
Bible Study – November 4, 2015
Practicing Safe Text: What's It All About?
Part 1 of 3

Historians have identified “Four Freedoms” as characteristic features or “distinctives” of most Baptists. The “Four Freedoms” are:

- **Religious Freedom:** the individual is free to choose whether to practice their religion, another religion, or no religion; Separation of church and state is often called the "civil corollary"
- **Church Freedom:** freedom of the local church from outside interference, whether government or civilian. Also termed, “autonomy of the local church.”
- **Bible Freedom:** the individual is free to interpret the Bible for himself or herself, using the best tools of scholarship and biblical study available to the individual
- **Soul Freedom:** “freedom of conscience,” the soul is competent before God, and capable of making decisions in matters of faith without coercion or compulsion by any larger religious or civil body

Four Principles for Bible Study:

- 1) The Authority of Scripture is based upon the Bible in its **ancient** Languages: The Old Testament was written in the **Hebrew** language; The New Testament written in **Greek**.
- 2) What is “Divinely Inspired” about the Bible is the Message conveyed by the “words” of the Bible.
- 3) Good Interpretation takes into account **the language, culture, and history**.
- 4) Try to avoid reading a modern meaning onto an ancient word or text.

Examples: Speaking in Tongues & Divorce are two examples where these four principles become helpful (cf. 1 Cor. 14, Acts 2: 1-4; Matthew 5: 31-32; Deut. 24: 1-4)

Homosexuality in the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible

The definition of “homosexuality” that will govern our study is that “homosexuality is a **consensual** attraction towards someone of the same gender.” Such attraction may or may not involve **sexual** relations.

Genesis 19 – The Destruction of Sodom & Gomorrah

The common view is that these two cities were destroyed because of male homosexuality. There are several observations about Genesis 19 that pose considerable challenges to this theory:

Issue #1: The **identity** of the mob in Genesis 19: 4. A close reading of the text in English and Hebrew reveals that the mob outside Lot’s house consisted of **men** and **women**.

Issue #2: Lot’s Daughters.

Issue #3: The act described in Genesis 19 is not **consensual**. Rather than being an act of love and caring, the mob is demanding to **rape** Lot’s guests. The depravity of Sodom has to do with sexual **violence** and **inhospitality**. (cf. Judges 19: 22-26)

Issue #4: Of all the biblical references to Sodom (& Gomorrah), **none** of them mention homosexuality as a reason the cities were destroyed. (cf. Ezekiel 16: 49-50; Isaiah 1: 10-17; Jeremiah 23: 14; Ecclesiastes 16:8; Luke 10: 10-13; 2 Peter 2: 4-9; Jude 6-7.)

CONCLUSION: The sins of Sodom based upon a careful and close reading of scripture were **pride, inhospitality, injustice, sexual violence, and not caring for the poor and needy.**

Leviticus 18: 22; 20:13

a. Leviticus 18:22

KJV: Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind; it is abomination.

NKJV: You shall not lie with a male [*zakhar*] as with a woman [*ishshah*]. It is an abomination.

b. Leviticus 20: 13

KJV: If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.

NKJV: If a man [*ish*] lies with a male [*zakhar*] as he lies with a woman [*ishshah*] both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them.

The common view is that Leviticus regards male homosexuality as an abomination. Several observations challenge this widely accepted theory:

Issue #1: In both the Hebrew text and the English translations two different words are used to describe the nature of the activity being discussed. The Hebrew translated “man” is not the same as the Hebrew word translated “male/mankind.” We must ask ourselves why this is the case.

Issue #2: The Hebrew word *zakhar* translated “male” in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 requires context to determine what type of “male” the word is referring to. On the basis of **context**, it became clear that *zakhar* is referring to a **sacred** male or a male **temple prostitute**. (cf. Leviticus 18: 1-5, 21, 24-27; 20: 1-5, 22ff; Deuteronomy 23: 17-18; 1 Kings 14: 23-24)

The practices referring to in these chapters are those engaged in by worshippers of the god Molech. Shrine or temple prostitution was a part of religious fertility rituals involved or believed to be involved in such worship.

Issue #3: The Hebrew word translation “abomination” is a clear reference to **cultic religious** practices that were regarded as “unclean,” “ritually impure,” or “idolatrous.”

Issue #4: The punishment for engaging in such activity is **death**. (cf. Leviticus 20:13)

Issue #5: Selective appropriation of the laws in Leviticus. Why pick and choose which laws you want to enforce and which you do not?

CONCLUSION: Leviticus is referring to pagan **cultic** activity and the verses in question are prohibiting Israelite men from engaging in sexual activity with male **temple prostitutes**. This is the abomination in the book of Leviticus.

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