

A Biblical Understanding of Same-Sex Attraction

“This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God.”

Philippians 1:9-11

A. Introduction

1. *If it were up to me I would never choose this issue as a critical issue of our time.* Just as I imagine many Christians in first century Rome, did not feel that paying homage to Caesar, needed to become the life and death issue that it became. We do not choose the defining issues of our time, they are thrust upon us. As far as I am concerned I wish this defining issue had nothing to do with sexuality and personal feelings but it does. I wish it did not divide churches and families, but it does. It would be nice if it was a simple matter of conservative versus liberal, but it is not. I wish I could say everyone is entitled to their opinion, each to his own way, but I cannot. I wish I could say just loving people would solve the issue, but it won't.

2. I suppose we could overlook the Lordship of Jesus Christ in this matter and the authority of God's Word and become more open minded. I would rather talk to you tonight about the exclusive claim of Jesus Christ, the reality of his second coming, the meaning of heaven and hell, and the joyful mandate to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth. But I was asked to speak on this subject, which I will endeavor to do as a brother in Christ. I resonant with the apostle's aim: “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). *I am not at liberty to say “yes” to something which God has said “no” to, because I believe this “no” is ultimately for our good personally and collectively.*

“For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good” (Titus 2:11-14).

3. *On race and gender the church has often failed miserably. It is because the Bible was weaponized against brothers and sisters in Christ that there ought to be deep concern that we not repeat the sins of the past when it comes to the LGBTQ community. All people deserve to be treated as images bearers of God, individuals for whom Christ died (2 Cor 5:16).* There is no place for anger and hate. Nor can we afford to confuse the will of God with cultural convention and its inherent discriminatory prejudices and animosities. It is important that we make a clear distinction between the old habits of the culture, the spirit of the times, and Spirit-inspired word of God. When we refuse to make the necessary distinction between cultural convention and biblical command, the devil has us right where he wants us.

When people come to me seeking counsel about their involvement in homosexual relationships, I often don't have to convince them that this sexual practice is wrong. They are already convinced on biblical grounds and personal experience that homosexual practice is sinful. The counsel they seek is

encouragement and support to end sexual relationships that are wrong. If I compromise biblical truth by denying the sinfulness of homosexual practice, I am as guilty as if I committed the sin myself. But if I make light of the personal suffering and emotional pain involved in breaking off homosexual relationships I am a deceptive spiritual director. To resist a deeply instilled sexual drive is a very painful test of faith. We must neither deny the sin nor minimize the pain involved in overcoming it. There is no short-cut around suffering, but the journey through it affirms and internalizes the word of God.

4. *Rosaria Butterfield begins her story: “My Christian life unfolded as I was just living my life, my normal life.”*¹ At the time she was a tenured associate professor at Syracuse University in the English department. She was in a lesbian relationship and a community activist, promoting animal rights and gay causes. Her field of expertise was Queer Theory (a postmodern form of gay and lesbian studies). Her high-profile as a lesbian and a leader of gay rights drew flak from conservative Christians. She concluded that they were bad thinkers, who “could maintain their worldview only because they were sheltered from the world’s real problems (poverty, violence, racism).” Christians were not only anti-intellectual, they were scary. They were “exclusive, judgmental, scornful and afraid of diversity.”²

As an academic she began a critical study of the Religious Right, its blatant “spiritual pride and club Christianity,” but she knew that there was more to Christianity than that. She wanted to understand the core of Christianity. This led her to a serious study of the Bible. During this time she published a critique of a conservative Christian group and their gender politics in the local newspaper and received a batch of hate mail and fan mail. But a letter from a local Presbyterian pastor fit neither category. Pastor Ken Smith’s letter was a kind and inquiring letter, raising reasonable questions about her presuppositions. She tried to throw the letter away a couple of times but each time she ended up retrieving it. After a week, she gave Pastor Ken a call. The chat on the phone led to a dinner invitation from Ken and his wife Floy. Rosaria writes, “The gay and lesbian community is also a community ‘given to hospitality.’ I honed my hospitality gifts serving pasta to drag queens and queers – people like me. . . . I really wanted to see how Christians lived! So I took him up on it. I was excited to meet a real born-again Christian and find out why he believed such silly ideas.”³ Rosaria’s account of her friendship with Ken and Floy Smith is beautiful. For several years they discussed everything including the Bible and Christianity. It is difficult to compress her conversion story, the influence of numerous friends, the many conversations, the months of wrestling, and the reality of prayer. She writes,

