

# five

**Shorter Uneasy Pieces**

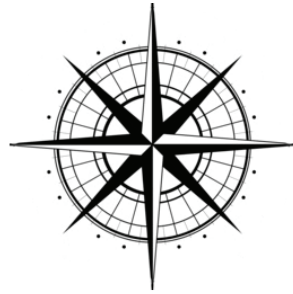
Reflections on Scripture and Sexuality



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# five



## **Shorter Uneasy Pieces**

Reflections on Scripture and Sexuality

**T**hese Five Shorter Uneasy Pieces are brief papers written by the authors of five scholarly Essays published in 'Five Uneasy Pieces' by Australian Theological Forum Press 2011. These Papers are written with two purposes in mind. First, to help people read the relevant scriptural pieces, which over the centuries have been used as 'proof' texts against homosexual practice. The material presented here is the product of responsible modern biblical study and application. There are many strong voices in Australia today denouncing homosexuality as un-biblical and un-Christian. These Papers help us to see that these texts are often used simply to reinforce prejudice or fear and to maintain majority norms by excluding those whose sexuality is ordered other than heterosexually. These "Uneasy Pieces" help us to find our voice in the often hurtful and painful conversation.

Secondly, the Five Shorter Uneasy Pieces can be used for classroom or group study, with the teacher or group leader using the book of full length essays as a detailed guide. The authors have written these Papers to be readable by senior secondary students and by lay people who do not have specialist biblical or theological training. They are all written by Australian Anglican Scholars, who come from a variety of backgrounds to make a collective contribution to our understanding in the Australian context.

On the back of 'Five Uneasy Pieces', The Rev'd Dr. Elizabeth Smith, encourages us to reflect on these Papers in a group with conversation partners, talking your time with complex and fascinating material. The five pieces may be uneasy but they will be very rewarding!" She is right!

The Rev'd Nigel Wright



### **Were the Sodomites really sodomites? Homosexuality in Genesis 19**

*But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; and they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them." Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof." (Genesis 19:4-8, translation from NRSV)*

It is common for contemporary readers of the book of Genesis to assume that the wickedness of the men of Sodom is homosexuality. The assumption is almost irresistible, given the link between the name of the city, 'Sodom' and the English word 'sodomy'. However, the text itself never explicitly identifies sodomy as the crime of the residents of Sodom, and interpreters of Genesis 19 have not always made this link.

What does the text of Genesis 19 itself say about the sin of Sodom? What features of the narrative have led readers to interpret Genesis 19 as indicating divine opposition to homosexuality? Is it necessary to interpret Genesis 19 in this way, or are there other ways to read this Scripture?

In Genesis 19 the men of Sodom surround Lot's house, where Lot is sheltering two mysterious visitors, and demand that Lot bring out his guests, in order that they might 'know' them (19:5). The Hebrew verb, 'to know', is *y'd'*. It has a range of meanings, just as in English, that sometimes have sexual overtones and sometimes do not. Often it is clear that the verb *y'd'* is being used in the sense of knowing someone sexually. That is the case, for example, in Genesis 19:8 where Lot says "I have two daughters who have not known a man". At other times it is clear that a sexual sense is not intended (Genesis 18:21 is an example). In modern times interpreters have

generally read the word 'know' in Genesis 19:5 as having a sexual sense, although that is not absolutely clear from the context. The resulting interpretation is that the men of Sodom want Lot to bring the visitors out so that they can have sex with them, that the wickedness of Sodom, therefore, is homosexuality, and that God punishes this wickedness by means of the destruction of Sodom and every person in it.

However, there is some need for caution here. Even if the majority of modern scholars are right in their view that *y'd'* possesses a sexual meaning in the context of Genesis 19:5, it does not necessarily follow that Genesis 19 should be read as a warning against homosexuality. On the contrary, when read closely it becomes apparent that the story has nothing to say about consensual sex between men. First, what the men of Sodom appear to propose in Genesis 19:5 is not consensual sex but pack-rape. Secondly, even if this rape had eventuated it would not have been rape of men by men. Although the text in some places calls Lot's visitors 'men', it elsewhere terms them 'messengers'. The visitors are not, in fact, men but divine beings. This story, if it is about sex at all, is not about consensual sex between men, but about the rape by human males of divine beings. In other words, Sodom's wickedness was not homosexuality, but hubris – the desire to attain divinity through intercourse with divine beings. Nowhere else in the book of Genesis is any concern expressed about homosexual activity, but hubris is a pervasive theme. Genesis 6 suggests that the reason for God's decision to send Noah's flood was his grief about widespread sexual activity between 'daughters of humans' and 'sons of God' and hubris was also the crime of the builders of the Tower of Babel.

