

# Bible Study Resource Booklet



Queer & Christian Without Contradiction Campaign  
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# Queer and Christian Bible Studies

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In this resource you will find 5 bible studies that you can explore on your own, as a local SCM unit, or in any other group.

You are encouraged to use them as a launching pad for exploring the bible and other writings. Use this alone or with the Que(e)rying Religion Resource to encourage discussion and investigation around spirituality and sexuality.

Please share with us your comments, reviews, and experiences!  
[www.scmcanada.org/queer](http://www.scmcanada.org/queer)

# Genesis 1:26-31 Bible Study



## Introduction

We chose this passage because it is the very first encounter we have been given which highlights the relationship between God and the people God creates. We decided that this would be a good place to start to explore our nature as human beings created in the image of God, and a good place to start asking questions about what it means to be created in God's image, especially with regards to gender and sexuality.



## Reflection 1

What images, challenges, questions does this passage raise for you?  
What is your previous history with it?

## Reflection 2

What can be inferred from this passage about the meaning of the word "fruitful"? Where else do we encounter the words "fruit" and "fruitful" in the bible or in church teachings? How are they used?

**Reflection 3**

Our understanding of who God is has major implications for our relations with others. What does this passage tell us about God? What is God's image? What does this mean for gay, lesbian, straight, and transgendered people?

**Reflection 4**

In this passage we are told that God blessed everything. What does it mean to be blessed? How does this blessing affect the way we live if we accept this all encompassing blessing?

**One Interpretation**

This passage focuses on the creation of human beings on the sixth day. It explains how God made people in God's image, and entrusted the rest of creation to their care and use.

God's instructions to the people were, "Be fruitful and multiply". From other uses of the word "fruitful" we can see that God's interpretation of this word doesn't necessarily involve children (for example, fruits of the spirit as referenced in - Galatians 5:22, I Corinthians 13:3-8, Phillipians 4:8, Colossians 3:12-16 ).

As God gave them these instructions, God blessed them and we are told that God was pleased with what had been created. This blessing was inclusive. No one was left outside of it, which is part of the beauty of this passage-it is affirming and loving.

# Galatians 2:1-15 Bible Study



## Introduction

Queer people have always been a part of the Christian community from its earliest days (Acts 8). Like the welcome of the Gentiles, however, the welcome of GLBT folks still causes a great deal of tension in many Christian communities. This passage from Galatians 2 deals with many of the same tensions, and therefore may have something valuable to contribute to our justice-seeking for our GLBT brothers and sisters. Interestingly, the passage comes from Paul, long regarded as an enemy of queer justice. Galatians is Paul's second letter (after 1 Thessalonians); in it, he struggles to apply what he knows of Jesus and the "good news" to the situations in his churches. If this is true, perhaps he can be an ally in our struggles for inclusion.



## Reflection 1

When is it appropriate to say that someone is "clearly in the wrong"? Is there a usual function in the Church for doctrine and disputes about doctrine? How does the practice of welcoming intersect with doctrine and how do they both relate in the lives of GLBT people? How would you approach dealing with someone who is teaching oppressive theology?

**Reflection 2**

Compare the story of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) with this passage. Though Galatians was written first, does Paul's dispute with Peter seem to take place before or after the Jerusalem council? Does your answer change how you feel about the dispute? What pressures do you think Peter was under to "forget" to welcome Gentiles into the Church? What kind of pressures do we face that tempt us to live out the status quo?

**Reflection 3**

Is it important for GLBT folks to "check" with the church to see if we are welcome? How do we deal with people in the church who disagree with us? When is it proper, or necessary, to resist apostolic authority? If it is proper or necessary, what does it mean to affirm that the Christian community is "apostolic"? Is Paul's reaction to disagreement the best one for our day? Why or why not?

**Reflection 4**

Some people may recognize or welcome Gentiles (or GLBT folks) in the Church right away. Others may tend to wait until they are convinced by Church leadership or by scholarship. Do these two approaches contradict each other? Is there another alternative? Which approach tends to be closer to your own, and what are the advantages and challenges of your approach?

**Reflection 5**

Discuss Karl Barth's statement: We must "live as though [we] have heard a true word, and are radically smitten by it." How does that relate to this passage, and how does it relate to the lives of GLBT people, the Church, and the Gospel of Christ? Are we as individuals "smitten" by Christ and the gospel? How do we know?

