



## LIKE A PRAYER THEM'S FIGHTIN' WORDS

*Whenever I'm asked about the "anti-gay" passages in the Bible, I groan. It's not that I'm embarrassed about the texts themselves, but those who ask are often looking for ammunition with which to fight religiously-bigoted Bible thumpers. Without the context of the whole of scripture, those who are looking to fight these texts piecemeal are usually going to lose.*

Nevertheless, not for fighting purposes, but for the sake of context, there are six so-called "lobber passages" that often come up. They include three (Genesis 19:1-5, Leviticus 18:22, Leviticus 20:13) that are found in the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible), while the other three (1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 1 Timothy 1:9-10, Romans 1:21-31) come from the New Testament.

The story from Genesis is often called "Sodom and Gomorrah" and tells the story of angels visiting Sodom in the effort to find as few as ten "righteous" men. Sadly, they fail in the effort, but even more tragically, when the only righteous man in town, Lot, offers them hospitality, the other men of the town come knocking at the door demanding to "know" the strangers.

The verb used for "to know" in this case is "yada" and is sometimes, but not always, used as to mean "have sexual relations with." Even if we were to translate "yada" as "to have sex with" the story would have nothing to do consensual homosexual intimacy, it would be about rape, which is always forbidden in the bible. But, for thousands of years, this story was used to highlight the sin of inhospitality, a grievous offense in the harsh, desert climate, and had nothing to do with modern day homosexual relationships.

The prohibitions against "man lying with man as with a woman" in Leviticus come into context when we understand that, first, the Hebrew people were highly invested in keeping their population numbers high. While they didn't have a sophisticated understanding about conception, they certainly knew where babies came from and sex between men wasn't the way. Moreover, male same-sex prostitution rites were practiced among the Hebrews arch-rivals, the Canaanite people and prohibited Canaanite practices, including tattoos as well as man on man sex were called "abominations."

In the New Testament, the social/cultural setting shifts from Canaanite worship practices and inhospitality to the Roman practice of patronage. At the time when letters to the Corinthians and Romans were written, common practice allowed older Roman men to adopt younger men and boys as their protégés. In exchange for their protection and promotion, the younger men and boys were expected to act as sexual partners for their patrons.

Additionally in both Rome and Corinth, active cultic worship of Bacchus/Dionysius was marked by indulging in excessive drinking, drug use and orgies wherein people were often either exploited or unable to make use of their innate judgment.

Modern scholars read these texts as prohibitions against exploitation. The Bible simply does not address contemporary adult consensual same sex relationships as such. The Bible does explicitly require people to treat each other with justice, kindness and a sacred regard to the Holy that dwells in all of us.

That's not "ammunition" for a fight, but it is a good start for the peace to come.

*Just Out's Like a Prayer is written by Rev. Jennifer Yocum, pastor of the Forest Grove United Church of Christ. Reach her at fgucc.org*