Some scholars have recently raised serious questions about whether *y'd'*, in the context of Genesis 19:5, should be understood as having any sexual meaning at all. For example, it is possible that *y'd'* is used in Genesis 19 in a legal sense, so as to draw a parallel between the intentions of the men of Sodom in Genesis 19 and those of God in Genesis 18. In Genesis 18 God sends messengers to assess the reports he has heard coming out of Sodom, so that he will 'know' whether the reports are true. Similarly, it can be argued, the men of Sodom want to 'know' the mysterious visitors to their city – in other words they are acting judicially and not as sexual predators. The presence of other legal language in chapters 18 and 19 of Genesis supports this idea.

So far we have raised some doubts about whether the text portrays homosexuality as the wickedness of Sodom. Does it say anything expressly that might assist the reader to reach an alternative view? In verse 9 the Sodomites say, "This fellow (Lot) came here as an alien, and he would play the judge! Now we will deal with you worse than with them!" The cause of the Sodomites' anger seems to be that Lot, himself an outsider in Sodom, has taken upon himself the responsibility of determining whether the visitors are appropriate recipients of the city's hospitality. We have already seen a suggestion that the role of judge is one that the men of Sodom wanted to reserve to themselves. In this way the text suggests that its theme may be hospitality to the stranger: It is possible that the authors of chapters 18 and 19 meant to contrast the extreme hospitality of Abraham and Lot with the extreme inhospitality of the men of Sodom. A survey of other Old Testament texts supports this interpretation. Texts such as Isaiah 1:10; 3:9, Jeremiah 23:14 and Ezekiel 16:49 suggest that their prophetic authors understood the Sodomites to be people who abused power. Their common theme is oppression of the weak. Neither these passages nor any others in the Old Testament associate Sodom with homosexuality, or even sexuality at all.

There is one further Old Testament text that should be considered here. Judges 19 does not mention Sodom, but there are so many parallels between its narrative and that of Genesis 19 that Judges 19 appears to be another telling of the same story. One interesting feature of the Judges version is that the householder's initial offer to the men of two women, his own daughter and the visitor's concubine, is declined, while a subsequent offer of the visitor's concubine alone is accepted. The men of the city rape and abuse her all night. This 'awkward' plot development suggests two things about the motivations of the men of the city. First, it suggests that they were not specifically seeking sex with men (if at all). Secondly, the men's rejection of the host's daughter, but eventual acceptance of the visitor's concubine may lead to the conclusion that their particular target was the visitor; when denied the opportunity to exert power over the visitor directly they were content to humiliate him through the abuse of his concubine. Judges 19, like Genesis 19, may be considered a story about the use and abuse of power.

If Sodom's crime was not popularly understood, at least prior to the time of Christ, to be homosexuality, then when did the identification of the Sodomites as sodomites first arise? Scholars do not agree about when the link between Sodom's sin and homosexuality was

first made. Some suggest that Genesis 19 was first associated with homosexuality in the first century after Christ, and that this can be seen in the writings of Philo and some of the apocryphal material. Others point to the work of the Church Fathers, noting that Origen did not link Sodom with homosexuality at all, while Augustine and John Chrysostom did so only once each, while placing greater emphasis on the theme of hospitality, suggesting that the association between Genesis 19 and homosexuality had not become widespread prior to the fifth century at least.

The earliest interpreters of Genesis 19 did not regard it as self-evident that Sodom's wickedness was homosexuality and in recent years scholars have begun to revisit the issue. This brief survey has set out to challenge the intervening 'traditional' view that includes Genesis 19 among the small number of Biblical texts that address the subject of homosexuality. It has found that a careful reading suggests that, far from being a text that compels its readers to conclude that homosexuality is a sin punishable by God, Genesis 19 can be understood as a narrative that has nothing to say about homosexuality at all. In the circumstances, contemporary readers may fairly consider themselves at liberty to identify within this complex and intriguing piece of Scripture other themes and pre-occupations that do not of themselves compel the holding of any particular view about homosexuality.

