FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO

(THE CHURCH, THE BIBLE, AND LGBTQ+ INCLUSION)

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This Book Is Just for You

Friend, you’re probably reading this because:

- you’ve expressed curiosity about why Galileo Church includes LGBTQ+ people without asking them to change who they are; or
- you’ve asked our pastor to help you talk to people you love about why we should welcome LGBTQ+ people into our lives; or
- you’re worried about whether you and God can still be friends if you are LGBTQ+ and happy about it; or
- you respect the Bible but you wonder why it can be used as a weapon against you or LGBTQ+ people you love.

We’ve written this little book just for you. We want to be as clear as we can about our **biblical-theological** grounds for practicing and promoting **full inclusion** of LGBTQ+ people in the family of God.

By “biblical-theological” we mean that we seek to learn about God, and what God wants, by reading the Bible. By “full inclusion” we mean the welcome into our church of LGBTQ+ people who want to follow Jesus, with no expectation that they should change their identity, remain celibate forever, or be content as members but not leaders in the church.

In other words, LGBTQ+ people are welcome at Galileo Church just the same as non-LGBTQ+ people, with no exceptions.

It’s a Two-Parter

Here’s how this book is organized.

**In Part One, “The Bible Says No?”**, we examine whether the Bible actually says “no” to LGBTQ+ inclusion in the church by looking at the “prohibition texts” from the Bible.

- Where are the scriptures that seem to keep LGBTQ+ people out?
- What do they actually say?
- And why do they say that?

We look at the historical context(s) of the Bible. We remember that ideas about gender and sexuality are very different today than they were 400 years ago when we first translated the Bible into English; or nearly 2,000 years ago when most of the New Testament was written; or 3,000-ish years ago when most of the Old Testament was written. How does the historical context influence what the Bible says in those prohibition texts?

**In Part Two, “The Bible Says Yes!”**, we follow the trajectory of the Bible’s instructions about all kinds of people: people who are ethnically or racially different from ourselves, economically enslaved people, and women, to name a few of the groups that do not fare so well in scripture.

We believe that God is constantly at work in our world to further God’s own purposes on earth, including God’s intention that all people are welcome at God’s table and in God’s heart. Like the Lord’s Prayer says, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

Sometimes God’s demonstrations of welcome require us to read against the majority of scripture to find the Bible’s minority report of God’s inclusive welcome. So we search the scriptures for quiet signs of progress as God’s people learn that God’s embrace is wider than they had imagined.
**Part One: The Bible Says No?**

We identify five places in the Bible that are traditionally considered to prohibit homosexuality.

1. In Genesis 19, God sends investigative angels to check out what God has heard about the twin cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

   Then the LORD said, “How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin! I must go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me; and if not, I will know.” (Genesis 18:20-21)

   While God’s agents are staying in the home of a member of Abraham’s family, a mob of men from Sodom come to his door. They demand that the strangers be relinquished so that they may rape them, thus humiliating them as a warning to other strangers who might pose danger to their town’s sense of security. We learn later in scripture that this is exactly the kind of behavior that God despised in those wealthy towns that did not share with people in need, like those traveling strangers:

   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. (Ezekiel 16:49)

   Jesus talks about the horrible example of hospitality in Sodom and Gomorrah when he sends his disciples into the villages to gain a hearing for the gospel. He teaches that extending welcome to strangers is a basic requirement of Christianity.

   If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. (Matthew 10:14-15)

   The men of Sodom (and Gomorrah) were not homosexual; they were selfish, frightened people who would use any means, including violence and rape, to protect their wealth from strangers. God’s disgust with this way of being is in line with the hundreds of texts in the Bible condemning the way people hoard material wealth while ignoring the needs of the poor. Violent protectionism is definitely not God’s will for God’s people; gracious hospitality is God’s will for God’s people. The story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19 clearly demonstrates this, and we agree wholeheartedly.

2. In Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, in a series of hundreds of specific laws for the people of Israel, men are prohibited from having sex with men.

   You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. (Leviticus 18:22)

   If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them. (Leviticus 20:13)

   There are at least three things we should understand about these direct commandments.

   *(a) It is the sex that is prohibited here, not the orientation.* Biblical writers never addressed the question of homosexual orientation, the way we think of “being gay” or “being lesbian.” They only addressed the sex itself (and most often sex between men, not women).