“I think that churches would be places of greater intimacy and growth in Christ if people stopped lying about what we need, what we fear, where we fail, and how we sin. I think that many of us have a hard time believing the God we believe in, when the going gets tough. And I suspect that, instead of seeking counsel and direction from those stronger in the Lord, we retreat into our isolation and shame and let the sin wash over us, defeating us again. Or maybe we muscle through on our pride. Do we really believe that the word of God is a double-edged sword, cutting between spirit and the soul? Or do we use the word of God as a cue card to commandeer only our external behavior?”⁴

¹ Rosaria Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*. Pittsburgh, PA: Crown and Covenant, 2014, 1

² Butterfield, 5.

³ Butterfield, 9.

⁴ Butterfield, 25. Rosaria describes her conversion as a “train wreck.” When I became a Christian, I had to change everything – my life, my friends, my writing, my teaching, my advising, my clothes, my speech, my thoughts. I was tenured to a field that I could no longer work in. I was the faculty advisor to all of the gay and lesbian and feminist groups on campus. I was

Discernment distinguishes between the gospel of grace that is powerful to save us from a life of sin and the abuse of grace that tolerates sin.

Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Ephesians 4:19-24

B. Image-bearers of God and the Secular Self

1. We begin with the most important thing that can be said of the person. We are made in God's image. We are not self-defined by our sexuality. *"So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them"* (Genesis 1:27).

Wesley Hill, a gay Christian, writes that "being gay isn't the most important thing about me or any other gay person's identity. I am a Christian before I am anything else. My homosexuality is a part of my makeup, a facet of my personality. One day, I believe, whether in this life or in the resurrection, it will fade away. But my identity as a Christian – someone incorporated into Christ's body by his Spirit – will remain."⁵ Along these same lines Sam Allberry writes, ". . .The kind of sexual attractions I experience are not fundamental to my identity. They are part of what I feel but are not who I am in a fundamental sense. I am far more than my sexuality."⁶

2. *Our sexuality is deeply personal. It is an important part of who we are, but we were not meant to draw our identity from our sexuality and to shift the ground of our identity "subtly and idolatrously away from God."*⁷ Many in the secular age are taught "to face the fact that the universe is without transcendent meaning, without eternal purpose, without supernatural significance."⁸ *Exclusive humanism and expressive individualism are heralded as the only real options in an age that renegotiates the meaning of the person, society, human flourishing, time, and authenticity.* Since many are convinced that life has no overarching purpose, the burden falls on the self to invent meaning and significance. The quest for meaning has eclipsed the quest for salvation. The fear facing people today is not the wrath of God so much as "a terrifying emptiness, a kind of vertigo, or even a fracturing of our world Making sense of our life is the object of a quest."⁹

3. *Today's wrestling with same-sex attraction is part of a much larger discussion of the meaning of the person in a post-Christian age.* Is meaning and identity left to the self to define or is it received as a gift? Is the inherent struggle over same-sex attraction the result of a culturally-induced guilt, the product of misguided biblical interpretation and social taboos or is it rooted in our fallen, broken, idolatrous rebellion from God? Is the church's historic moral vision of marriage and human sexuality

writing a book that I no longer believed in" (26).

⁵ Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting*, Zondervan, 2010, 22.

⁶ Sam Allberry, *Is God anti-gay?* The Good Book, 2013, 11.

⁷ Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, Harper, 1996, 379

⁸ Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, x, 77.

⁹ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 18.

the source of suffering or the provision for human flourishing?

C. Biblical Reasoning

1. *Romans 1:18-2:4* is a critical passage for our discussion, not because same-sex attraction is the apostle Paul's primary issue, but because it "is the only passage in the New Testament that explains the condemnation of homosexual behavior in an explicitly theological context."¹⁰ The significance of this text for sexual ethics is that homosexual behavior is used to illustrate our rebellion against the Creator and his moral order. "When human beings engage in homosexual activity, they enact an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual reality: the rejection of the Creator's design."¹¹

2. The reason for the paucity of specific texts on homosexuality has to do with the biblical understanding of marriage and human sexuality celebrated in Genesis and established in the Law. There is also a paucity of texts on parenting and other important subjects. There are no explicit texts on abortion or racism other than the overarching truth that we are all made in the image of God.

