

“The So-Called Clobber Texts: Prepare to Be Prepared”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Season of Pentecost

Sunday, August 11, 2019,

and

Sunday, September 18, 2022

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Holy Scriptures: Leviticus 18: 22; 20: 13; Luke 4: 16-21; Matthew 6: 25-26

Leviticus 18:22

²² You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.

Leviticus 20:13

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; their blood is upon them.

Luke 4:16-21

¹⁶ When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Matthew 6:25-26

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”

Prepare to be prepared.

Pastor Paul Turner of Gentle Spirit Christian Church was in his office,

which is upstairs on the second floor here at First Christian Church of Decatur.

His congregation worships God outdoors in Candler Park,

where they minister to and with homeless families and the LGBTQ+ community. Paul and his husband Billy were married here in our church in 2015,

having waited over 30 years for their love to be legally recognized by the state. So, Pastor Paul was sitting in his office upstairs when the phone rang.

The conversation that followed went like this:

"Hello, Gentle Spirit Christian Church. How may I help you?"

A pleasant voice said, *"Hi, I am calling about a revival we are having in Atlanta.*

This will be a wonderful revival to celebrate the unity we have in Jesus Christ.

We want your church to come."

"Thank you for inviting us. I am curious how you got our number," said Paul.

"Well, we are calling all the churches in Atlanta

to a revival to celebrate the unity we have in Jesus Christ."

"So, you know that we are a progressive, open and affirming church?"

Silence.

Then *"Does that mean you like the gays?"*

"Yes."

Click.

Hypocrisy lives.

Each of us has hypocritical aspects and attitudes and activities.

None of us are perfect; no judgment here.

Yet when I hear such true stories, like this one from this week,

it is no wonder so many good souls stay away from the Church.

Who can blame them?

A revival of our unity in Christ?

Unity that only includes those who exclude?

What we need is a confessional, an honest disclaimer about our disharmony, admitting how we abuse God's Word and how we mistreat one another.

Consider the following scriptures misused over centuries:

"Slaves, obey your earthly masters." (Ephesians 6:5; Colossians 3: 22)

Used to justify enslavement of races and entire nations.

"Women should be silent in the churches." (1 Cor. 14:34)

Used to justify subjugation of women and girls for millennium

Noah's curse of Ham: *"Canaan shall serve his brothers..."* (Genesis 9: 20-27)

Used to justify institutional racism against people of color.

"The story's original purpose may have been to justify the subjection of the Canaanite people to the Israelites, but in later centuries, the narrative was interpreted by some Christians, Muslims and Jews as an explanation for black skin, as well as a justification for slavery." (David M. Goldberg)

"Nevertheless, most Christians, Muslims and Jews

*now disagree with such interpretations,
because in the biblical text Ham himself is not cursed,
nor is race or skin color mentioned."*

(David M. Goldberg)

Clearly, the same people whom God blesses, baptizes and bequeaths the Holy Spirit
have been known to use the Bible

to justify human hatreds and prejudices and privileges.

Today in this sacred and safe space

we dare to speak of use, abuse, and misuse of the Holy Bible.

The Bible has been used like a weapon.

God's Word has been used to clobber people, emotionally, spiritually, socially,
to hurt and harm the innocent.

The faith experiences of our forefathers and foremothers

have been misrepresented, misinterpreted, and misunderstood

in attempts to control or dominate or exclude

neighbors known and unknown, and even family members.

At a past General Assembly, at the LGBTQ+ Alliance booth

for what was then called the Gay and Lesbian Affirming Disciples, or GLAD,

two parents and their teenage daughter approached.

The adults asked some questions, were given answers about the mission of GLAD,
and then the parents said they could not imagine anyone in their church

having any interest in what GLAD was offering.

The family turned around and began to walk away.

The teenage girl stopped.

She turned back and mouthed to the GLAD reps: *"Thank you."*

Prepare to be prepared for how to respond to biblical challenges
about who you are & whom you choose to love.

I'm not going to ask for a show of hands or a chorus of "Amen!"

