

Human Sexuality & The United Methodist Church

A Conversation About the Complex and Contentious Debates Around LGBTQ Issues within the UMC.



Session #2 – Is the Practice of Homosexuality Incompatible with Christian Teaching?

1. Definitions

Discipline short for The Discipline of The United Methodist Church, the denomination’s book of church law, policy, and beliefs

Gender Identity the gender a person perceives themselves to be

Cisgender this describes a person whose gender identity matches their biological gender

LGBTQ a catch-all acronym identifying all who are not heterosexual cisgender

Lesbian – a homosexual female

Gay - homosexual

Bisexual – sexual attraction to both genders

Transsexual/Transgender – one who identifies as a gender not the same as their biological gender

Queer – a catch-all term for any non-heterosexual, non-cisgender persons

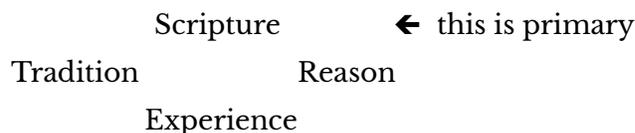
2. A Little History - John Wesley & his Theology

John Wesley (founder of the Methodist Movement during the early 1700s) left us his theological reflections in (many) sermons, his letters and journals, and his annotations of the New Testament. Although he was not systematic in his approach, we identify the following big themes:

- All persons are in need of salvation
- God meets this need through generous grace
- Faith is more important than righteous works
- Authentic faith produces inward and outward holiness (Wesley called this “vital piety”) (Wesley understood “holiness” to be one’s heart fully fixed on God)

1729 – John Wesley establishes the first “holy club” - a mutual accountability group in which its members were asked at each meeting a series of questions about the condition of their faith and how they were living it out. The group’s purpose was to promote holiness of heart and life.

Wesleyan Quadrilateral (Quad) – a spiritual discernment tool promoted by John Wesley composed of the following:



SCRIPTURE - a.k.a. Bible

Tradition - teachings and practices of the Church throughout its history

Reason - like the sign over the door at IBM: THINK

Experience - how we understand the world by living in it

Both those who advocate for full LGBTQ inclusion in the UMC and those who want to maintain current UMC teaching use the Quadrilateral for theological reflection. Moreover, both sides believe themselves faithful.

3. How Both Sides of the Debate Use the Quadrilateral

	Advocates for full LGBTQ inclusion	Advocates for upholding current teaching and practice
Scripture	<p>Faithful Christians interpret scripture differently. Specific passages declare homosexual intercourse as sinful, but the nature of the relationships in view require understanding the historical and social context.</p> <p>Loving, committed monogamous relationships among same-sex couples are not in view.</p> <p>Interpretations and applications change. The Bible was once used to justify slavery and the subordination of women. This is no longer the case for us.</p> <p>More important than historical and culturally-bound beliefs and practices is that we are to love God with all our beings and love our neighbors as ourselves.</p>	<p>Humans have been created with different but complimentary gender and marriage has been designed as a relationship between man and woman. This relationship includes procreation, requiring the coupling of each gender.</p> <p>Numerous passages of scripture prohibit same-sex intercourse.</p> <p>The scriptural understanding of love for one's neighbor does not imply that all possible relationships are acceptable.</p>
Tradition	<p>The teachings of the church should serve to build up the Body of Christ and the spreading of the hope of the gospel to a hurting world. To do this a tradition of the church is to adapt to changes in the world in order to liberate people and better bring them more fully into a saving relationship with God through Christ.</p>	<p>While animus and discrimination of LGBTQ persons have no place in the church, we must recognize that for most of Christian history, the wisdom of the church has confirmed that homosexuality is not God's will for human sexuality. A departure from this view is a departure from the church's orthodoxy.</p>
Reason	<p>Scientific discovery and understanding are considered a gift of discernment about God's creation.</p> <p>Studies have strongly suggested that sexual orientation and identification is not a choice, but aspects of one's being. This raises the question, Why would God create one type of person who is more inclined to sin than everyone else?</p> <p>Moreover, same-sex couples thrive, do no harm to others, and are often faithful within their consensual, monogamous relationships.</p>	<p>The science around human sexuality can help us understand same-sex as well as help the church minister to LGBTQ persons with compassion.</p> <p>However, science does not supersede theological reflection but adds to our understanding of creation.</p> <p>We can show love and acceptance of LGBTQ persons without affirming homosexual practice.</p>
Experience	<p>Many LGBTQ persons have loving, dedicated relationships with their partners and with God. They demonstrate Christlike love through word and deed and demonstrate the working of the Holy Spirit in their lives. God has accepted them, so how can we reject them?</p>	<p>Experience can lead to self-authentication (because something is experienced it is valid/real/true) but such experience may not be authentic to scripture. Having the experience of being homosexual does not in itself justify homosexual behavior.</p> <p>John Wesley's consideration of experience limited it to Christian experience as it relates to salvation.</p>

