

[send this](#)[bookmark](#)[print](#)[close](#)

The Parish Paper

OF
ST. JOHN'S CHURCH
SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

Vol.34 No.34

St. Mary Magdalene (Trinity V)

07/20/03

The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion - In Crisis - Part III

The Biblical texts which have to do directly with homosexual practice are few in number but definitive in moral force. There are others that certainly relate to these, but these few set the framework. And though we must consider these texts for what they say, and in their context, we must also keep them within the full scope of the Bible. The message of the Bible is not finally about the negative commands, the "Thou shalt nots," the prohibitions that warn us of death. The Bible is ultimately about the positive Word, the principles of life that illumine us and lead us to God's holy hill and to his dwelling.

The first two passages that concern us are found in the Old Testament, in the Book of Leviticus, in the section which scholars have called the Holiness Code. It was this code of behavior that God gave to his covenant people to separate them for himself and apart from their idolatrous neighbors. "Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy" (Leviticus 19:2).

The first passage is from Leviticus 18:22, "Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination." The second is Leviticus 20:13, "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."

The reasons for these prohibitions can be seen in the context of these passages. In chapter eighteen, homosexual practice is viewed, alongside idolatry, with other improper sexual activity: incest (18:6-17); adultery (18:20); homosexual behavior (18:22); bestiality (18:23). In chapter twenty, the punishments for these and other offenses are made specific.

While it is true that not all the laws of Leviticus still hold true (as, for example, the dietary laws or laws of sacrifice), or that the judicial punishment of them is still in effect (as, for instance, the stoning of those caught in adultery), these which refer to homosexual practice retain moral force down to our present time.

The reasons for their present moral validity lie in three areas. First, the proper form for sexual activity in the Bible is given at the beginning, in creation, in the complementarity of male and female. The anatomical structure of male and female demonstrate this fact. (Genesis 1:27; 2:18-25). God has shown his intention for human sexuality in the

creation of man and woman. Both human procreation and human society depend on this originative idea.

The Holiness Code of Leviticus reaffirms the original creative intention of Genesis, and thus affirms the integrity of marriage and procreation. Hence the long section in Leviticus on incest and the references to bestiality form the context for the prohibition of homosexual practice. God would have his covenant people live by the creative design of his holy will.

Second, homosexual practice is universally wrong at all times and in all places. It is forbidden in the Book of Leviticus along with other sexual prohibitions that retain moral force in our time, namely incest, adultery, and bestiality.

No one, at this point, is interested in defending incest, or adultery, between consenting adults. But an argument could be made for them. Given the fact of birth control, the argument could be made that the danger of an impaired offspring from an incestuous act is eliminated, and therefore incestuous relationships between consenting adults may be permitted. And while adultery is presently considered wrong, an argument for sexual activity between married people could be made simply on the basis that they choose it. In the case of bestiality, the most perverse minds could sanction it as an act done by a person in the privacy of his or her own home. The point is this. None of these, incest, adultery, or bestiality is considered morally good in our culture. There is an inherent wrongness about them that continues to carry moral weight.

And third, these prohibitions are reinforced by the teaching of St. Paul, which we will address later (Romans 1:26,27 [18-32]; 1 Corinthians 6:9). Paul addresses these in the context of what is given by God in nature and therefore refers us back to the complementarity of male and female in the creative idea and intention of God. And, lest we forget, it should be said also that while Paul sees homosexual practice as an example of the fall of man, Paul does not limit the perverseness of the fall to this kind of sin. There are many others. See again Romans 1:29-32.

The witness of these particular passages from Leviticus is clear. So what is the argument brought against these? The basic argument of the advocates of homosexual practice is that the Bible does not know of committed sexual love between two members of the same sex. In other words, it was not part of their culture.

Some argue that the notion of faithful homosexual relationships was not known among the Hebrews, and that they knew such behavior only in cases of vicious rape, as at Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:1-28), or in the instances of cult-prostitution which existed in the lands that the Hebrews encountered, which is the historical context of Leviticus.

But the problem with these arguments is simply this. They ignore the original creative intention of Genesis, (which the Lord Jesus affirms [Matthew 19:3-6], and that is followed by Paul). The complementarity of male and female is written in creation, and both the integrity of marriage, and the consequent procreation of male and female, assumes it. Vicious homosexual rape, as in the event of Sodom and

Gomorra, and the occurrence of homosexual cult-prostitution in those idolatrous religions the Hebrews encountered, prove only that the fall of man has occurred in various degrees and different modes. Man is fallen and his sexuality is also fallen. It is no surprise that the viciousness of rape or the wickedness of idolatry assume such an expression: they have existed in heterosexual activity as well.

Furthermore, even if the Hebrews knew nothing of committed homosexual love, such practice between consenting adults did appear in the time that elapsed between the writing of Leviticus and St. Paul and the Gospels, as in the culture of the Greeks and the Romans. The ancient world had grown familiar with this aberration. But such practice was never written into law. Indeed, it was condemned by law as something that was inherently injurious to the interests of the state.

We may conclude this part of our series by saying that the Old Testament prohibition toward homosexual practice is one with the creative intention of God, revealed in Genesis. We shall see that the Christian Church did not find justification for such behavior either in the teaching of Jesus or in that of the Apostles. The New Testament is one moral voice with the Old. Next, we must consider what the Lord Jesus says and does not say.

The Rev. Dr. Michael L. Carreker

[send this](#)

[bookmark](#)

[print](#)

[close](#)

[Report Errors](#) | [Comments](#)

Copyright 2003 - 2004 St. John's Episcopal Church in Savannah, GA. All rights reserved.