3. Genesis 2:20-25 – The creation of male and female climaxes a series of complementary dynamics (heaven and earth, sun and moon, sea and land, humanity and animal, God and humanity, male and female). "That means that male and female have unique, non-interchangeable glories – they each see and do things that the other cannot. Sex was created by God to be a way to mingle these strengths and glories within a life-long covenant of marriage." "Without understanding this vision, the sexual prohibitions in the Bible make no sense."¹²

4. Genesis 19:1-29 – The gang-rape situation in Sodom speaks to the city's wickedness but it is not critical in the discussion of consensual homosexual practice (Jude 7, Ezekiel 16:49).

5. Leviticus 18:22, 20:13 – The unambiguous prohibition against male homosexual practice is the basis for "universal rejection of male same-sex intercourse within Judaism."¹³ Neither motive nor the distinction between ritual law and moral law modifies the prohibition. The church must decide to what extent this categorical prohibition governs the followers of Jesus.

6. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 (1 Timothy 1:10) – Apparently, some of the believers in Corinth advocated a spirit / body dualism that gave license to sexual immorality. Paul lists the wrongdoers who will not inherit the kingdom of God: fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, *malakoi* (a pejorative slang to describe passive partners – often young boys – in homosexual activity), *arsenokoitai* (trans. of the Hebrew *mishkav zakur*, meaning "lying with a male" derived from Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13), thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers.¹⁴

Wesley Hill, a gay Christian, identifies personally with 1 Corinthians 6. He feels the stinging indictment of Paul's mention of homosexuality, but he takes comfort in the apostle's words, "And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11). He writes,

¹⁰ Hays, 383.

¹¹ Hays, 386.

¹² Tim Keller, "The Bible and same sex relationships: A review article," Redeemer-Report, 6/2015, 2-11, 10.

¹³ Hays, 381.

¹⁴ Hays, 382.

“Whenever I look back on my baptism, I can remember that God has cleansed the stains of homosexual sin from the crevasses of my mind, heart, and body and included me in his family, the church, where I can find support, comfort, and provocation toward Christian maturity. . . . Washed and waiting. That is my life – my identity as one who is forgiven and spiritually cleansed and my struggle as one who perseveres with a frustrating thorn in the flesh, looking forward to what God has promised to do.”¹⁵

7. Romans 1:18-2:4 – The “godlessness and wickedness” that receives the wrath of God is due to humanity’s refusal to honor God (1:21). Paul does not list sins that alienate us from God. Rather, he deals with the root cause that stands behind all of our depravities – the radical rebellion of the creature against the Creator. God gives us what we want. The cause of moral perversion is the result of God’s wrath, not the reason for it. “The passage is not merely a polemical denunciation of selected pagan vices; it is a diagnosis of the human condition. The diseased behavior detailed in verses 24-31 is symptomatic of the one sickness of humanity as a whole. Because they have turned away from God, ‘all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin’” (Rom 3:9).¹⁶

Paul’s main argument is that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Homosexual behavior is illustrative of his main argument.¹⁷ Our rebellion “is made palpable in the flouting of sexual distinctions that are fundamental to God’s creative design.”¹⁸ The point of the passage is not to expose particular sins as much as to show that we all have sinned. We all are under the wrath of God. We all are guilty of exchanging the truth about God for a lie. Homosexual acts are no worse sins than that of covetousness or gossip or disrespect for parents. Paul includes all homosexual acts as proof of our depravity (man-boy relationships, male homosexual conduct, and lesbianism).

Those who argue that Paul’s negative judgment against homosexual acts applies only to heterosexuals who exchange their natural intercourse for what is unnatural is untenable. The issue is not “individual life decisions” as much as our pervasive rebellion against God’s moral order. Allberry writes, “But attractive as it may be for some, this view cannot be supported by the text itself. The words for ‘natural’ and ‘against nature’ do not describe our subjective experience of what feels natural to us, but instead refer to the fixed way of things in creation. The nature that Paul says homosexual behavior contradicts is God’s purpose for us, revealed in creation and reiterated throughout Scripture.”¹⁹

Human depravity and rebellion play out in personal and societal ways - “God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done” (Rom 1:28). Duke NT theologian Richard Hays writes,

“Romans 1:18-32 sets up a homiletical sting operation. The passage builds a crescendo of condemnation, declaring God’s wrath upon human unrighteousness, using rhetoric characteristic of Jewish polemic against Gentile immorality. It whips the reader into a

¹⁵ Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting*, 49-50.