Scripture Passage	<p>Leviticus 18:22 & 20:13 You must not have sexual intercourse with a man as you would with a woman; it is a detestable practice. If a man has sexual intercourse with a man as he would with a woman, the two of them have done something detestable. They must be executed; their blood is on their heads.</p>
Interp.	<p>Part of the Holiness Code within the Law, the observance of which marks Israelites as distinct from other cultures. The Holiness Code was concerned with not just Israelite identity but also religious and cultural purity.</p> <p>These verses also reflect the created design of humans who procreate through heterosexual intercourse. For a minority population of Israelites in the hostile world of c. 1200 BCE, population growth meant ethnic survival. Clearly, homosexual intercourse does not support this need.</p>
Scripture Passage	<p>Matthew 19:4-6 Jesus answered, “Haven’t you read that at the beginning the creator made them male and female? And God said, ‘Because of this a man should leave his father and mother and be joined together with his wife, and the two will be one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, humans must not pull apart what God has put together.”</p>
Interp.	<p>Jesus confirms the God’s creation of humankind as male and female and that it is part of the created order that man and woman come together in marriage, which is intended to be a lifetime relationship. His answer is to a question about whether divorce should be a quick and easy male prerogative and denies this. Throughout church history, this passage has been used to cast divorce as wrongdoing, thus the stigma placed on divorced persons. However, in today’s world divorce is regrettable but not considered immoral.</p> <p>Nowhere in the gospels does Jesus address any of the issues around homosexuality.</p>
Scripture Passage	<p>Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:9-11 That’s why God abandoned them to degrading lust. Their females traded natural sexual relations for unnatural sexual relations. Also, in the same way, the males traded natural sexual relations with females, and burned with lust for each other. Males performed shameful actions with males, and they were paid back with the penalty they deserved for their mistake in their own bodies.</p> <p>Don’t you know that people who are unjust won’t inherit God’s kingdom? Don’t be deceived. Those who are sexually immoral, those who worship false gods, adulterers, both participants in same-sex intercourse, thieves, the greedy, drunks, abusive people and swindlers won’t inherit God’s kingdom.</p> <p>We understand this: the Law isn’t established for a righteous person but for people who live without laws and without obeying any authority. They are the ungodly and the sinners. They are people who are not spiritual, and nothing is sacred to them. They kill their fathers and mothers, and murder others. They are people who are sexually unfaithful, and people who have intercourse with the same sex. They are kidnappers, liars, individuals who give false testimonies in court, and those who do anything else that is opposed to sound teaching. Sound teaching agrees with the glorious gospel of the blessed God that has been trusted to me.</p>
Interp.	<p>It is hard to ignore Paul’s strongly negative assessment of homosexual intercourse in these verses. This may simply reflect the Judeo-Christian culture in time in which he lived that regarded same-sex intercourse as a violation of the created order and thus prohibited.</p> <p>Some argue that Paul’s concern is much more narrow and that he was referring to pagan cultic prostitution and male pederasty (an adult male having sex with a younger boy), both common in the Greek culture in which Paul lived. Consensual,</p>

loving, committed same-sex intercourse was not his concern in these passages. While this interpretation provides as easy culturally-distant way to blunt these passages, it may also be a forced and indefensible interpretation. It is crucial to not read our own desired interpretations into scripture but let it speak with its own voice. Indeed, the Bible consistently prohibits homosexual intercourse. Yet, these texts reflect the cultures and concerns of their writers and first readers, which are different than our own.

From Living Faithfully: Human Sexuality and The United Methodist Church –

“All sides of The United Methodist Church’s debate about homosexuality believe that the witness of scripture reveals a God of love, compassion, and grace. The question is whether all caring, monogamous, sexual relationships are a faithful response to the life this God calls us to, or if only heterosexual relationships are affirmed.” (pp. 24-25)

This study is based on and borrows liberally from
Living Faithfully: Human Sexuality and The United Methodist Church
(2017, Abingdon Press)