

## LEVITICUS AND HOMOSEXUALITY

### SPECIFIC PROHIBITIONS AGAINST HOMOSEXUALITY

Lev. 18:22 “You shall not lie with a male as with a female; it is an abomination.”

Lev. 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.”

### OVERVIEW OF LEVITICUS

The central issue of Leviticus is holiness before God. “You shall be holy for I the LORD your God am holy” (Lev. 19:2). Israel is set apart from the surrounding nations and peoples for God and for God’s purposes. The book includes specific instructions regarding sacrifices, clean and unclean foods, purification for women after menstruation and child-birth, dealing with lepers and their purification, *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement), the proper way to slaughter animals, sexual relations, moral holiness, how priests are to behave, offerings and festivals, the Year of Jubilee, rewards for obedience, and penalties for disobedience.

### INTERPRETING LEVITICUS TODAY

There is general consensus that some passages represent the will and purpose of God for human society. “You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another.” (Lev. 19:11) There are some passages where Jesus has lifted us to a new understanding, a higher righteousness. Regarding the laws of clean and unclean foods, Jesus said: “it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles a person” (Matt. 15:11). And regarding the *Lex Talionis*, Jesus said: “You have heard that it was said, ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. If anyone strikes you on the right cheek turn the other also...” (Matt. 5:38-39).

There are some passages that the modern culture no longer regards as holiness, such as the prohibition against tattoos (Lev. 19:28), or the death penalty for anyone who blasphemes the name of the LORD (Lev. 24:16). And when was the last time you (or anyone) observed the Year of Jubilee? (Lev. 25:8-12ff.)

### UNITED METHODIST GUIDELINES TO LIVING FAITHFULLY BEFORE GOD

(UMC Book of Discipline, paragraph 105)

SCRIPTURE – primary source and criterion; Jesus Christ is the living Word of God; the Bible is the sacred canon and the source of all that is necessary and sufficient for salvation; we are guided by scholarly inquiry and personal insight; we properly read Scripture within the believing community.

TRADITION – represents a consensus of faith over time and in a diversity of human cultures

EXPERIENCE – the personal appropriation of God’s forgiving and empowering grace; and the corporate experience of God’s people.

REASON – by reason we ask questions of faith and seek to understand God’s action and will. All truth is from God, including truth of science and nature.

## SOME NEW TESTAMENT TEXTS TO CONSIDER

### 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (NIV)

<sup>9</sup> Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers *nor men who have sex with men*<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>10</sup> nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

### 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (NRSV)

<sup>9</sup> Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, *male prostitutes, sodomites*,<sup>10</sup> thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.

(see also Rom. 1:26-27 and I Tim. 1:10)

#### Notes:

- There is no Greek or Hebrew word for homosexual.
- In this text, the NIV interprets and combines two Greek words (*malakos* and *arsenokoites*) and comes up with “men who have sex with men;” the NRSV translates it as two separate words: “male prostitute” and “sodomite.”
- Do we take these verses at face value? Is this the timeless or culturally-conditioned revelation of God’s will?
- Do any of these references refer to a committed same-sex relationship?

### Acts 10:9-16, 23-28, 34-36

<sup>10:9</sup> About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. <sup>10</sup> He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. <sup>11</sup> He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. <sup>12</sup> In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. <sup>13</sup> Then he heard a voice saying, “Get up, Peter; kill and eat.” <sup>14</sup> But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.” <sup>15</sup> The voice said to him again, a second time, “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.” <sup>16</sup> This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven...

<sup>23b</sup> The next day [Peter] got up and went with them, and some of the believers from Joppa accompanied him. <sup>24</sup> The following day they came to Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. <sup>25</sup> On Peter’s arrival Cornelius met him, and falling at his feet, worshiped him. <sup>26</sup> But Peter made him get up, saying, “Stand up; I am only a mortal.” <sup>27</sup> And as he talked with him, he went in and found that many had assembled; <sup>28</sup> and he said to them, “You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean...

<sup>34</sup> Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, <sup>35</sup> but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. <sup>36</sup> You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all...

#### Notes:

- Might this passage have anything to say about LGBTQ inclusion or is it only about the Gentile mission in the early church?
- Did God’s revelation stop when the canon was closed or is the Spirit still speaking?