Problematic Uses of Scripture in Religious Ethics
Professor of Moral Theology
Boston College School of Theology & Ministry

All links tested as of August 18, 2015 (if you find a dead link please e-mail me at Bretzke@bc.edu)

Setting the Problematic: The Web-Site of Pastor Fred Phelps and the Westboro Baptist Church
http://www.godhatesfags.com
This is clearly a way “over-the-top” malicious web-site, but it has established itself as a certain “niche” in America. I would suggest briefly visiting the site to see what it contains, and then move on to the “Introductory Exercise” below.

Introductory Exercise: Web-Site Comparison and Contrast

Please Visit the Following Two Contrasting Sites and Consider the Problems Listed Below. Since both sites would claim to be grounded in the same broad Christian denomination, which itself is based on a very strong claim to the authority of Scripture, it is interesting to see how each approaches Scripture in relation to this key area of human sexuality, community, understandings of Jesus Christ, sin, grace, salvation, etc.

Site #1: http://www.atruechurch.info/home.html [“A True Church”]
    See especially their sub-page entitled False Ministries:
    http://www.atruechurch.info/falseministrieshome.html

Site #2: http://www.gaychristian.net/index.php? {Gay Evangelical Christians}
    In this site check under the tab “Info and Ideas” and look at the “Great Debate” sub-heading, and/or visit some of the other essays, videos, etc.

Video Debate:
And if time permits view the picket-line debate between a member of Fred Phelps Westboro Baptist Church (the group that picketed the funerals of soldiers killed in Iraq and ran the “GodHatesFags” campaign) and a member of the “True Church” organization. Note how each uses Scripture and the impasse that is quickly reached (the video is about 6 minutes long but you wouldn’t have to watch the entire video to get a sense of what’s going on):

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFMdQTpPKe4
After browsing the web-sites and watching a bit of the video please go on to the next page to consider some of the theological issues involved. --->

Theological & Methodological Reflection on the Web-Sites

What Are the Biblical Textual Issues and Problems?

1) Proof-texting [taking just a verse or two from the Bible as “proof” for some position]
2) Taking verses out of context, and treating them as simple truth-claims or propositions
3) Insufficient exegesis [i.e., looking at the formal structure and meaning of the passage]
4) Eisegesis [reading “into” the text the message one wants to find or prove]
5) Tendentious hermeneutics [problematic mode of interpretation]
6) Overlooking/ignoring “problematic” passages?
7) Other problems?

What Are the Possible Theological Problems In One or the Other Site?

1) Problematic image of God
2) Problematic Christology [the theology of who Jesus Christ is]
3) Problematic soteriology [the theology of salvation and redemption]
4) Problematic understanding of sin, grace, reconciliation
5) Problematic theological anthropology, including sexuality
6) Problematic understanding of Tradition
7) Problematic understanding of ecclesiology [the theology of the nature of the Church]
8) Problematic understanding of church discipline and law
9) Other problems?

What Are the Ethical Problems?

1) Problematic understanding of human rights
2) Problematic understanding of sexuality
3) Problematic understanding of community
4) Problematic understanding of the common good
5) Problematic understanding of law and morality
6) Other problems?

What Could Be the Correctives?

- Biblical Correctives (e.g., other biblical texts or themes which might modify a problematic interpretation)
• *Theological Correctives* (how a theological understanding of a certain issue or theme might help provide a more nuanced biblical interpretation)

• *Ethical Correctives* (how our understanding of philosophical ethics, and our understandings of what is “normatively human” might help guide us in our interpretation of biblical texts)

**Exercise on Reading Selected Biblical Texts Which Purportedly Relate to “Homosexuality”**

[Please try to read these in advance of the class meeting, and in different biblical translations if possible]

Many reference books and web-sites offer different bible translations. One site is [http://www.ntgateway.com](http://www.ntgateway.com)

*Pick one or more of the following Biblical passages and look at its context & message*

**Hebrew Scriptures [Old Testament]**

- Genesis 19 (Sodom and Gomorrah)
- Leviticus 18:22
- Leviticus 20:13
- Deuteronomy 23:17
- Judges 19:22ff
- 1 Kings 14:24
- 1 Kings 15:12
- 1 Kings 22:46
- 2 Kings 23:7
- Ezekiel 16:47

**New Testament**

- Romans 1:26-27
- 1 Corinthians 6:9
- 1 Timothy 1:10
2 Peter 2:4-8

Jude v.6-7

First, try to read it in at least two different translations.

Note the differences in how certain words are rendered into English.

Try to look at the broader context of the given passage and see what the overall theme of the passage seems to be about.

Some Additional Bible Study Sites: [Optional, For Further Study]

Bible Study Tools Parent site:
http://www.biblestudytools.com/?utm_source=footer&utm_medium=link&utm_campaign=traffic

Greek and Hebrew Interlinear site:
http://biblestudytools.net/InterlinearBible/

Greek Lexicon: http://biblestudytools.net/Lexicons/Greek/

In the Lexicon choose “Greek word” and enter this word: malakos; the Greek word will come up (in Greek [μαλακός]) and then you can click on it for further information.

In the Lexicon choose “Greek word” and enter this word: arsenokoites; the Greek word will come up (in Greek [αρσενοκοίτης]) and then you can click on it for further information.

Now let us look at the context of these two words: 1 Corinthians 6:9
Go to the following site, choose New Testament, then 1 Corinthians 6:1 and then read the verses before and after 1 Cor 6:9 so you get a sense of what the passage is about.

http://www.devotions.net/bible/00bible.htm

Now let’s compare some well-established translations with the following document:
https://www2.bc.edu/james-bretzke/1Corinthians6TranslationsCompared.pdf

Final Question for Reflection:

What are some of the “take-aways” you might have regarding the challenges, methodologies, and problems in interpretation and application of Biblical texts in moral matters?