## **One Interpretation**

**Galatians, overall, shows that Gentile believers are included in the community of faith by their trust in Christ and the reception of the Spirit, not because they follow the Law. When Paul begins his letter, he can hardly give the proper greeting before diving right in to the main problem, as he sees it: the Galatians risk losing the true Gospel.**

**Paul defends his apostolic ministry to the community (2: 1-5). Against people who insisted that Gentile believers must be circumcised and must follow the Torah, Paul argues that the Galatians' trust in Christ and their reception of the Holy Spirit showed God's welcome to them. Any other message was, in fact, "another gospel" that would lead the community back into slavery. Paul feels that it is wrong to enforce ethnic boundary markers (Torah observance and circumcision) upon Gentiles as a condition of welcome, as though to say, "You have to behave just like us! Somewhat of a rebel, Paul insists that the apostles (who are not important in themselves, v. 6) agree with him: they add "nothing to my message."**

**When Peter stops eating with the Gentiles at the behest of some who came from the Apostle James (remember that table fellowship indicated full acceptance, as in Jesus' ministry), Paul confronts Peter directly about his hypocrisy. He doesn't live what he preaches!**

**If Peter lives exactly opposite to his convictions (by no longer welcoming Gentiles), how can he say he's "a good Jew" when he only behaves that way when "good Jews" are around? Paul's challenge to Peter, and to us, includes living out the implications of the "good news," which he tries to explain throughout the rest of the letter. Theologian Karl Barth reflected this Pauline passion when he said that we must "live as though we have heard a true word and are radically smitten by it."**



# Sodom Bible Study



## Introduction

The Sodom story in Genesis 19 is often used as the *locus classicus* (along with some passages by St Paul) to show that the Bible condemns same-sex relations. Indeed the terms “sodomy” and “sodomite” take for granted that the story is about homosexual activity. Yet it says nothing about sexual orientation and instead describes attempted gang rape. In Ezekiel 16:49 the sin of Sodom is named as social injustice. A different interpretation from the traditional one is therefore not only possible but required.



## Reflection 1

If Sodom represents social injustice, who might be the Sodomites of our day?

## Reflection 2

Why do you think passages such as Ezekiel 16:49 have been generally overlooked by those who see the Sodom story as one condemning homosexuality?

### **Reflection 3**

Look at Matthew 10:15 and Luke 17:29 – how is Jesus using Sodom as an example in these cases?

### **Reflection 4**

Reread the Sodom story in Genesis 19 and consider how it might relate to GLBT experience if (a) the guests were gay men targeted for attack; (b) Lot were a gay man trying to take care of the vulnerable members of the community; (c) Lot's daughters were lesbian and their sexuality discounted; (d) your own experience were the lens.

### **One Interpretation**

The classic story of Sodom in Genesis 19, often understood to be a story about a city of homosexuals judged and destroyed by God for their sexual activity, is in fact a story about the social evils of injustice, greed, pride, inhospitality and violence. It has a mythic aspect to it, probably indicating that a story was created to explain the burnt barrenness of the area, associated with a calamitous natural disaster that made it uninhabitable.

The men of the city who approach Lot's home to assault his visitors are clearly not homosexual, or Lot would not offer them his virgin daughters in a (shockingly sexist and patriarchal) attempt to protect his guests. Their intention is rape, the ultimate breaking of the Middle Eastern code of desert hospitality, and a universal act of domination and humiliation.

Sodom stands in the Hebrew scriptures as a symbol of devastation. There are many references to it in this way, without any mention of sexual sin. See for example Deut. 29:23; Jer. 49:18; Amos 4:11. Where we might say, "Like New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina," the Hebrew people saw Sodom as the ultimate image of destruction.