   *(b) In Leviticus, hundreds of things are prohibited and labeled as “abominations”.* Some of those have to do with sex — when and with whom it’s okay, or not okay — but most of them have to do with dietary restrictions, economic practices, family relationships, and religious rituals. Frankly, most of Leviticus sounds like superstitious rules for an ancient and foreign culture to our ears. For example, read these verses about the kind of people who are unwelcome in God’s presence:

   Speak to Aaron and say: No one of your offspring throughout their generations who has a blemish may approach to offer the food of his God. For no one who has a blemish shall draw near, one who is blind or lame,
or one who has a mutilated face or a limb too long, or one who has a broken foot or a broken hand, or a hunchback, or a dwarf, or a man with a blemish in his eyes or an itching disease or scabs or crushed testicles. (Leviticus 21:17-20)

The Israelites imagined that physical imperfections and signs of disease in the human body would be offensive to the God who created all human beings in God’s image. But we have developed much more compassion for those who suffer physical disability or chronic illness. Because of Jesus’s ministry we understand that God is compassionate toward those who suffer. We have not carried forward from the Old Testament the strict rules about physical wellness for membership in the church, nor for ordination to ministry. Reading Leviticus as a whole, rather than picking out two short sentences that condemn one practice, reveals a different way of understanding God that we have been granted by knowing Jesus.

(c) There are good reasons that same-sex sexual activity would be prohibited for God’s people in their historical context. In their world (as in ours), sex was used as a weapon for the disempowerment of the other. Conquering armies raped defeated soldiers and their families to humiliate and terrorize. Masters raped slaves to solidify their dominion of the household. But God’s people behaved differently in war; they did not rape and pillage the enemy. (Sometimes they were instructed to destroy the enemy – both people and belongings – entirely, perhaps in part to avoid the looting that was normally part of war.) And slave owners among the Israelites were meant to have regard for their slaves as human beings, making allowances for their Sabbath rest, for example.

We do not sanction either of these systems – neither the violent system of conquest by warfare nor the abomination of slavery – but we understand that the laws in Leviticus promote a society in which sexual domination is disallowed. And we agree: dominating another person through sexual practice is a terrible idea and not allowed for the people of God.

3 & 4. In 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10, early New Testament churches receive lists of the kinds of behaviors that are incompatible with the Christian faith.

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, malakoi, arsenokoitai, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

This means understanding that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their father or mother, for murderers, fornicators, arsenokoitais, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me. (1 Timothy 1:9-11)

We have left two words untranslated in these lists because their translation from ancient Greek is not entirely clear. Indeed, it’s difficult to find two English translations of the Bible that use the same vocabulary for either one.

In writings other than the Bible, the word arsenokoitai is not translated as a personal sexual preference or act; it refers instead to the economic exploitation of someone else’s sexuality. In the ancient world, as in our contemporary world, the small and weak were trafficked to fulfill the lustful desires of the wealthy and powerful. Child slavery and the buying and selling of enslaved adults were described as arsenokoitai in ancient writings around the time of the Bible. Today we could think of pimps who control prostitutes, or sex traffickers of vulnerable immigrants, as arsenokoitais. Clearly, God does not sanction the exploitation of vulnerable people. So the arsenokoitais are right out.

The word malakoi is similarly problematic in translation. It literally means “soft, delicate.” You might have lace curtains or a cashmere sweater that could be described this way. (Jesus even pokes a little fun at malakoi clothing in Matthew 11:8.) When applied to people, the “softness” of malakoi becomes a metaphor
that means “effeminate,” an insult in a patriarchal society that valued men’s stoic, stubborn temperament over the “soft,” emotionally sensitive temperament of women. Of course our understanding of these gender stereotypes has changed over the centuries, but calling a man malakoi in the biblical context was like saying he “throws like a girl.”

Why would such a disposition be included in a list of such serious violations of the Christian way of life? If we take the lists in these passages as a whole, we see in our mind’s eye a crowd of people who exercise no self-control as their passions run amuck. They will stoop to anything to get what they want – violence, theft, sex outside the covenant of marriage as a fulfillment of lustful desire, and the exploitations of persons and systems for self-interested gain. Indeed, we agree that people who live like that must change their lives to follow Jesus on a selfless, disciplined path toward holiness.