Megan Warner

#### Recommended Resources

Lyn Bechtel, 'A Feminist Reading of Genesis 19. 1-11' in Athalya Brenner, Ed., *Genesis: A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)* (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1998)  
Mark Brett, *Genesis: Procreation and the politics of identity* (London: Routledge, 2000)  
Patrick Vandermeersch, 'Sodomites, Gays and Biblical Scholars: A Gathering Organized by Peter Damian?' in Ed Noort and Eibert Tigchelaar, Eds., *Sodom's Sin: Genesis 18-19 and its Interpretations* (Leiden: Koninklijke, Brill NV, 2004)  
Audio from the Lambeth Conference Press Conference on 30 July 2008, chaired by Archbishop Phillip Aspinall, Australian Primate, and featuring a discussion of Genesis 19 by Professor Gerald West:  
<http://www.lambethconference.org/daily/news.cfm/2008/7/30/ACNS4490>



**(Summary of) 'Taking the Bible fully seriously:  
an Anglican reading of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13'**

**A problem**

Taken at face value, and in isolation, these two verses prohibit male-male homosexual acts. Read in their historical, cultural, and literary context, however, they do not address what might be understood by the term 'homosexuality' today. Given this, and the fact that part of 20:13 ('they shall be put to death') cannot simply be taken at face value in a twenty-first-century Western setting, how do Anglicans – gay and straight – take the Bible fully seriously?

**Reading the Bible as Anglicans**

There are at least four related features of an Anglican approach to scripture:

(1) A 'high' view of scripture ... and of the church

The same Holy Spirit believed to have inspired scripture in the past is still at work in the church as it interprets scripture in the present. The Bible and the church make sense of each other.

(2) An understanding of the authority of scripture as 'relative', rather than 'absolute'

For Anglicans the Bible is a primary source of authority, but never the only source of authority. Several classic Anglican formulations hold the Bible in tension with other important theological sources; among them God-given human reason, and the church's tradition (or experience).

(3) An 'incarnational' view of scripture

Scripture is inspired by God whose eternal Word became flesh in Jesus of Nazareth. Anglicans see this 'scandal of particularity' (Jesus being born at a particular time and place) as applying no less to the written word of God, which is also to some extent culturally bound and specific.

(4) A 'canonical' approach to the reading of scripture

This is all about context: reading texts like Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 within the wider sweep of Leviticus as a 'book', mindful of the witness of the Bible as a whole; and reading both scripture and tradition in the context of a dialogue with the society in which the church is set and to which it is sent, and where the Holy Spirit is also active.

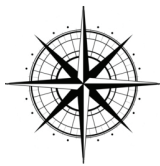
**Reading Leviticus 18:22 & 20:13 as Anglicans**

Leviticus reflects the ritual practices (worship) of what biblical scholars call the 'Second Temple period' in Jerusalem, before the Common Era, and is chiefly concerned with 'holiness as separateness' – both God's and Israel's. The primary measure of Israel's holiness was thus to be its difference from the surrounding nations. Leviticus, like much of the Hebrew Bible (OT), is haunted by Israel's struggle to keep the covenant forged with God at Mount Sinai. This is especially so with respect to the ongoing influence of some socio-religious customs from the neighbouring peoples displaced by God (according to the 'plain sense' of the narrative) on Israel, including male cultic prostitution as part of the idolatrous worship of 'foreign' gods. The 'Holiness Code' (Leviticus 17 onwards) identifies male-male intercourse as one such 'abomination' to be avoided by Israel as a mark of its separateness from these nations. 'Abomination' here suggests something ritually (as distinct from morally) offensive as a result of the confusion or mixing of the clean (or sacred) with the unclean (or profane).

Taking these texts fully seriously means reading them – as best we can – in their full literary, historical, and cultural (including religious) contexts. It means not expecting them to solve, or even directly bear upon, issues arising from a completely different raft of contexts. It means bringing them into conversation with other sources of revelation, which is understood to be progressive rather than final or finished. It also means adopting a 'hermeneutic of resistance' (reading against the 'face value' or 'plain sense') in cases where aspects of a text's own worldview have become problematic, as for example with respect to the way indigenous societies are regarded in Leviticus.

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# three



## Romans Chapter One Verses 26-27

### A. What is the Bible?

What do Anglicans think of Scripture? Compared to some other Reformation creeds, The Articles of Religion are fairly minimalist: Article VI says that *Holy Scripture contains all things necessary to salvation*. It does not consider whether Scripture is inerrant, infallible or even inspired. Scripture contains good food, says the Collect for the Second Sunday of Advent. We are encouraged to hear, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest Scripture, to receive salvation through it. We interpret Scripture as prejudiced readers, but prejudiced in a good way: readers who expect to find good food and even salvation through its words - stories, history, prophecies, commandments, wisdom and songs.