I imagine that if I did ask,

a significant number of the souls here today have borne witness

to the Bible being used, abused and misused to clobber

our Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender,

and Questioning (or Queer) folks.

Such use of the Scriptures has shaped who we are today as the Church.

Our responsibility is to reshape our understanding

so we can reshape ourselves, our church, our community, and our world.

Put another way,

God has already shown us "what is good and what is required of us:

do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

Now it's our turn to show one another...and to show God...we can give as well as we get.

Prepare to be prepared.

You may have read Leviticus or heard it quoted.

Very little of the book deals with the subject of human sexuality.

Pastor Jim Dant of First Baptist Church, Greenville, SC, in his book This I Know, says:

*"There is no valid, Christian, biblical argument
against same-sex relationships between consenting adults."* [\[1\]](#)

Still, that doesn't mean folks won't try.

Dant has observed that the attention span of some of our most critical folks
is the equivalent of a bumper sticker.

We will draw on Jim Dant's teaching moving forward.

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; their blood is upon them."*

A good bumper sticker response is:

"This verse refers to treating another person like property.

I do not treat my partner like property.

I treat my partner with love and respect." [\[2\]](#)

Leviticus 18:22

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

The bumper sticker response is to say:

"I am a Christian

and I have been freed from the demands of Old Testament law.

And if you are a Christian,

I assume you do not live by Old Testament law either." [\[3\]](#)

No Christian who challenges you with a verse from Leviticus

is living according to the laws of Leviticus.

I guarantee it.

Many judgmental Christians find it convenient

to impose the laws of Leviticus on other [people]

while claiming graceful exclusion for themselves.

And do not let them convince you that some laws are 'moral'

and others may be disregarded as 'less important.'

According to Leviticus, it is also an abomination

to eat shrimp, wear clothing of mixed fabric and touch the sick or the dead. [\[4\]](#)

According to Leviticus, we are supposed to stone – put to death – persons who do not keep Sabbath, who talk back to their parents or who commit adultery.

No one who claims to be a follower of Jesus accepts these as normative standards or necessary demands. [\[5\]](#)

Pastor Jim Dant shares with us this story of when he led a conference...: [\[6\]](#)

“The title of my session was

“Loving Leviticus: What Every Christian Should Know about the Heart of the Torah.”

I had made my way through much of the book without mentioning homosexuality.

(Comparatively, it is a very, very minor part of Levitical law.)

Finally, a frustrated young zealot raised his hand.

I acknowledged him.

“When are you going to mention the sin of homosexuality?” he asked.

“Do you believe it’s a sin?” I responded.

Enthusiastically he asserted, “Yes, it is!”

I calmly asked him, “Are you homosexual?”

“No! Absolutely not!”

I continued, “Have you ever eaten a cheeseburger?”

“Heck yeah, I love cheeseburgers.”

“Well then, you are a homosexual.”

He was beside himself. “I am not! What’s a cheeseburger got to do with it?”

I responded, “In the New Testament book of James, it says

‘Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.’

It’s against the laws of Leviticus to eat beef and milk together.

You’ve broken that law. If you break one law, you’re guilty of all laws.

Therefore, since you eat cheeseburgers, you are a homosexual.”

No Christian who challenges you with a verse from Leviticus is living according to the laws of Leviticus.

And according to the New Testament, even if they tried, they would still be guilty of every law in the text when they break just one.”

Prepare to be prepared.

You have heard some folks refer to the Book of Genesis, saying “Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve!”

You have heard people claim that the creation story of Genesis 2 explicitly and exclusively defines marriage as the union of one man and one woman. [\[7\]](#)

The bumper sticker response is to say:

The creation story of Genesis refers to humanity’s need for companionship and God’s care for that need.

It was never intended to establish heterosexual parameters for marriage.^[8]

You may have heard that in Deuteronomy 22:5 the Bible states:
it is abhorrent to God for a man to wear women's clothing
or for a woman to wear men's clothing.

Therefore, it is a sin to be live a transgendered life.