5. Romans 1:26-27 is, no doubt, the most difficult of all the prohibition texts. In the first three chapters of Romans, the church’s first theologian, Paul the Apostle, writes a meta-description of human history that shows our cosmic and eternal need for God’s mercy. Humanity has forgotten its Creator, Paul says, and we are deeply imperiled and impoverished except for the saving selflessness of Jesus our Rescuer. We would agree with that assessment of reality: that the whole creation is broken, including all the people of Earth. We agree that the whole creation is in need of divine repair, and that Jesus’s way of love (and God’s honoring of Jesus’s faithfulness) provides redemption for the whole creation and all its people.

The challenge to our biblical theology of inclusion for LGBTQ+ people is that Paul makes the meta-description of the damaged creation concrete by using same-sex sexual activity as the “obvious” example of how bad things have gotten.

For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error. (Romans 1:26-27)

This is not the only thing that’s wrong with the world today, Paul says. There’s a long list of ways that humanity has gone terribly wrong because they (we) have not acknowledged God:

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. (Romans 1:28-31)

Again, we remember that the ancient world knew nothing of same-sex-oriented people who lived lives of integrity, desiring marriage and family and domestic stability the same as Christian heterosexual couples. The over-the-top descriptions in this text of depraved, hateful, lustful, self-interested humankind are meant to remind us that without God, we revert to the kind of awful people who will do anything to get what we want. (One might or might not agree with Paul’s assessment of human nature, but that is his view, and he makes his argument from that view.)

In the description of same-sex sexual activity in Romans 1:26-27, the words “degrading,” “passions,” “consumed,” and “shameless” indicate that Paul is thinking of how horribly human sexuality can be abused, even to the point that one’s own “natural” inclinations toward faithful, monogamous heterosexuality could be forfeited to lust and the desire for sexual gratification without relationship.

This way of imagining homosexual sex bears no resemblance to the contemporary, psychologically and spiritually mature, Christian LGBTQ+ person who faithfully seeks covenant with another. We do not believe, in our contemporary context, Paul would have chosen the same example of the world’s brokenness. Perhaps instead he might have used the case of over-the-top
consumption of material goods by spiritually bankrupt Americans; or the idolatrous worship of celebrities promoted by soulless interaction with screens; or the false security of a gun culture that results in daily violence of neighbor against neighbor. Or perhaps he would have pointed to our own forms of sexual excess as the obvious examples of the deep-down brokenness of the world—addictive internet pornography, the continued trafficking of children and women, a hook-up culture that treats sex (and one’s sexual partners) casually and disrespectfully.

We agree that “the whole creation has been groaning” (Romans 8:22) for God to make us whole again, and that the signs of our brokenness are clear. One misses the point entirely if one reads Romans 1 as an indictment of one group of people (LGBTQ+ people) and imagines oneself as exempt from the critique because one is not gay. That would be way too easy.

We draw two conclusions from this set of “prohibition” texts in the Bible.

1. These texts do not disallow LGBTQ+ identity for God’s people. The behaviors they forbid are behaviors we agree are out of bounds for Christians, but those ways of being (inhospitality, violent protectionism, sexual domination, exploitation of weak people, lustful fulfillment of unchecked sexual desire, and many other forms of destructive self-indulgence) have nothing to do with a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity.

2. This tiny set of scriptures does not compare to the massive weight of biblical-theological testimony on subjects that are near to God’s heart—subjects like the way God’s people should care for the poor, or how religious practice ought to ignite our passion for justice, or how we are meant to live lives of integrity with each other and before God. Based on the authoritative testimony of scripture, these are the things God cares about most and wishes we would care about, too.

Part Two: The Bible Says Yes!

Now we turn to the positive case for the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people in the church. It’s not enough just to say, “The Bible doesn’t disallow it, so it’s okay.” But there’s no place in scripture that says, “Love your LGBTQ+ neighbor as yourself.” (We’ve already discussed that sexual orientation was not a category in biblical times, so such a statement in scripture would be impossible.)

To make the case for inclusion, we have to think carefully about the big story the Bible tells across centuries and generations. Whom does God love? Whom does God include? For whom did Jesus come? And what are the implications of those questions for our life together as Christians today?