A closer look at some of the references which refer to Sodom reveal the social evils mentioned above:



**Isaiah 1: 10f – “Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom!... your hands are full of blood... cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.”**

**Isaiah 3: 9, 15 – “They proclaim their sin like Sodom... What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor? says the Lord God of hosts.”**

**Jeremiah 23: 11, 14 – “Both prophet and priest are ungodly... they commit adultery and walk in lies; they strengthen the hands of evildoers... all of them have become like Sodom to me.”**

**Ezekiel 16: 49 – “This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy.”**

**Sodom represents not sexual immorality but social injustice. Its destruction was a judgment not on homosexuals but on the proud, the greedy and the heartless.**

# Romans 1:21-2:16 Bible Study



## Introduction

We chose this particular passage because it is one of the key New Testament passages that is used to condemn homosexuality, in a very non-ambiguous manner. Secondly, this is the only passage which MAY refer to lesbianism.



## Reflection 1

What images, challenges, questions does this passage raise for you?  
What is your previous history with it?

## Reflection 2

This is a difficult passage because Paul is writing to a specific group of people who are struggling with a specific group of issues at a specific time in history. It is meant to be part of a larger conversation, but we only get one part of this. What do we know, or what can we infer about the setting and context from Paul's words?

## Reflection 3

This passage is thought to refer to homosexuality because of its reference to natural and unnatural relations. What could be meant by natural and unnatural? One's definition of natural depends on whether it is biology-based, or centered around the norms of one's society. Which do you think Paul is writing about? Is there a difference between identity and behavioural choices?

**Reflection 4**

What do you think is Paul's purpose for elaborating on his list of sins? What is Paul's concern with harmful behaviour? How does this connect to the larger themes in the passage?

**Reflection 5**

Why is the beginning of Chapter 2 relevant to our understanding of the first chapter? In what ways does judgmentalism factor into our church groups now?

**Reflection 6**

How do we decide how important this text is? Are there other biblical norms that support or contradict this text?

**One Interpretation**

In this passage Paul is addressing a specific group of people, but his address can be divided into two sections. In the first, Paul is talking about God's wrath towards those who turn against God through a variety of different ways. One of these ways mentions natural and unnatural relations between men, and also between women.

This brings into question issues surrounding the meaning of natural and unnatural. For instance, what is natural for a gay man is quite different than what is natural for a straight man. It also raises questions about whether "natural" refers to societal norms, and therefore behavioural choices, or whether it refers to biology.

In the second section, Paul condemns the judgmental nature of the people who probably would have been nodding their heads in agreement to the first section, deeming themselves above such activities. The purpose of this passage, therefore, seems to be to highlight the hypocrisy of some members of society who think themselves above sin, as no one is, and to reinforce our need for God's grace.

# Sabbath Bible Study



Mark 2:22-28, 3:1-6; Luke 13:10-17; John 5:1-18; John 9:13-17

## Introduction

Over the past decade there has been much discussion about the issue of same-sex marriage. Opponents to same-sex marriage often claim that it would weaken, threaten or destroy “the sanctity of the divinely created institution of marriage.” It was during this debate that I started to reflect on Jesus' attitudes toward the institutions of his day, particularly any that are considered in the Bible to be divinely created, like scripture (called the Law and the Prophets), the temple, marriage and the Sabbath.

In many ways Jesus seems to honour these institutions. He goes to the temple to pray, he quotes the Law and the Prophets, he begins his ministry (in the Gospel of John) by attending a wedding. At the same time Jesus doesn't stop at honouring these institutions. He often challenges how people think about them. He turned over tables in the temple, he often gave a new interpretation to the Law and the Prophets (“you have heard it said . . . but I say to you . . .”). Even at the only wedding we know of him attending his only action was to turn water into wine!

The one institution that seems to have troubled Jesus the most was the Sabbath. He couldn't seem to resist healing people on the day of the week when healing was forbidden. And he didn't stop there. He argued that he was right in doing so and challenged people's understanding of the institution.

## Background on Sabbath

One of the primary institutions in Judaism both today and in Biblical times was the keeping of the Sabbath, the holy day that begins each week.

The first references in the Bible to a Sabbath are found in the Book of Exodus where the Hebrew people, having fled slavery in Egypt begin their long journey through the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula. For five days God gives them manna to eat with the instruction to only gather enough for one day. Those who tried to keep some for two days found it became foul and wormy. On the sixth day Moses instructs the people to gather enough for two days, for the seventh day will be a day of “*solemn rest, a holy sabbath to the Lord.*” (See Exodus 16: 22-26 NRSV)



The Sabbath was more deeply instituted later in the story of the Exodus in the Ten Commandments which Moses brought from Mount Sinai to the people. It is the third of the ten, which indicates its importance. The Sabbath commandment is stated in Exodus 20:8-11.