For much of Church History the Bible has been a battleground for the church. Willard Swartley has written an illuminating book *Slavery, Sabbath, War and Women* showing how Scripture has been used on both sides of each of these four historical debates to "prove" a point. It is not that Scripture contradicts itself, but if it is read as a flat text and taken out of context, some verses do seem to contradict others.

St Paul was not somehow separated from his human nature when we wrote his Epistle to the Romans. This is not to deny the inspiration of Holy Scripture, but a comprehensive belief in inspiration sees the Holy Spirit active at every point of transmission, from the situation in Rome, to Paul's childhood and schooling and experiences, to the reaction in Rome that caused them to keep his letter for posterity, to those who copied and kept it, translated it into other languages, and finally brought it to my desk where I can prayerfully open it and interpret it with my full humanity at work.

But we read Scripture not first and foremost as individuals, but as a Church community. And our communal life prejudices our reading, as we have seen in The Articles of Religion, assuming that *Holy Scripture contains all things necessary to salvation*. In this way prejudice is a good thing. How, then, do we read the Bible for our times and with regard to this matter?

### B. How do we read it?

#### i. Read the whole of Scripture

We should not make prejudgments about which parts of Scripture are more useful than others. We will read with special care the parts that challenge and disturb us, because they are most likely where we will find new life instead of merely having our prejudices confirmed. Coming to Scripture with a closed mind about an overall meaning may mean that we miss the particular meaning that may even change the way we think about the whole. As we draw the odd parts to the centre, our view of the centre itself may change radically.

#### ii. Let go and allow Scripture a life of its own

There is something profoundly Christian in letting go. It is a matter of grace. Letting go is needed if we are to truly profit from Scripture. We firstly trust the text to have good things to say to us, then we ask our questions of the text, then the horizons of text and reader merge. But we finally need to step back from the text and let it raise its own concerns of us. We need to truly listen.

#### iii. Draw the margins and the marginalised into the centre

The Psalter is half praise and half lament. The laments are cries from the margins, the poor, the sick, those in trouble, and who get no justice. Praise tends to uphold the status quo. So the cries of those marginalised from our worship and church life should be heard within our worship and church life. Jesus ate with the marginalised, tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners. For gay people this hermeneutical move will see them brought to the centre of Church where straight Christians can listen to what gay exegetes say.

#### iv. Read eschatologically

We interpret from heaven backwards, not creation forwards. When the Sadducees propose their conundrum to Jesus about the woman with seven husbands "In the resurrection whose wife will she be?" (Mark 12:18-27) Jesus answers that "God is God of the living". Where we are headed - the new heavens and earth - is not just a re-run of the way it was at creation before sin entered human life. This method begins by asking 'What will we be like when we see not in a mirror dimly but face to face and know fully even as we have been fully known?' (1 Corinthians 13:12)

### C. Romans 1:26-27

There are a small number of texts that mention homosexual behaviour. This is the most vital mentioning homosexual behaviour in the same breath as "the lusts of the hearts of those who have exchanged the truth of God for a lie." (Romans 1:25) .

#### i. Natural and unnatural

In verses 26-27 Paul describes behaviour driven by lust and greed rather than committed and faithful love. Of Paul's use of the words "natural" and "unnatural", Brendan Byrne argues that "the language reflects the conventional Stoic sense of 'nature' as the established order of things. (cf 1 I:21, 24). Paul here condemns heterosexual people who are acting, out of greed and lust, as if they had a homosexual orientation. He seems to have no understanding of people who are genuinely or "naturally" homosexual. Romans 1:26-27 is an horrific description of what happens when humans do not honour God. It is about the consequences of idolatry, which Paul understands to have a strong link with sexual depravity. It says nothing about a homosexual couple in a faithful, committed and loving relationship. (page 70)

#### ii. Law and Gospel

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*) played a major role in the ordination of women debate. Paul was defending the very Gospel of Christ as he angrily wrote to the church of Galatia which insisted on circumcision for Gentile believers. But the letters to the Galatians and to the Romans damn a legalistic ethic. Both books argue that those who live under the law are judged by the law and are obligated to keep every commandment of the law. But if Christ is the end of the law, then we are freed to live new life in the Spirit. If we are indeed all one in Christ, then there is no male or female, just as there is no slave or free, and no gay or straight. And if we now wish to make the words of Scripture, even of Paul himself, into a new Law, we are doing what the apostle fiercely condemned.