Here is a true thing that is hard to acknowledge about the Bible when we read it from start to finish: it does not always say the same thing about important issues. For example, in many places scripture says that my children, my grandchildren, and even my great-grandchildren must suffer the consequences of my sin:

The LORD is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children to the third and the fourth generation. (Numbers 14:18)

But when Jesus’s followers tried to apply this way of thinking to an actual human being’s suffering, Jesus rejected the idea that God punishes anyone for their parents’ sin. (You can read the whole story in John 9.) Notice that we no longer believe that physical suffering is a direct result of any person’s sinfulness, much less the sins of their parents. We have learned since the early writings of the Old Testament that this is not actually the way God operates, largely because Jesus showed us a new way of thinking about God’s love and justice.
This idea (that the Bible says more than one thing about a given issue) is extremely important in our case for the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people in the church. Take, for example, the case of the Gentile Christians in Acts 10, 11, and 15.

The strongest, longest-held belief of the biblical Israelites, the “children of Abraham” who became the Jewish people, was their special selection by God to be “the chosen people.” Hundreds of scriptures confirm that God chose Israel to the exclusion of all other people to be especially close to God’s heart. They lived in covenant with God for prosperity in every area of life, from farming to childbearing to conquering entire city-states to claim land for their own. Everyone who was not an Israelite (the Gentiles, meaning “the nations”) was inferior and literally expendable. For example:

When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are about to enter and occupy, and he clears away many nations before you—the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations mightier and more numerous than you—and when the LORD your God gives them over to you and you defeat them, then you must utterly destroy them. Make no covenant with them and show them no mercy. Do not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for that would turn away your children from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. But this is how you must deal with them: break down their altars, smash their pillars, hew down their sacred poles, and burn their idols with fire. For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession. (Deuteronomy 7:1-6)

The military dominance of Israel in its “promised land” was short-lived, however. The Old Testament tells the story of their defeat by the Assyrians, then the Babylonians, then the Persians. By Jesus’s day, Rome and its Caesars were the reigning Empire and Rome’s soldiers occupied every square mile of the land formerly known as Israel.

For hundreds of years, the suffering Jewish people waited for a messiah, a savior who would rescue them from the oppression they suffered under the conquering armies of their later enemies. Many were convinced that Jesus was that messiah, and they waited for him to ignite an armed revolution. Although Jesus himself did not believe that a military victory against Rome was the salvation God promised, for most of his ministry he did view himself as a particularly Jewish messiah, and not the savior of the entire world.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’” (Matthew 10:5-7)

Thus the earliest Christian church was made up entirely of Jewish followers of Jesus. The first and most divisive problem the believers encountered after Jesus’s death and resurrection was the surprising hunger of Gentiles (everyone who was not Jewish) for the good news of the gospel. Could Gentiles be recipients of God’s amazing grace through Jesus? Or would they first have to convert to Judaism and learn to follow the religious laws of the Old Testament, including all the dietary restrictions and the rules governing family relationships and the hundreds of other miscellaneous practices written in books like Leviticus?

The book of Acts in the New Testament tells the story of Christianity’s spread through the ancient world. The conflict over Gentile inclusion is at the heart of that history. One of Jesus’s disciples, Simon Peter, encountered an entire Gentile family empowered by the Holy Spirit to speak in tongues. Shocked but submissive to the work of the Spirit, Peter baptized Cornelius and his family and went back to the church leadership to defend his actions.
“If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?” (Acts 11:17)

The Jewish church leaders considered Peter’s testimony again when they addressed the meta-question of God’s inclusion of Gentiles in the saving work of Jesus (Acts 15). They decided that the evidence of the Holy Spirit among these new converts – the fact that they could see and hear and experience the Spirit’s presence in the Gentiles who wanted to follow Jesus – was enough to change centuries of their own identity formation as the exclusive people of God.

*We cannot stress enough what a huge change this would mean in the heart of every Jewish believer.* It would be comparable to learning that your worst enemy has actually been on your side all along, working for your protection; or that your spouse is a secret agent for a foreign spy agency. “The Gentiles are in!” would have appalled their grandparents, and no doubt many Jewish believers left the church because of it.

But James, the head of the Jerusalem church and the spokesperson for all the Christian believers, said this:

“My brothers, listen to me. [Simon Peter] has related how God first looked favorably on the Gentiles, to take from among them a people for his name. This agrees with the words of the prophets, as it is written, ‘After this I will return…so that all other peoples may seek the Lord—even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called. Thus says the Lord, who has been making these things known from long ago.’ Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God…” (Acts 15:13-19)

We notice that James quotes an Old Testament prophet, Amos 9:11-12, to show that he has biblical-theological authority for the decision to include all the non-Jewish people of the world in God’s saving work. He can see that the testimony of scripture (for him, the Old Testament alone) says more than one thing about Gentiles. It usually says that they are excluded, unchosen, not God’s people. But once in a while it says that God has been making plans to include them all along. And when James heard the testimony of those who had seen the Holy Spirit at work in Gentile followers of Jesus, he was ready to see the new-old testimony offered quietly in ancient scripture for their inclusion.

This story was repeated in subsequent generations of the developing church over the centuries following the Gentiles’ inclusion. For example, concerning the ownership of human beings by other human beings, or slavery: the Bible actually allows slavery and gives rules to govern slavery in many places. Even Jesus never said slaves should go free. Some of the early Christians owned slaves; many of the early Christians were slaves.

So the American Civil War divided white Christians in this country, some of whom felt like if scripture clearly shows that God allows slavery, then slavery cannot be wrong. This would be like the Jewish believers deciding that because the overwhelming majority of scripture clearly shows the elite status of Israel before God, to the exclusion of all other peoples, Gentile believers (almost all American Christians today) are not allowed the salvation offered in Christ.

Concerning the European and American institution of slavery, some white Christians demonstrated a dawning understanding of God’s presence among enslaved people. They came to believe that enslaved races are fully human, created in God’s image and loved by God in the same way as they themselves. This calls to mind Peter’s statement about the Gentile Cornelius and his family:

If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God? (Acts 11:17)

And so, like the early Jewish church deciding that Gentiles were in God’s plan all along, even against the bulk of scripture, some white European and American Christians began to call for abolition of slavery as an ungodly and immoral institution – even though scripture permits it, even though there is no prohibition in the Bible against it. They discerned that, like Amos’s sneaky
insistence that Gentiles were included in God’s future, there were hints in scripture that God might show us something new about God’s true feelings about slavery:

...[I]n Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or [Gentile], there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:26-28)

We do not know of any Christians in the 21st century who still argue that the enslavement of one race by another, or the ownership of one human being by another, is permissible according to the Bible. We have allowed the Holy Spirit, the enduring presence of God among us, to open our eyes and change our minds about that. (Thanks be to God.)

This same dynamic has played out for another group of formerly maltreated people as well: women. Were we to list all the times that the Bible dictates the subjugation of women to men, our writing would spill off the pages of this book. Indeed, much of the prejudice against LGBTQ+ people in the church has stemmed from the church’s traditional view that women are inferior to men, and that men should avoid being “womanish.” (See the discussion of malakoi above.)

But over the centuries, many Christians have realized that God is at work among women in the same ways that God works among men, empowering women for all kinds of contributions to the life of the church, as well as the life of the world.

Not all Christians agree; after all, the Bible clearly and overwhelmingly says that women can’t be priests, or own property, or make decisions as partners with their spouses, or speak up for themselves. But when we are open to God’s presence in the lives of unexpected people, the very people we used to think were less in God’s sight, we find that a small, quiet voice in scripture supports our new understanding of God’s inclusive welcome of all people.

There is no longer Jew or [Gentile], there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)

And so we come to the question of God’s inclusion of LGBTQ+ people among the people of God. This case is slightly different because there is a flood of scriptural testimony supporting the exclusion of Gentiles, the ownership of slaves, and the subjugation of women. There is no comparable word in the Bible prohibiting LGBTQ+ identities. As we demonstrated above, there is a thin collection of references to same-sex sexual activity as one possible way that human self-interest can run amuck.

There is, however, a strong strain of heteronormativity in the Bible. By that we mean that the Bible assumes that everybody is straight, and tells the story of humanity’s early engagement with God through a series of heterosexual marriages. Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Mary and Joseph, and countless more couples are the bearers of God’s promise to save humanity from itself. Thus the weight of the Bible’s witness concerning LGBTQ+ people happens by negation: they don’t actually exist and therefore are not part of God’s plan.