¹⁶ Hays, 385.

¹⁷ William Loader in *Making Sense of Sex* (137) who personally approves of gay sexuality, makes the case that the ancients knew about mutual, non-exploitive same sex relationships and that Paul’s reference to men burning with passion for one another (Rom 1:27) underscores mutuality not rape, prostitution or pederasty. Loader argues, “Nothing indicates that Paul is exempting some same-sex intercourse as acceptable.” See William Loader, *Sexuality in the New Testament* (2010) and *The New Testament on Sexuality* (2012).

¹⁸ Hays, 386.

¹⁹ Allberry, *Is God anti-gay?* 31-32.

frenzy of indignation against others: those unbelievers, those idol worshipers, those immoral enemies of God. But then in Romans 2:1, the sting strikes: “You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God’s judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?” (Rom 2:1-4).²⁰

Is the grief and heartache associated with homosexuality due to human rebellion and depravity or is it due to the misguided understanding that the Bible views homosexual behavior as sinful?

Mark Achtemeier argues that the church has a long history of misinterpreting the biblical “fragments” on homosexuality. As a “conservative church activist” Mark advocated up to the late 90s for marriage between a man and woman and chastity outside of marriage. Since that time he has changed his position due to his encounter with men and women who he believed suffered because of the church’s disapproval of the gay lifestyle. This led him to reexamine the biblical “fragments” and to conclude that to deny sexual intimacy to a person born with same-sex attraction is cruel and unusual punishment. Achtemeier’s “big picture” thesis is that gays ought to have the same opportunity to love, sex, and marriage as in a marriage between a man and a woman. Marriage serves human love in whatever form the partnership takes. He transfers all the gifts and blessings of marriage between a man and a woman to same-sex marriage. Instead of procreation there’s adoption; instead of the biological correspondence of male and female there’s an alternative anatomical experience in same-sex marriage; and instead of the majority standard plan there’s a minority unconventional plan. Achtemeier cites the gospel’s outreach to Gentiles and Mary as an unwed-bride-to-be as examples of God’s unconventional work in support of the sexually marginalized and in fulfillment of “God’s highest purposes for love, marriage, and sexuality.”²¹

D. The Costly Path of Discipleship

1. The Story of Redemption

Everyone has a story, but only one story redeems our story. Every one falls short of the glory of God and everyone needs the gospel of Jesus Christ. Richard Hays says that “the judgment of Romans 1 against homosexual practices should never be read apart from the rest of the letter, with its message of grace and hope through the cross of Christ.”²² Wesley Hill explores the power and sufficiency of God’s redemptive grace:

“What is it that keeps me as a homosexual Christian from pursuing my sexual fulfillment? . . . I could find a partner and learn to *express*, rather than *repress*, my homoerotic impulses. Didn’t Paul himself say in one of his letters that ‘it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion’ (1 Corinthians 7:9)? . . . In the end, what keeps

²⁰ Hays, 389.

²¹ Mark Achtemeier, *The Bible’s YES to Same-Sex Marriage: An Evangelical’s Change of Heart*, WJK, 2014, 72.

²² Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 393.

me on the path I've chosen is not so much individual proof texts from Scripture or the sheer weight of the church's traditional teaching against homosexual practice. Instead, it is, I think, those texts and traditions and teachings *as I see them from within the true story of what God has done in Jesus Christ* – and the whole perspective on life and the world that flows from that story, as expressed definitely in Scripture. . . .I abstain from homosexual behavior because of the power of that scriptural story.”²³

2. The New Creation Reality

“The message of what God has done through Christ reminds me that all Christians, whatever their sexual orientation, to one degree or another experience the same frustration I do as God challenges, threatens, endangers, and transforms all our natural desires and affections.”²⁴ We all need the message of Romans 3:23-24.