Here the Sabbath rest has become a day to keep “holy” and is extended to the whole household, including livestock and “alien residents in your towns.” The reason for the Sabbath is connected to the first story of creation (Genesis 1) where God rests on the seventh day, giving the day of rest blessing and consecration.

Exodus 31: 12-17 indicates that work profanes the Sabbath and that anyone who works on the Sabbath should be put to death!

Exodus 35: 2-3 prohibits even making a fire for warmth.

Throughout the Book of Leviticus there are many Sabbath references making it clear that the Sabbath is to be a day of worship and special offerings. In Leviticus 25: 2-4, the Sabbath is extended to the very land which the people farm, giving it a year of rest after six years of being planted.

In Nehemiah 13 we read of the reforms instituted by Nehemiah in which he blames the profaning of the Sabbath for the defeat of Israel by the Babylonians and calls for renewed commitment to the institution.

By Jesus’ day the Sabbath was well established as a divinely created, blessed and consecrated day in which no work could be done and the day was to be kept holy. This raised some inevitable questions. How does one keep the Sabbath day “holy”? What does rest mean? What is work? Is it ever permissible to work on the Sabbath?

The Pharisees (Jesus may have been one) were a group of very religious Jews who were committed to keeping all the laws of the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament. They were extremely careful to not break any of the laws. In terms of the Sabbath, this meant that because the Sabbath began at sundown they would make sure they were home an hour before in case something delayed them.

(Note: in the Bible the day begins at sunset, not sunrise. The Sabbath begins at sunset on Friday and continues through to sunset on Saturday. Early Christians changed the day and the time because the resurrection of Jesus was discovered on Sunday morning, the third day after his execution on the Friday before.)

By being so careful the Pharisees thought that they would serve as a model for all Jewish people and for the world and that by their strict obedience to their practices the world would be saved. They took it as a matter of personal honour to confront people like Jesus who clearly broke the requirements of the Sabbath on many occasions.

By Jesus' time the only acceptable work one could do on the Sabbath was to save a life.

NRSV lists 97 references to Sabbath in the OT and 60 in the NT.

### **Reflection 1**

What makes something an institution? What kind of institutions are you a part of or which affect your life? In what ways are they beneficial to you and in what ways harmful? What are the benefits of the Sabbath as an institution, one day in seven set aside for rest and spiritual reflection? What are some of the problems? Is it workable today?

### **Reflection 2**

When he healed people on the Sabbath was Jesus just being rebellious? What would have happened to Jesus if it were established that he broke the Sabbath Laws? Are his actions and comments on the Sabbath likely to have changed people's perspective and values? What about your own views?

### **Reflection 3**

From your own knowledge of the Bible what does it say about marriage as a divinely created institution? Is it fair to equate the institution of marriage with the institution of the Sabbath? What do you think Jesus might say about the institution of marriage in light of the issues of today?

### **Reflection 4**

What does Jesus' challenge of other institutions (ie. The Torah, Matthew 5: 38-42) say about the place of institutions in our lives today?



### **One Interpretation**

Each of these texts and their parallels show Jesus putting people in priority over one of the most central institutions in Judaism, the Sabbath. Next to the temple itself, keeping the Sabbath by not working was a divinely instituted practice in Judaism. It is the third of the Ten Commandments, given by God through Moses. The only exceptions in Jesus' day were for acts which would save someone's life. Jesus appears to have no qualms at all about healing the sick and crippled on the Sabbath but does not justify it by trying to claim that he was saving their lives. Instead he places just treatment of people over the laws of the Sabbath, saying, in effect, people are more important than the institutions, divine or otherwise, that we uphold.

These passages are of contemporary relevance when we see so many Christians and Christian churches committing themselves to protecting the "divinely created" institution of marriage" by opposing same-sex marriage.

Reflecting on these passages I have come to believe that Jesus would not choose to protect the institution of marriage. Instead he would take the risk, enhancing marriage by honouring the desire of two people to enter into a covenant of mutual respect before God. Jesus always seems to put the need for health and healthy relationships above the needs of a long established practice or an institution, divinely created or not.