The bumper sticker response is to say:

I am a Christian and I have been freed from the demands of Old Testament law.
In addition, the ideas of 'abhorrence and abomination'
were a reference to ceremonial cleanliness
and were not moral labels.^[9]

You may have heard someone lift up
how God destroyed the people of Sodom and Gomorrah
because of their homosexual behavior.

The story of Sodom and Gomorrah is recorded in Genesis 18-19.

To read this story as an indictment against homosexuality is to completely
– and I mean completely – miss the point of the story.

Hospitality is a central tenet of Jewish culture and Jewish law.

The primary sin of Sodom and Gomorrah
was their lack of hospitality toward the strangers in their midst.^[10]

The bumper sticker response is to say:

The Bible says God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah
because of their failure to practice hospitality
and their lack of care for the needy in their community.

Prepare to be prepared.

You may have heard it pointed out that the Apostle Paul said homosexuality is a sin.

Just read Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10.

Even if you do not follow the Old Testament law

and even if Jesus did not intentionally define marriage,

the Apostle Paul is absolutely clear in his writings: homosexuality is a sin.

The bumper sticker response is to say:

Paul is not writing about consensual, healthy relationships between adults.

In Romans, I Corinthians, and I Timothy,

Paul is writing about rape, pedophilia and temple prostitution

– all nonconsensual sexual relations between a lesser and a greater power.

I'm against those things too.^[11]

Prepare to be prepared when misuse of the Bible as a weapon for clobbering the LGBTQ+ community fails and falls short of the mark, the fall back statement you may hear is that practicing homosexuals have not repented.

The line goes something like this:

You cannot be Christian if you are a practicing homosexual because you have not repented of your sin.

Jim Dant says *"This is the most astoundingly illogical statement made by Christians with regard to persons in the LGBTQ community. I've heard it numerous times and I'm still shaking my head."*^[12]

The best response is to simply say:

One, I do not believe that 'being who God created me to be' is a sin.

And two, even it was a sin, my present relationship with God and my future with God are a product of my faith in the grace of God.

My relationship with God is not dependent upon my works.^[13]

Just like you, I am saved by the grace of God.

I am redeemed by the love of Jesus Christ.

I am transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

How do I know this?

"Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

Prepare to be prepared.

One day a delightful festival took place in a city park.

The park was centrally located in a neighborhood where many gay and lesbian and transgender families took refuge and found safety in numbers.

In this festival was an odd booth.

Above the booth were the words "Confessional."

There were two doors.

Above one it simply said, "Welcome home. Come inside."

Folks passing by were curious.

A few got up the courage to open the door and enter.

There was a wooden chair by a small window in the wall that separated the two sides of the booth.

The visitor sitting in the chair could see a minister sitting in the other side.

The minister spoke slowly and carefully.

"I need to confess my sin. Please listen to my confessional. I am so sorry.

We the Church of Jesus Christ

have intentionally and repeatedly hurt you, abused you.

We have wielded our power against your will,

especially when you were at your most vulnerable.

I pray that you might find it in your heart to forgive the Church,

*and that we might move into a new day and new way together,
freed from past sins of intimidation, instillation of fear, and oppression.
May we be released from the violence and wrongs of our past.
May we move together into the light of God's grace, mercy, and justice.
Thank you for listening."*

Some people left the confessional booth and walked into the sunshine amazed.
Some people left cynical;
 some people left transformed, inspired, hopeful;
 some people left with some thinking to do.

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

^[1] Jim Dant, [This I Know: A Simple Biblical Defense for LGBTQ Christians](#), Nurturing Faith, Inc. 2018. P. 4

^[2] Dant, Page 11

^[3] Dant, Page 8

^[4] Dant, Page 8

^[5] Dant, Page 9

^[6] Dant, Page 9

^[7] Dant, Page 14

^[8] Dant, Page 14

^[9] Dant, Page 22

^[10] Dant, Page 26

^[11] Dant, Page 36

^[12] Dant, Page 42

^[13] Dant, Page 42