

## A Biblical Defense of the ELCA

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The strongest advocates of a Biblical condemnation of same-sex relationships subscribe to a Sacred Writ view of Biblical authority.

If you truly believe that point of view, however, then you cannot pick and choose what parts of the Bible you are going to accept. If you believe that God condemns homosexuality because of selected verses, then you also have to believe that it is an abomination:

- to eat pork, bacon, (Levit 11:7-8)
- to eat shrimp, clams, oysters, scallops, crab, lobster, and squid (Levit 11:10-12)
- to do any work on the Sabbath, *under penalty of death* (Exodus 35:2)
- to let your furnace run on the Sabbath (even when it's -20 outside) (Exodus 35:3)
- to wear any clothing made of blended material (Deut 22:11)
- to shave or trim your beard or have a tattoo (Levit 19:27-28)
- for a woman to wear pants (Deut 22:5)

Furthermore, if you believe God condemns homosexuality in the Bible because of selected verses, then you must believe with equal conviction that:

- a defiant child must be stoned to death (Deut 21:18-21)
- God *requires* you to sell all you have and give the money to the poor. (Luke 18:18-22)
- no one who is lame or has a defect in sight can be a pastor
- no one who has a blemish can approach the altar for communion (Lev 21:18-21)
- it is shameful for a woman to read a lesson or say a prayer in church ( I Corinth 14:34-35)
- offering your daughters to a mob to be gang-raped is an acceptable alternative (Gen 19:8)
- not only is slavery fine with God but beating a slave to death is righteous behavior so long as the slave survives a day or two (Exodus 21:20-21)
- polygamy is valid (the patriarch Jacob had 4 wives)
- genocide is not only okay but sometimes demanded by God (Joshua 8:24-27, 10:40)

When people complain that the ELCA is no longer a Bible-based church, what they mean is that the ELCA is not a Holy Writ church. **It never has been.** In the ELCA, we take the unique view of actually following the teaching of Martin Luther, who urged us to read the Bible, the inspired Word of God, in light of its central claims of who God is and how God relates to us.

If we read the Bible in light of the central claims of who God is and how God relates to us, the Bible tells a very different story than what the ELCA's critics would have us believe.

### **Look at the key Biblical texts that are central to our faith—from a law perspective.**

1. Exodus 20 The 10 commandments. *The issue of same-gender relationships doesn't appear.*
2. Matthew 22:36-40 Jesus is asked what is the essence of the law. He answers, "Love God and your neighbor." *Again, this issue is not in the picture.*
3. Galatians 5:14 gives a similar essence of the law. *Again this issue is not there.*
4. Jesus never spoke one word on this issue.

Given all that, as a law issue, committed same-gender relation issues cannot by any stretch of the imagination be considered central to the message of the Bible. If that is what fuels our energy and our passion, we have no business pretending we are the church Jesus Christ calls us to be.

**On the other hand:**

5. Ex 22:21-24 holds high the issue of justice for the poor, the oppressed, and the stranger. This focus occurs so often in the Bible that it has to be considered a central theme. This passage is the only case in the Bible where God takes a law personally: *I will kill you*. Whether or not you take that literally, the meaning is clear—justice is absolutely central to who God is.

Luke 16:19-31. Only one sin we know of got this guy sent to hell—failure to do justice. Again, the meaning of the story is clear—justice is central.

5. Matt 25: 31-46 Again what is the sin that sends them into damnation? Injustice.

6. Matt 18: 23-35 This guy owes the equivalent of 100s of billions of dollars. God forgives it all. God forgives EVERYTHING in this story EXCEPT injustice.

**The conclusion:**

1. Jesus never condemns same-sex relations
2. In the Bible, God's wrath is aimed at injustice.

**Is this a law issue or a justice issue?**

If, in one's experience, those in committed, same-gender relationships are actively recruiting, corrupting, and threatening the stability of the family and culture, then this is *a law issue*.

If, in one's experience, they are just people who happen to be wired differently, then this is *a non-issue*.

If, in one's experience they are good friends or family, you share their pain and heartache, and get a feel for the abuse and persecution they experience, physically and emotionally, then this is very much *a justice issue*.

Given this range of experience, it is impossible at this time for all committed, faithful Christians to agree on exactly to what degree same-gender issues are justice issues or law issues. There's no way to prove from Scripture that one side or the other is right in the degree to which it considers this a law issue or justice issue.

The ELCA recognized the futility of reaching a consensus on this issue at this time: that is why the ELCA wisely left this decision to individual congregations, heeding Paul's admonition in Titus 3:9, "*Avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissension, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.*"

Given what Jesus says about God's hatred of injustice, given Jesus' disgust with the Pharisees harping on their morality laws all the time, and given Paul's admonition, the unmistakable message of the Bible is that if you're going to err, you had better err on the side of justice.

The ELCA's stance is faithful to that message. Imagine the lives that could be changed if Christians took 1/10<sup>th</sup> the energy they spend promoting the agenda of Jesus' enemies and instead focused it on the proclaiming the Gospel.