### D. Love or power?

Walter Wink examines the many and varied biblical views on sexual intercourse, adultery, nudity, polygamy, levirate marriage, semen and menstrual uncleanness, social regulations on rape, incest, prostitution and property rights, divorce, celibacy, and other sexual matters such as the lack of terms for sexual organs. He concludes boldly:

"The crux of the matter is simply that the Bible has no sexual ethic. There is no biblical sex ethic. Instead it exhibits a variety of sexual mores, some of which changed over the thousand year span of biblical history. Mores are unreflective customs accepted by a given community. Many of the practices that the Bible prohibits, we allow, and many that it allows, we prohibit. The Bible knows *only a love ethic*, which is constantly being brought to bear on whatever sexual mores are dominant in any given country, or culture, or period." (page 6)

For the worldwide Anglican communion this means that we may have to live together with great diversity about the issue of homosexuality and acknowledge that it has more to do with culture than clear biblical commands.

But such a way of going forward is risky. If we draw gay people to the centre of church proceedings, rather than leaving them on the margins, we may, we will, change the church irrevocably. If we allow gay people to teach and preach Scripture, the power base of our church will shift.

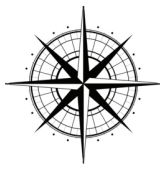
We speak as if we live by grace, but we long to live under the Law. We preach a life of faith but we long to live by sight. Could it be that Scripture encourages us to live without unequivocal guidance about most sexual matters? What is clear is that we are commanded to love one another, even those with whom we disagree on this matter:

Peta Sherlock (The Very Rev'd Dr)

Dean of Bendigo

*A longer version of this essay can be found on Changing Attitude Australia website*

# four



## Keeping Lists or Embracing Freedom: I Corinthians 6:9-10 in Context

All too often a small section of the Bible, say a verse or two, is used to justify or negate a contemporary viewpoint. Scant regard is given to the multiple contexts which inform these verses and help to bring understanding of what the verses likely meant when they were written. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians suffers particularly from this. The minutiae of two words that occur in a 'vice list' in I Corinthians 6:9-10 are lifted out of context and used as a biblical appeal to make decisions about issues that have grabbed attention today. This offends any usual approach to literature. At a deeper, theological level it offends an understanding of the importance of the incarnation and the importance of history. The material reality and value of history is one of the great affirmations of the Judeo-Christian story. What must be rejected is the isolated focus on two words in I Corinthians 6:9-10 (*malakos and arsenokoites*) that assumes that a dictionary study will yield the meaning in this literary and historical contexts. Modern scholarship recognises that words only have meaning in a specific context.

Therefore, if these verses of Paul's letter, and the particular words in them, are to be understood meaningfully, they need to be set into two broad contexts. Firstly, there is the literary context of the larger section of the first letter to the Corinthians in which the verses occur. Secondly, there is the historical context which determines what meaning these verses could have in the time of their writing. Within these two broad fields are further levels of context. On the literary side, there is the rhetoric — the persuasive intent — of vice lists and their use in literature, that is, what are they designed to achieve as a response by those who read or hear them. There is also the structural context, that is the larger section of writing in which the vice list in I Corinthians 6:9-10 occurs. This larger section is all about an address of a specific pastoral issue in the Corinthian community. On the historical side, there is a great need to be sensitive to issues of gender in the first century of our era. This means recognising the expectations placed upon the behaviour of freeborn males of high status. It also means recognising the Roman imperial context that values the assertion of power by a privileged few over the many others.