Psychologists Stanton Jones and Mark Yarhouse agree. They write in *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate*:

*“Even if the homosexual condition of desiring intimacy and sexual union with a person of the same gender is caused in its entirety by casual factors outside the personal control of the person, that does not constitute moral affirmation of acting on those desires. If it did, the pedophile who desires sex with children, the alcoholic who desires the pursuit of drunkenness, and the person with Antisocial Personality Disorder who desires the thrill of victimization and pain infliction would all have an equal case for moral approval of their exploits. At the broadest level all humans are heirs to a predisposition that we have not chosen and that propels us toward self-destruction and evil—our sinful nature. The plight of the homosexual who has desires and passions that he or she did not choose is in fact the common plight of humanity. We all face the same challenge: how are we to live when what we want is out of accord with what God tells us we should want in this life?”*²⁵

3. The Way of the Cross

“The Christian story commends long-suffering endurance as a participation in the sufferings of Christ. In light of this, my objection that abstaining from homosexual sex will be too difficult doesn't seem as strong or compelling as it once did. . . .The sorrow and suffering we experience as homosexual Christians is that of saying good-bye to any sure hope of satisfying our sexual cravings. In choosing fidelity to the gospel, we agree to bear up under the burden for as long as is necessary.”²⁶ We all need the message of Romans 12:1-2.

E. A Pastoral Response

1. A Summary of the Cultural Situation

²³ Hill, *Washed and Waiting*, 60-61.

²⁴ Hill, 64.

²⁵ Stanton Jones and Mark Yarhouse, *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate*, Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000, 181.

²⁶ Hill, 70, 75.

a. The gay movement sees societal acceptance of all forms of sexuality between consenting adults as a civil rights issue. The sexual revolution has been codified into the laws of the state. Society has defined the moral crisis as a matter of personal autonomy and freedom rather than sinful deviancy or psychological disorder. The categories of “sin” and “sickness” no longer apply to homosexuality.

b. Sexual self-determination is increasingly viewed as fundamental to personal identity. In this new “sacred order” the person decides who they are whether by genetics, choice, or experience. The self is sovereign in these fluid and flexible decisions and demands from society tolerance, respect and approval as a moral imperative.

c. The gay movement has gained the support of many in the legal, political, corporate, scientific, educational and religious spheres of culture. This dramatic reversal of cultural consensus positions Christians who advocate biblical sexuality as either out of step with the times or as bigoted and immoral. The fear that the church will stand on the wrong side of history, like it did in the 1960s, has fueled some churches to affirm one’s autonomous, inalienable rights to personal self-identification.

d. Christians in the West who have grown into adulthood within this new cultural consensus face mounting personal and societal pressure to accommodate these changing perspectives and to endorse sexual self-determination in all its forms. Tolerance for sexual diversity in our pluralistic age has become one of society’s cardinal doctrines. This pressure to change long-held moral convictions is out of step with the moral order of historic Christianity and the vast majority of the church in other parts of the world. That is not to say that the church in other cultures is free from besetting sins such as misogyny and polygamy.

e. Depending on the authority of the Bible to define sexual ethics and to determine the moral order necessary for human flourishing has always been challenged by those who do not accept the Bible as the Word of God. But recently those who claim to submit to biblical authority are asking, “Did God say. . .?” Their revisionist approach seeks to renegotiate the clear teaching of the Bible to defend sexual self-determination. Their argument often begins with the personal stories of self-identifying gays who inspire them to re-examine “the traditional” interpretation of a select list of biblical texts.

f. No matter how welcoming and open Christ’s followers may be to self-identifying gays, the perceived lack of moral approval and blessing is judged to be intolerant and immoral. Christ’s followers are increasingly “foreigners and exiles” in their home culture, yet they are urged “to abstain from sinful desires” and to “live such good lives among the pagans, that even though they accuse [them] of doing wrong,” their good deeds glorify God (1 Peter 2:11-12).

2. Christ’s followers are urged to respond in the following ways:

a. We need the wisdom of God to “regard no one from a worldly point of view” and to embrace the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:16). This is not an ideological war that requires a political response as much as a spiritual battle that requires a faithful life. In a world of evil and hostility, the gospel of Jesus Christ is an inclusive invitation to an exclusive Savior and Lord. We come as we are but we do not remain as we were. We are new creations created in Christ Jesus. We have a new citizenship, a new family and an entirely new indwelling Spirit. Rosaria Butterfield observes:

“Too often the church does not know how to interface with university culture because it

comes to the table only ready to moralize and no dialogue. There is a core difference between sharing the gospel with the lost and imposing a specific moral standard on the unconverted. Like it or not, in the court of public opinion, feminists and not Bible-believing Christians have won the war of intellectual integrity. And Christians are in part to blame for this."²⁷

