. D. Haffner

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