## Other Suggested Readings

If you have tried any of the previous bible studies, or even if you haven't, take a new look at the spiritual world around you. Use your new eyes to look at any of these other texts:

- **Look for References to Sexuality or Outsiders in other Holy Writings**

Qur'an, The Analects, Bhagavad Gita, RigVeda, The Eddas, The Tanakh, Theravada Buddhist Texts, Mahayana Buddhist Texts, Tibetan Buddhist Texts, The Urantia Book, Baha'i Sacred Writings, Tao-Te Ching, and many others

- **Denominational Writings**

Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body  
(Pope John Paul II, translated Sep 2006)

Letter to Women - Pope John Paul II (June 1995)

Membership, Ministry, & Human Sexuality (United Church Aug 1988)

Journal of Lutheran Ethics (Volume 7, Issue 2 Feb 2007)

American Baptist Men USA Policy on Human Sexuality (July 2005)

- **Prayers, Litanies & Creeds**

- **Hymns & Worship Music**

- **Doctrines from your own church/faith background**

- **Anything else that interests you**

Please share with us your comments, reviews, and experiences!  
[www.scmcanada.org/queer](http://www.scmcanada.org/queer)

# How to “Bible Study”

*This is merely a suggestion on how a bible study could be done. There are no right or wrong methods, do what works best for you and your group and what feels most comfortable. If something doesn't work, try something else.*

## **Preparation**

Before the day of the bible study, read through the study you are doing and assume that the people in your group will not be familiar with ‘religious terms’. Look for any words you might need a definition for. Look for references that you might need to bring (or bring a concordance). Gather these ahead of time to make the bible study go as smoothly as possible. Do introductions, prayer and/or liturgy (brief), ice-breakers if the group is new or there are new people present, and set group norms.

## **Gathering**

Do introductions, prayer and/or liturgy (brief), ice-breakers if the group is new or there are new people present, and set group norms.

## **Activity**

Here are two possible warm-up activities.

Put "sexuality" up on a flipchart/whiteboard and ask people to come up with words they associate with "sexuality". Do the same thing for "spirituality" (or in the reverse order). Then ask people to look at both pieces of paper and imagine switching the headings. Is there anything jarring? New insights?

Break into pairs or groups of three and talk about the first time sexuality and spirituality intersected in your life. What kind of an impact did that have on you? What was your reaction? Who was involved and how do you feel about it now?

## **Bible Study**

Read the passage aloud - one person, or each participant reading a verse. Then move into the questions given in each study.

## **"One Interpretation"**

Have someone read or summarize this. Then ask if there are any new insights, anything you agree and/or disagree with, why? Does this interpretation change anything for you regarding any of the reflection questions you've explored? If the group is interested and there is time, each could write their own interpretation (now or before the next meeting) and they may share them and discuss them.

## **Ending/Closing**

Give each participant a chance to name, briefly, one thing they'll take away from the study; end with prayer and/or a brief liturgy.

# Resources

## Further Reading

- Kelly Brown Douglas  
*Sexuality & the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective (2002)*
- Robert Goss  
*Queering Christ: Beyond Jesus Acted Up (2002)*
- Carter Heyward  
*Touching our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God (1989)*
- Daniel Helminiak  
*What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality (2000)*
- John McNeill SJ  
*The Church & the Homosexual (4<sup>th</sup> ed. 1993)*
- Virginia Ramsey Mollencott  
*Sensuous Spirituality: Out of Fundamentalism (1992)*
- Justin Edward Tanis  
*Trans-Gendered: Theology, Ministry and Communities of Faith (2003)*
- more at [scmcanada.org/queer](http://scmcanada.org/queer)

## Faith Communities

- AXIOS : Orthodox
- AFFIRM UNITED : United Church
- BRETHERN MENNONITE COUNCIL for LGBT interests
- DIGNITY : Roman Catholic
- INTEGRITY : Anglican
- LUTHERANS CONCERNED
- METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH : Evangelical-Protestant
- RAINBOW BAPTISTS

*These resources are listed in SCM's 'Stop Homophobia in the Churches' pamphlet. To order the pamphlet (or other resources) contact SCM Canada: 310 Danforth Ave, Toronto, Ontario M4K 1N6  
416.463.4312 [info@scmcanada.org](mailto:info@scmcanada.org)*