

Getting all we can from Scripture

Men's Bible Study at Park View

April 7, 2015

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Session 1 - Introduction; Prepare your heart

We value the Bible, agreeing with

- what Scripture says about itself
2 Timothy 3:16

- what Christ said about Scripture
Matt 22:41-46
John 10:30-39

- the church's witness

Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, Article 4 -

"We accept the Scriptures as the Word of God and as the fully reliable and trustworthy standard for Christian faith and life."

"Other claims on our understanding of Christian faith and life, such as tradition, culture, experience, reason, and political powers, need to be tested and corrected by the light of Holy Scripture."

- what the New Testament says about the New Testament
2 Peter 3:15-16

Seven disciplines that help us read God's ideas out of the biblical text (rather than read our ideas into the text)

Discipline #1 - Prepare your heart

Do I open myself hear God in the text?

Am I willing to be confronted by God—to learn that I am wrong?

Or am I only willing to have the Bible say what I already want to do or think?

Luke 10:38-42

John Alexander, "On Misinterpreting Stories You Don't Like," *The Other Side* (March/April 1995) -

"[M]y concern is ... our willingness to ignore the obvious meaning of any biblical story that challenges our behavior. We are comfortable with the stories we agree with, but ignore or interpret those we don't agree with."

"I used to put it this way: 'A passage means what it says unless you have compelling evidence to the contrary.' But over the years that wording hasn't had enough teeth to deter me from rampant misinterpretation, rationalization, and self-deception. So I have devised a new wording: *The interpretation you like least is normally the correct one.*"

1 Cor. 6:9-10 - sodomites (Greek: *arsenokoitai*)

One interpretation (baptistnews.com/opinion/columns/item/29239-two-odd-little-words-the-lgbt-issue-part-11-revised; also in David Gushee, *Changing Our Mind*, p78-79):

Most English-speaking Christians would have no idea that the Greek word being translated was a new word that Paul coined whose meaning and translation are contested.

They would not know of the intense debate among classics scholars and New Testament interpreters as to what Paul was thinking about.... Consensual adult sex? Man-boy sex/abuse? Prostitution? Rape? Abuse of

slaves? They would not, for example, have read biblical scholar Michael Vasey's observation that in imperial Rome same-sex activity was "strongly associated with idolatry, slavery, and social dominance—often the assertion of the strong over the bodies of the weak." Is that what we think today when we hear the term "homosexual"? ...

How might the history of Christian treatment of gays and lesbians have been different if *arsenokoitai* had been translated "sex traffickers" or "sexual exploiters" or "rapists" or "sexual predators" or "pimps"? Such translations are plausible... And they are at least as adequate, or inadequate, as "homosexual"...

Another interpretation (interactingwithjesus.org/gaymatter/inclusion-responses.html):

Paul's list of persons excluded from the kingdom of God includes "male-bedders" (*arsenokoitai*), a compound word formed of two words found in Leviticus 20:13 in the Greek version that Paul used. From its components, the word seems to be a general reference to males choosing same-sex sex. Arguing from its components to what a word means in a particular context is dangerous, with one exception: when the word is so rare that it could not have, through use, shifted away from its inherent morphological meaning. This word is indeed so rare in the Greek world that Paul may have coined it. It could not have, through use, developed a range of meaning beyond the general concept of males choosing same-sex sex; thus it is very tenuous to make the common argument that this word is limited to relationships involving promiscuity or exploitation. English translations of this word are all over the place; but that is due to the church's awkwardness at talking about the topic, not due to ambiguity of meaning.

Questions for Table Discussion:

How hard is it for you personally to approach the Bible with an essential humility? Can you think of an instance when someone was willing to have the Bible say something that they did not want to hear?

Again look at the two interpretations of *arsenokoitai* in 1 Cor. 6. This is not the time to discuss which is right. Rather, take time to talk about your level of ability to acknowledge the force of an interpretation you are sure is wrong, to acknowledge why good-hearted, Bible-believing Christ-followers can hold it. Is it fair to expect someone to be totally open to both interpretations?

Many times it is our own voice we hear in Scripture—we read into the text what we want it to say. Are you pessimistic or optimistic that some simple disciplines can lead us to "get all we can from Scripture," i.e., read God's ideas out of the biblical text?

Believers through the centuries have said that they witness the voice of God in the Bible. Give a time when you witnessed this.