
Bible Study – November 18, 2015
Practicing Safe Text: What's It All About?
Part 3 of 3

“The purpose of this Bible study is to show how critical the task of biblical interpretation is for those who believe that Scripture is our source of authority on matters of faith and practice. In order to faithfully relate God’s Word to the issues we face today, this Bible study series has attempted to show that we must attend to language, culture, history, and social context of the scriptures. Failure to do so, takes the scriptures out of context and results in furthering harmful ideas that are not a part of the life changing witness of Scripture.”
Delman Coates, Pastor

Does Jesus Address Homosexuality?

Perhaps the most glossed over passage of scripture when it comes to the discussion of homosexuality is found in Matthew 19: 1-12. After discussing marriage and the conditions under which a man could discard (not “divorce” as we think of it today) his wife in verses 1-10, Jesus proceeds in verses 11-12 to discuss a category of individuals who were exempt from his teaching on marriage.

Eunuchs were “trusted men” who were employed to keep watch over the wives or concubines of kings and wealthy men. The Greek word ‘*eunouchos*’ literally means “a keeper of the bed,” and this official position was given to someone who was a superintendent of the bedchamber of the wives and/or concubines of an elite male. Eunuchs were “trusted” because they posed no threat to having sex with the wives and concubines of the wealthy man or king. According to Jesus, “eunuchs” fall into three categories.

First, those who “made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom” were those who by choice to a religious vow of celibacy. Second, those who were “made eunuchs by men” were those who by virtue of some violent act, force, or castration were appointed to serve in a king’s palace. Third, those who were “born eunuchs from their mother’s womb” were men who were not sexual threats to women because they either had a physical defect in their genitalia making sex with women impossible, or they were born with sexual attraction to women. Today, we would call this last sub-set of eunuchs homosexual men. For clarity, all eunuchs were not homosexual men, but those “born eunuchs” would include what we would today call homosexual men. This interpretation is very clear when examining authors at the time of the New Testament writing about this subject. Opponents of this view claim that a eunuch can only be a physically castrated man or a genitally deformed man, but never a physically intact man with sexual desire. Jesus clearly said this is not so, and he exempts those who are “born” without a sexual attraction to women from his marriage paradigm discussed in the earlier portion of the chapter. The reader should also note that Jesus does not berate, demean, or condemn those who are born without the sexual attraction to women; instead, he exempts them from the marriage paradigm discussed in the earlier part of the chapter, and proceeds to further his ministry. Knowing that Jesus regards some eunuchs as being “born that way from their mother’s womb,” provides great insight into the inclusive approach to eunuchs found in Isaiah 56: 3-5.

This text opens up huge possibilities for discussing issues of sexuality in the church and in our families in a more sensitive and nuanced manner. We get the sense that there are several factors that influence sexuality:

biology, personal choice, socialization, psychological influences, and experiences (i.e. sexual violence and physical trauma). That some men are “made eunuchs by men,” implies that physically violent actions, like rape, molestation, sexual abuse, castration, etc., can impact a person’s sexual behavior. Such physical and sexual violence does determine their sexuality, but can influence their sexual behavior. Such individuals (heterosexual or homosexual) need spiritual guidance and professional therapy for healing from their psychic trauma that has been inflicted upon them.

What about the Law of First Mention & Genesis 1 and 2

It is not uncommon for people who wonder whether the creation story of Adam & Eve provides the clear cut model intended by God for human relationships. Homosexuality is regarded as “against God’s divine order” because it goes against what God intended for human relationships and marriage as expressed in Genesis chapters 1 and 2. The Law of First Mention is the “interpretive principle” that is often used to substantiate this position. While this is an idea that comes from outside of the Bible, the Law of First Mention states that in order to understand a doctrine or an issue one must go to the first instance where the doctrine or position is mentioned for the first time in order to get the fundamental meaning of that doctrine or position. The idea is that God deliberately arranged Scripture so that the first mention of any concept or word reveals its most fundamental and overarching character. It’s a useful idea to a certain point, but very quickly becomes absurd when treated as a “Law.” Either one’s conclusions become nonsense, or they become justification for theological preconceptions. Let me give you some examples. In appealing to Genesis 1 & 2, homosexuality is rejected as against the original intent for human relationships. It is also not uncommon for commentators to regard homosexuality as “unnatural,” and a “perversion” of God’s design for humanity, for marriage, for the body, and for human relationships. While the “law of first mention” purports to lead people down the path of truth, when the concept is pressed to its full conclusion it leads readers down a ditch. Either one’s conclusions become nonsense, or they become justification for theological preconceptions. Let’s consider just a few examples as it relates to Genesis. Adam and Eve were vegetarian (Genesis 1: 29). There aren’t too many opponents of homosexuality using Genesis as their model advocating vegetarianism. Adam and Eve were told (in the present indicative sense) to “be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it.” (Genesis 1: 28) Does this mean that those who do not want to marry at all or have children are against the order of God? Additionally, does this mean that those who use contraception, have vasectomies or get tubal ligation so as not to have no more children, are going against God? Genesis 2: 25 also says that Adam and Eve were “naked and unashamed.” Does this mean that wearing clothes are against the order of God? This may sound like silly reasoning, but appealing to God’s “original intent before the fall” doesn’t just include the gender of the parties involved, and to isolate their gender for the convenience of advancing one’s argument, but it ignores these other aspects of the creation narrative that call the position into question because of the lack of consistency. It reveals that what commentators are doing in reading ideas that are not in the story onto the story. The idea that Genesis “establishes heterosexual monogamy as the model God desires for all relationships, and therefore, homosexuality is unnatural and against God,” is an idea that is not in the text. It is a cultural idea read into the text. Far from being a model imposed on all humans and relationships, Genesis is merely a theological account of beginnings and how the world was populated. The recipients of Genesis 1 and 2 did not regard heterosexual monogamy as the point of the text because the same Hebrew word is translated “woman” and “wife” in Genesis 2: 22-25. We tend to read our own ideas of what it means to be a “wife” onto the text (along with our modern notions of marriage), but these are not in the text. Apply the “law of first mention” to the idea of delineating practices that are regarded as natural and those that are not is also fraught with a range of problems. On many occasions, Jesus challenged the way in which religious people misused the concept of “nature.” (cf. John 9:1ff)

So what does all this mean for Mt. Ennon as a church?

First, We will allow the _____ of _____, and the _____ ethic of _____ guide our ministry approach. (Matthew 22: 39; Luke 6: 27-37; Revelation 22: 17; Matthew 16: 23-25; Ephesians 2: 8, 9. Hence we will welcome everyone.

Second, We will continue to learn. Regardless of where we are on this issue, we will ask God to continue to speak to us in the areas of _____, _____, and _____. Let us never be closed-minded. We can all learn more and grow in our knowledge, wisdom, and understanding.

Third, As it relates to the rite of marriage, we will recognize the right _____

NOTES:
