

Scriptural Engagement

What is the central and overarching message of Scripture?

God's unconditional and redeeming love for humankind.

1. **The issue in our church is not about the authority of Scripture.** We all recognize the central authority and importance of God's Word. Instead, the issue is about *interpretation*. What do the Scriptures say and what do they mean to us today? This is a question the church has always asked itself and will always continue to ask itself.
2. **We interpret scripture through the lens of Jesus life, teachings, death, and resurrection.** Jesus gave us a key to understand the Scriptures, that is, a lens through which we may interpret every other command in Scripture. Every command in Scripture must be focused by this question: "How does following this commandment enhance love for God and neighbor?" By asking this question of every other scriptural command, one remains truly faithful to Scripture. Jesus did two things vis-à-vis the law. First, by including in the simple commands against murder and adultery (among others) hatred, slander and lust, he made it impossible for us to boast that we can keep the law. We are all mortal sinners. Second, he broke specific, God-given laws for the sake of love of neighbor. One of the best examples he left us in this regard comes with the man who had a shriveled hand (*Mark 3:4; Matthew 12:12; Luke 6:9*). (Wengert)
3. **The Lutheran tradition emphasizes what builds up the Christian community.** (*1st Corinthians*) One of the strengths of our Lutheran theological tradition is our emphasis on Christ. In Christ we know that no law whatsoever can be imposed on us simply on the grounds that it is biblical, or even that it is commanded by God. Christ is the end. Legalism is finished. As St. Paul writes in 1st Corinthians: "'All things are lawful,' but not all things are beneficial." Loving, committed, same-gender relationships can be and are a blessing to the Christian community, in the same way that loving, committed heterosexual relationships are a blessing.
4. **The Bible is the source and norm of the Christian faith.** As Lutherans, our ultimate authority for reading the Bible is the Gospel of Jesus Christ to which the Scriptures give witness. Jesus Christ is the source and scope of scriptural authority.
5. **Scripture passages dealing with homosexual actions are not at all aimed at homosexual orientation** and behavior in the present but at very specific issues regarding, in Leviticus, standards of holiness that set the people of Israel apart from the pagan temple cults and, in the Pauline material, the coercive relations of male-on-male sexual activities.

6. **There is no biblical model for marriage or family:** We know there is not just one model for marriage and the family recorded in Scripture. Rather, the Bible records several models. Many of these models would not be considered acceptable if practiced today. For example, we find “Levirate” marriage, where, if a married man dies childless, his widow is to have intercourse with each of his brothers in turn until she produced a male heir. Jesus mentions this custom without criticism (Mark 12:18-27 par.). None of us today obey this unambiguous commandment of Scripture. We see in Deuteronomy 21:15-17 where Scripture presumes a man can have two wives. Exodus 21:7-11 describes how a man may purchase a slave as a wife for himself or for his son. In Deuteronomy 21:10-14, we see laws governing the situation where, (quote) “When you go forth to war against your enemies and the Lord your God gives them into your hands and you take them captive, and see among the captives a beautiful woman and you have desire for her and would take her for yourself as wife” What both Scripture and history show is that marital forms change to meet the concrete realities of a culture at a given time.

Examples from the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly:

- *Isaiah 40:31*: “But those who wait on the LORD will find new strength. They will fly high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.”
- *Matthew 5:21-48*: “I found the sermon on the mount was a very scary document, because Jesus took the rules and elevated them to a level that condemns us all”
- *Matthew 13:31-32*: Parable of the mustard seed that grows into a bush and makes a home for the animal.
- *Matthew 22:36*: Love the Lord God with all your heart, soul, and mind
- *Acts 8:26-39*: Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch
- *Romans 8:38-39*: Nothing separates us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.
- *1 Corinthians 13*: One of the gifts of Christ is love