The larger literary unit within which the vice-list occurs is I Corinthians chapters five and six. This larger unit deals with a major pastoral and communal issue that has been reported to Paul, namely, incest. What Paul is concerned about is how the offender is to be characterised and managed and how the wider community is to consider the offender. This is the controlling context for the vice list. It is used as a means to draw out the general ethical significance of the specific offender and to instruct the community about how to understand this offence. The vice list operates within this framework, a framework that determines a behaviour as incest. It has nothing to do with either modern conceptions of homosexuality or ancient same-sex relationships. It judges the dishonour and violence of the incestuous male offender to be against the father/husband of the woman involved. Notably the woman is given little significance in the whole affair — this tallies with ancient concerns about the honour of freeborn males. Significantly however, Paul does not rest a decision in a legalistic application of a summary vice-list. He is concerned to correct another summary slogan used at Corinth: "all things are lawful". For Paul, the freedom of the gospel is about freedom *for* the other person in the community and in society, whoever they may be. Incest has fractured this freedom. This accent on community service rather than a worried avoidance of vices is found in one other gospel text, the parable of the Pharisee and the Toll-Collector (Luke 18:9-14). Luke is writing to address the problem of a leadership that has drifted from the freedom and mercy of the good news to a reliance on righteous attainment. In this story, we have a gospel message that matches the intention of Paul's writing.

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# five

## I Timothy 1:8–10

### The text

*Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it legitimately. This means understanding that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their father or mother, for murderers, fornicators, sodomites, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.*

(I Timothy 1:8–11 NRSV)

### Whose voice are we hearing?

It is very helpful to gain a clear sense of whose voice we are hearing when we read these words from I Timothy.

Are we hearing the voice of God in this passage, or the voice of an influential leader in the early Christian community? And if it is the latter, was it Paul the Apostle or one of his successors? And what difference does it make how we answer those questions?

Competent biblical scholars know that every word in the Bible comes from humans, no matter how we understand the “inspiration” of the Scriptures. The words were chosen by the authors of the documents that later came to be accepted as sacred Scripture. Most often the authors would have no idea that their words might become part of the Bible, although in some cases people may have written with an awareness that their words could be taken as part of the Bible.

That may be the case with the three NT letters sometimes called the “Pastoral Epistles” – I & 2 Timothy, and Titus. They form a distinct set of three, and do not appear in the oldest collections of Pauline writings. Almost certainly they were written many decades after Paul’s death, but they seek to invoke the authority of Paul for their opinions.

An early church leader, writing sometime in the middle of the second century CE, was addressing some really serious problems in the churches of his time. He adopts a very conservative attitude on a whole range of social issues, and especially on gender roles—which were closely related to “respectability” for this author. This was not only a “steady as she goes” approach for the church at the time, but also in keeping with trends in the wider Roman society at that time when traditional values were especially valued after a period of chaos in the senior leadership of the empire.

### **How do we listen?**

Like any other text, the Bible has to be read and interpreted by a reader—and preferably by a community of readers—before it has any meaning. And every reader/community will bring to the act of reading their own perspective. Meaning, including our sense of what God might be saying to us through a Bible passage, emerges from the interaction of text and reader; just as music emerges from the interaction of musician and score.

So we listen attentively, but we pay attention both to the words and context of the Bible, and also to the context and questions of our own time. We read the Bible not to access a set of timeless answers to tricky questions, but in search of wisdom for holy living in the present circumstances of the twenty-first century. We bring our questions. We pay attention to the ways people tackled similar questions, or maybe different questions, in the past. And we seek God's wisdom for how we should address our questions here and now.

### **What do we do?**

We notice that the author sees rules for living ("the law") as necessary for people who might otherwise have no idea about how to behave properly. He gives a long list of pretty extreme misbehaviour, and part way through the list he mentions sexual offenders: "fornicators" and "sodomites."

The Greek words used by our second century author are ambiguous and our Bible versions struggle to know how best to translate them. The Greek word *pornois*, suggests men engaging in improper sexual activity with women, while the second Greek term, *arsenokoitais*, suggests improper sexual activity with other men. Typical of the time, sexual activity initiated by women is not even considered. Perhaps they could not imagine it?

Our early church leader includes improper sexual behaviour (i.e., behaviour that offends the cultural values of the community) among a list of serious misbehaviours that can be restrained by proper adherence to the rules.

If our contemporary cultural values are not the same as those of second century Roman society, then we may have trouble transferring the instructions of I Timothy across to our time and place. Our view of women may be different. Our views of children, or slaves will no doubt be different. Our understanding of what it means to be human may have changed. We may have a very different view of gender and human sexuality. What our ancestors may have found offensive may not offend us. And actions they found acceptable may be deeply offensive to us. We will want to live in ways that avoid offending people, and in ways that express our intention to live a godly life. Indiscriminate and promiscuous sexual activity—no matter what genders are involved—is clearly unacceptable, but sexual activity between persons of the same gender within a committed relationship may not be offensive to the contemporary Christian.

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