



Interpreting the Bible Especially the Hard Stuff

What must I do to inherit eternal life?

What is written?

How do you read?

(Luke 10:26)

Vincent Van Gogh, *The Good Samaritan*, 1890



What is
written?

On sexual orientation or
committed relationships between
people of the same gender
identity?

How do you
read?

On nonbinary gender identities?

On sexual acts between men?

On sexual acts between women?

Genesis 18-19

Abraham's lesson in statecraft



How do you read?

Themes:

Statecraft involves advocacy for the vulnerable – minorities, foreigners, girls

Breakdowns in social order are marked by predatory sexual violence

Hospitality is a sacred virtue and includes protection from sexual violence

Leviticus 18:22; 20:13

Within the “Holiness Code” of Leviticus

A section concerned with both ritual purity and morality

Prohibitions of a man “lying with a male as with a woman”

“Abomination”: a purity violation that requires an extreme remedy.



How do you read?

How was one act or practice embedded
in a larger network of social practices?
in broader cultural concerns?
in ancient norms and values?

Do we make the same connections today?

Possible rationales

1. Demands that Israel not resemble other nations
2. Protects ancient cultural notions of masculinity
3. Prohibits blurred boundaries; keeping separations
4. Like incest laws, prohibits free, powerful males from treating others in the family compound as sexual property
5. Blends moral and purity concerns (for example, moral codes punish the perpetrator; purity codes sometimes also punish the one violated)

New Testament Vice Lists



Malakos

A common term – softness, delicacy, loss of manliness, effeminacy, loss of manly self-control

Some English Bible translations:

“effeminate” (KJV, NASB)

“boy prostitutes” (NAB)

“male prostitutes” (NIV, NRSV)

Arsenokoites

Unusual, compound word

Some English translations:

“liers with men” (Douay-Rheims)

“abusers of themselves with mankind”(KJV)

men who use male prostitutes (some scholars)

“homosexuals” (NASB)

“sodomites” (NRSV)

What is written? How do you read?

Admit ambiguity.

Be careful when texts aren't clear or simple.

If you don't know what it means ,
don't make it a rule.

Paul on God's Impartiality

Romans

1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

3: 22b-24a. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift...

Patterns in Romans 1

A story of how polytheism came to be

How & why Gentiles are accountable to God

Patterns of exchange...

“God gave them up...”

The sweeping vice list ...

Where is Paul taking us?

... do you despise the riches

of God's kindness

and forbearance

and patience?

Romans 2:4



Alternate readings of Romans 1

1. Same-sex sexual acts are a serious example of sin in any cultural context
2. Sin takes place in the link between idolatry and out-of-control promiscuity
3. Our understanding of *nature* has changed
4. Paul is not talking about committed same-sex relationships or imagining church leadership, so Romans 1 doesn't helpfully guide our conversations
5. Paul's specific example is a stage in developing his core affirmation: all humans need grace, mercy, and redemption

How do you read?

What guides your interpretations?



Justice, Covenant, Hospitality

On whom does the burden of proof lie?

Affirmations

Genesis 1:27 So God created humankind in God's image, in the image of God, God created them; male and female God created them.

Galatians 3:28 There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Romans 10:11 The scripture says, "No one who believes in Jesus Christ will be put to shame."

Moral imperatives

Galatians 5:13-14 For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

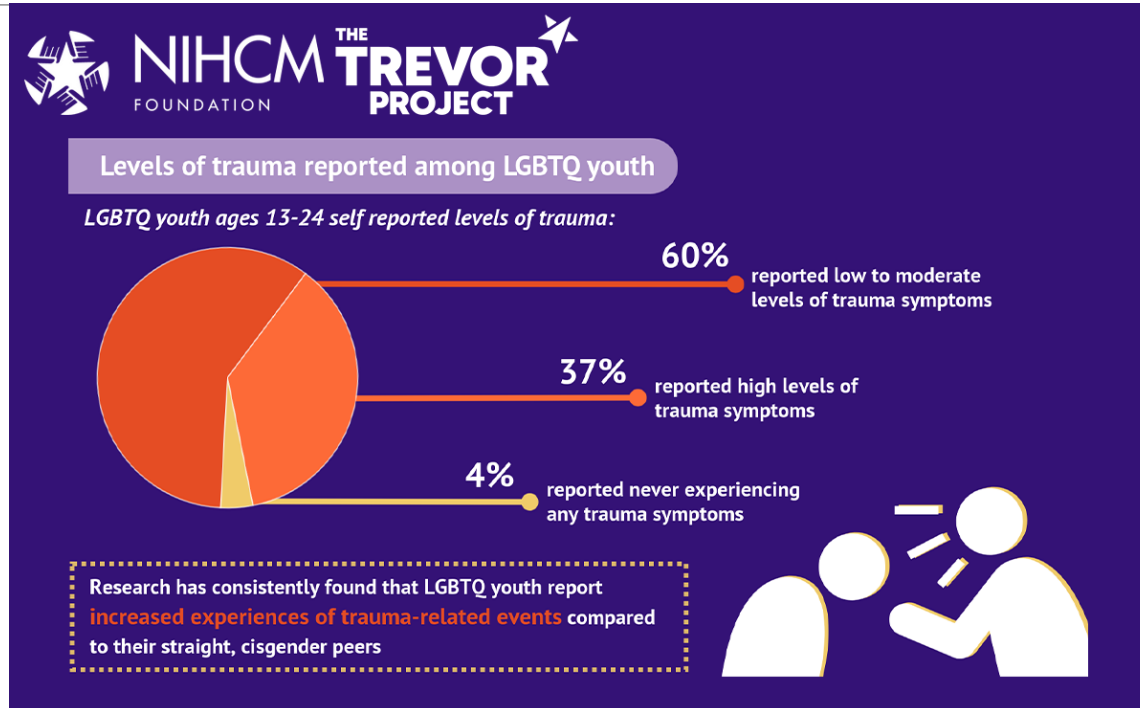
Micah 6:8 The Lord has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Reading in light of experience

Galatians 3:4 “Did you experience so much for nothing?-- if it really was for nothing.”



Biblical legacies we inherit



God gave them up? Death and destruction?

Biblical messages about which we may agree

Predatory or exploitative sexuality is sin

Christian sexual ethics involve self-control, social protections, and commitment

Hospitality matters

Those lacking social power need protection

All humans are made in the image of God