

*Moving from Scripture to Theology and Practice*  
**Sexuality, Gender, and Faith Forum**  
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**I. WHAT IS THE BIBLE?**

- A. The Bible is not a handbook or a set of rules; it is a multi-vocal, narrative witness to God’s work with a particular people in a particular time.
1. Multivocal
  2. An overarching story made up of different stories
  3. Tied strongly to an ancient people in their ancient context
- B. The Bible teaches us about what the authors and first audiences thought; the stories, laws, poetry, wisdom, and letters helped them live in their world as God’s people and Jesus followers.
- C. We all read the Bible with lenses—and biases and presuppositions and preunderstandings—that shape and guide our interpretation (e.g., Numbers 12:1-2)—we must be aware of these!
- D. As we read and try to understand how ancient Israel and then first century Christians lived, learned, and changed, we come to understand the character and work of God, the nature of humanity, and the message and meaning of Jesus’s life.
- E. The journey to understanding the character and work of God does not involve merely following a set a rules or stating certain beliefs; it involves letting the story of Scripture and the life of Jesus shape us.\*

\*This means that quoting out of context Scripture is not proof for a certain theology; it should not dictate practice

**II. WHAT IS DOCTRINE?**

**Working Definition of Doctrine:** Statements of systematic theology drawn from a diversity of passages the Bible and read in light of a particular religious tradition to serve as a foundation for a particular community of faith. **Note:** The Bible does not teach a doctrine of anything—not the trinity, creation, incarnation, salvation or atonement (e.g. doctrine about atonement)

- A. Doctrine always involves dismissing or qualifying the Bible’s multivocality (e.g. doctrine of inerrancy)
- B. Doctrine is processed, worked over, and developed over the centuries
- C. Doctrine is shaped by tradition, culture, and people (usually men) who are in leadership
- D. Doctrine reflects a society’s values and is limited by it
- E. Doctrine is not always the same as theology

## *Test Case: Doctrines about Women in ministry*

### **III. MOVING FROM SCRIPTURE TO THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE**

- A. Note: There is not one “theology” taught by the Bible; there are many theologies
- B. The biblical literature conveys some theological ideas that are being developed in their time but they are all still in flux and exist in a diversity of expressions
- C. Developing theology helps someone think “Christianly” or “in a Christ-like way” about ethical convictions and Christian practices, shaping a person's worldview and providing a framework for reasoning/thinking and acting
- D. Ways people have moved from Scripture to theology:
  - 1. Naively claim they are following the Bible but in actuality, pick and choose which pieces to focus on according to their own presuppositions, traditions, or opinions (a popular practice but NOT ideal)
  - 2. Wesleyan Quadrilateral (Scripture, Tradition, Reason, Experience)
  - 3. Center theology on a “canon within the canon” or a key biblical theme/teaching (Jesus’s life and ministry/the Gospels, Love God/love neighbor and enemy, upside-down kingdom)
  - 4. Pay attention to the movement of God in the Bible and trajectories that are established
- E. My personal story of becoming affirming

“No theology is strictly speaking timeless. All theology has a historical and cultural context, including the theology of the biblical writers. And that is good news, for it gives us permission to accept the responsibility to think through what it means from God to be present now.” —Pete Enns

### **Questions to consider when developing theologies and practices around gender/sexuality/marriage:**

- What does it look like for God to be present in my life and my church when it comes to the inclusion of LGBTQ+ folks?
- How might I live like Jesus in the world when I consider my words and actions concerning gender and sexuality?
- How might individuals and churches go about developing a theology of sexuality and marriage when the ancient context of the Bible is so far removed from our context? Do we need a specific theology around this at all?
- Which theologies and practices in our society have been most harmful to LGBTQ+ folks and other vulnerable people? Which have been most loving and lifegiving?
- What personal opinions, traditions, or preunderstandings am I willing to reexamine for my faith community to pursue a more welcoming and affirming stance on LGBTQ+ inclusion?