

# Scripture and Marriage Equality: Resources

2006 Colloquy resource materials



## Study Changes Pastor's Mind on Same-Sex Marriage – Jack Rogers\*

---

The Post and Courier, Charleston, Oct. 1, 2006

In the November election, South Carolina voters will decide whether to amend the state Constitution to ban same-sex marriage. Going further than the recent bills in Congress and many other states, Amendment I also would ban same-sex domestic unions.

Surveys tell us that South Carolina is the most Christian state in the nation with 88 percent of residents identifying themselves as Christian. The political choices of many voters will naturally be influenced by their faith. Yet, what is the proper Christian perspective on this measure? I'd like to share my testimony.

I've been an evangelical all my life and dedicated my career to serving the church: first as a pastor, then as professor of theology and later as the moderator of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

For much of my life, I opposed same-sex marriage.

Like many Christians, I opposed it reflexively: It's just what I thought good Christians were supposed to do.

Then in 1993 I was asked to serve on a task force on homosexuality at the local church where my wife and I worship. The task force engaged in an intense nine-month process of Bible study, prayer and reflection on the issue from all angles. I've been reading the Bible every day since childhood, but I'd never really studied the biblical texts on this issue in depth before. I had assumed, incorrectly, that there was only one position on this issue.

The Presbyterian Church has very clear orthodox guidelines for interpreting the Bible. These guidelines are similar to those of other Protestant denominations. The first of these guidelines is to recognize that Jesus is the center of Scripture. Another way to say it is that we are to read the Bible through the lens of Jesus' redeeming life and ministry.

When Jesus was asked which commandment in the law was the greatest, he quoted two verses from the Old Testament: Deuteronomy 6:5: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might," and Leviticus 19:17: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus said, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:36-40). When we see Jesus as the center of Scripture, it enables us to focus on the heart of the gospel message: Love God and love your neighbor.

But what about the specific biblical texts that people such as James Dobson and the Palmetto Family Council like to cite? The debate in the church focuses on, at most, eight texts. None of these texts is about Jesus, nor do they include any of his words. In fact, as I show in my new book, "Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church," none of these texts, properly understood, refers to faithful same-sex couples as we know them today.

---

\* Jack Rogers, author of "Jesus, the Bible and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church." Dr. Rogers is professor of theology emeritus at San Francisco Theological Seminary and was moderator of the 213th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Take for example, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19). In Old Testament references to Sodom, the sins of the city are variously described as greed, injustice, inhospitality, excess wealth, indifference to the poor and general wickedness. In the New Testament when Jesus referred to the sin of Sodom, as recorded in Luke 10:12 and Matthew 10:15, he was passing judgment on cities that refused hospitality to his traveling disciples. A focus on the supposed homosexual aspect of the Sodom story only comes later in nonbiblical literature.

Reading each of the other eight texts using proper methods of biblical interpretation likewise reveals that the “conventional wisdom” is simply incorrect, and they do not apply to faithful same-sex couples.

As a church, we are called to support marriage and family life, yet Amendment I causes enormous hardship for the thousands of families led by same-sex couples in South Carolina. Amendment I makes it harder (and often impossible) for these families to obtain health insurance for their children, sick leave to care for family members and hospital visitation rights. Granting these couples permission to make a lifelong commitment to each other through marriage would be good for their children and society.

The American Medical Association, American Pediatric Association, American Psychological Association and American Psychiatric Association have all concluded that gay and lesbian parents are as likely as heterosexual parents to provide healthy and supportive environments for their children.

Jesus taught us to love God and love our neighbor as ourself. People who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender are our neighbors, co-workers and fellow church members. They are sisters and brothers, parents and children. I believe that supporting same-sex marriage affirms our Christian faith, strengthens our communities and supports children and families.