But when we encounter God’s presence among people we thought were not God’s concern – Gentiles, slaves, women, others? – we are compelled to look again at scripture. We are compelled to read against the grain, to search the Bible for the quiet hints that God might have been preparing an even wider welcome than we were at first able to see.

We turn again to the Apostle Paul’s baptismal theology in Galatians:

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or [Gentile], there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:27-28)

The early church did not fully embody this beautiful statement of unity. They had barely admitted Gentiles to their number; they still owned slaves (or were slaves); they still discounted women’s
full humanity. But Paul could still say it was true: “all of you are one in Christ Jesus” because of your baptism – you have all been “baptized into Christ.” It remains the truth that the church is trying to live into every day.

This teaching about baptism and its unifying power runs throughout the New Testament epistles. **When people are baptized into Christ, their differences disappear.** They are no longer ethnically or economically distinguishable; their gender identity and sexual orientation fade in comparison to their new identity as Christian persons. We would even say that the only identity that matters to a Christian is that s/he is a Christian – everything else is extra, nothing to boast about or to be ashamed of. “All of us are one in Christ Jesus.” And all of us have been welcomed into God’s heart, one and the same. Thanks be to God.

**Epilogue: Jesus > The Bible**

It would be a huge mistake to ignore the ministry of Jesus whenever we talk about the inclusion of people who have previously been excluded. It’s true that Jesus never said a word about LGBTQ+ identity. But it’s equally true that he got himself killed for extending God’s welcome to people that his religion said should be locked out.

There are so many stories in the gospels demonstrating Jesus’s inclusion of people who were excluded from religion, it’s hard to choose. Should we observe him at dinner with tax collectors, who were the despised Jewish collaborators with the Roman government? Should we remember how kind he was to prostitutes? Should we follow him as he reaches out to touch lepers before he has healed them of their contagious disease? Should we eavesdrop on his conversation with a Samaritan who also happens to be a woman? Should we notice how he attracts crowds of the poor and the hungry, congratulating them for their nearness to God’s heart?

In so many instances in the gospels, Jesus shows his awareness that his ministry is taking place outside the bounds of religious tradition and propriety. He knows that’s why the religious authorities hate him, and that they have the power to punish him, but he persists.

And as he sat at dinner in Levi’s house, many tax collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples—for there were many who followed him. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” When Jesus heard this, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.” (Mark 2:15-17)
Galileo Church is called to embody the Spirit of Jesus. We follow closely on the heels of a messiah who defied religious tradition to welcome people from the fringes into God’s heart. When we practice this wide welcome, inviting LGBTQ+ people into full participation in the church and making safe space for people to be themselves regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, we find ourselves at odds with centuries of religious tradition and the religious people who are invested in keeping that exclusive tradition alive. We find ourselves to be just like Jesus in this regard.

We believe with all our hearts that the God of the Jews and the Gentiles, the God of the free and the slave, the God of men and women, is also the God of cisgender, straight people and LGBTQ+ people. God has welcomed all of us into God’s heart, exactly the same. How can we not welcome each other? Who are we to hinder God?

Soli Deo gloria. Amen.

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**For Further Reading**

If this little book just wasn’t long enough for you, you should add these to your reading list:


*Scripture and Discernment: Decision Making In the Church* by Luke Timothy Johnson (Abingdon Press, 1983). This is a scholarly treatment of the early church’s decision to include Gentiles in Acts 10, 11, and 15. It suggests the positive reading for inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons in its final chapter.

*A Time to Embrace: Same-Gender Relationships in Religion, Law, and Politics* by William Stacy Johnson (Eerdmans, 2006). Johnson’s discussion of the legal status of LGBTQ+ persons is outdated now; but his description of the various theological positions for and against inclusion remains helpful.

*Unclobber: Rethinking Our Misuse of the Bible on Homosexuality* by Colby Martin (Westminster John Knox, 2015). Martin’s chapters deconstructing the traditional clarity of the “clobber” (prohibition) texts from the Bible alternate with chapters of memoir – his own journey from conservative evangelical pastor to het-cis ally without a job.

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**Contact Galileo Church**

You’ve got questions… curiosity… and we’re here to help. Or at least to pay attention.

- Find us online: galileochurch.org.
- Send us email: info@galileochurch.org.
- Call us up: 817-773-3147.

We would love to hear from you.