

Our Ukiah United Methodist Church does not tell people what they must believe or how they must understand the scriptures. However, most people in our congregation are not biblical literalists. In other words, we understand the scripture as the inspired, authoritative text for our lives that must be studied in its historical, cultural, and literary context.

We believe that the message of the Bible is about God's love for people and the way people should love each other. Have you ever really met anyone who takes the entire bible literally?

Remember the teachings of Jesus to set the captives free? What about his teaching to "sell everything you own and give to the poor"? When we are honest, we all approach the scriptures through the lens of our experience and limited understanding.

We often have people ask for help understanding how we respond to passages in the scripture related to homosexual acts. The following are some attempts to explain how those verses are usually taken out of context and misquoted or misinterpreted:

What does the Bible say about homosexuality? **Jesus said nothing about the issue.** There are only three passages in the entire Bible that clearly seem condemn same sex acts.

#### **Leviticus 18:22**

"You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination." (NRSV)

#### **Leviticus 20:13**

"If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall be put to death." (NRSV).

However, according to Leviticus it is sinful to eat pork, shrimp, clams, or oysters, to plant more than one crop in a field, or wear a garment made of more than one type of fiber, or even to cut your sideburns. These texts cannot be used to condemn homosexual behavior unless one is prepared to condemn all these behaviors.

The thinking behind this prohibition was that semen contained life and was sacred. It should never be spilled except for the specific purpose of procreation. Thus, male masturbation or intercourse during a woman's menstrual period was also condemned. The secondary reason was that in a

strongly patriarchal society to treat men in the same way that women were treated was to degrade men.

### **Romans 1:26-27**

"Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and, in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another." (NRSV)

Here Paul describes same-sex acts as a result of idolatry. They are condemned for being unnatural and for being motivated by lust. Paul had no inkling that for some persons, a same-sex orientation might be natural, that is, part of who they are created to be. If he had known this, he would have had to argue that for such persons, heterosexual acts would be unnatural. And while this text condemns promiscuity, or sexual expression apart from loving relationship, it says nothing about same-sex acts as expressions of love. Elsewhere Paul talks about women cutting their hair as "unnatural" and men who wear their hair long as being "unnatural" - he was referring to the cultural norms as being natural - not moral norms.

Other texts often used to condemn homosexuality are: **Genesis 19** (the story of Sodom) which is about gang rape and says nothing about what consenting adults do in private. Furthermore, in **Ezekial 16:49-50** and **Luke 10:10-13** scripture states that the sin of Sodom was inhospitality and lack of concern for the poor. References in Timothy, Jude, II Peter, and Deuteronomy to male prostitutes, male sex slaves, and "sexual perverts" (I Corinthians 6:9-11) are often used as condemning scriptures about homosexuality. But, clearly they are condemning prostitution, rape, and promiscuity.

**Conclusion:** People often use the bible to support what they already believe. But, to simply argue that the bible condemns homosexuality is not faithful to the scriptures as a whole. Jesus said nothing about the issue. Nowhere does the bible explicitly prohibit sex between unmarried consenting adults. This is just another of many examples of using religion to enforce cultural norms. Our United Methodist Church long ago refused to use the scriptures to enforce slavery, we accept women as equal in worth and ability to serve as ordained ministers in our church. We ask that you prayerfully study the scriptures addressed here.