The gay issue is a symptom of a much larger phenomenon that is deeply rooted in the human condition and the fall. We have all exchanged the authority and glory of God for the authority and glory of the self. Everyone's sexuality has been impacted by the fall. We all need to confess, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). The gay issue may seem like a new phenomenon that poses a special threat to the Christian life, but it is not. We have failed to live into a biblical sexual ethic through our tacit approval of immature parenting, poor spiritual direction for the young, pre-marital sex, easy divorce, and selfish marriages. We have largely ignored the battle within when it comes to pornography and sexism, leaving us vulnerable to the battle without.

b. We should not be surprised if the world does not understand a biblical sexual ethic. We have naively thought that the goodness of God's moral order is somehow self-evident and that everyone should see it and appreciate it. We have been strangely silent on the sacramental cast of holy living. We have expected young Christians to mature automatically. We live by grace, not works, but grace is never an excuse for practical antinomianism – the false idea that Christians are under no obligation or responsibility to fulfill the law of Christ. We are not saved by works, but saving faith is always accompanied by the work of righteousness. Costly grace provides the motivation for living the Jesus way, producing a counter-culture life-style rooted in the Sermon on the Mount. We should expect the world to misjudge and condemn us because our understanding of God and the human person is radically different from the modern world-view.

c. We need to do everything in our power to welcome sinners like us into the fellowship of believers. We want everyone to hear Jesus' invitation, "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly" (Matthew 11:28-30, The Message). We want to experience the grace of God's "no" against every form of ungodliness and worldly passions and the power of God's grace-filled "yes" to redeem every aspect of our lives. We believe that real compassion and true conviction can and must go together. For the sake of our faithful brothers and sisters who resist same-sex sexuality and for the sake of our young who need biblical guidance, it is absolutely necessary that we remain true to our biblical convictions.

d. We seek to teach and model a biblical sexual ethic within the counter-cultural community of the household of faith. We want to instruct the young in a theology of self-understanding, sexual purity, singleness, and marital fidelity. We want to support, encourage and befriend those brothers and sisters who are struggling with same-sex attraction. This will involve renegotiating the nearly exclusive and essential status the world subscribes to sexual identity. We are made in God's image, male and female, and we face an onslaught of self-damaging influences and temptations. Our sinful disposition is deeply rooted in our depravity and beyond redemption apart from the redeeming grace of God. Same-sex

²⁷ Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*, 7.

attraction is one such potentially disabling and destructive influence. This specific temptation may be rooted in various and complex factors, such as a person's genetic make-up, the way they were parented, early sexual experiences, mental and physical abuse, and conflicted relationships with the opposite sex.

e. We believe that there is a fundamental difference between male and female mutuality and same-sex sexuality. The Bible's redemptive trajectory moves away from patriarchy and gender stratification and moves toward gender differentiation, where men are men and women are women, gifted by the Spirit, engaged in ministry, and mutually submissive in Christ.²⁸ The transcultural prohibition against homosexuality is sustained and strengthened throughout biblical revelation, even as old hierarchal patterns and gender roles are liberated under the influence of the gospel. The redemptive movement of the New Testament celebrates gender mutuality and prohibits same-sex sexuality. Christians must challenge society with faithful and charitable non-conformity when society departs from the will of God while at the same time embracing those initiatives and actions in culture that agree with the will of God. We live in a holy tension between hierarchical complementarians, who believe that they have rightly divided the Word of Truth, and advocates for same-sex sexuality, who believe that they are making the Christian faith relevant for modern culture. We distort the church's biblical response to sexual immorality when we discriminate against women.

f. We praise God for our brothers and sisters in Christ who courageously acknowledge their struggle with same sex attraction and who seek to remain chaste and faithful in their discipleship. In Christ they are worthy of our deep respect and friendship and they ought to be encouraged to use the full range of their God-given gifts in God's Kingdom work. Instead of drawing apart from our brothers and sisters in need we ought to draw even closer to them and in their company confess and repent of our many struggles with holy living and righteous impact. Brothers and sisters who struggle with same-sex attraction and remain faithful to their calling in Christ ought to inspire us to remain faithful in our calling.

g. We are not interested in a power struggle with the gay movement. Society was moving toward radical pluralism and tolerance of all forms of sexuality long before the Supreme Court sanctioned gay marriage. The world is the world and Christians should not expect to change it. God will change the world at the final judgment and in the creation of the new heaven and the new earth. Our responsibility is to live as salt and light in a decaying and hostile environment. We have a *living hope*, a *lasting inheritance*, and a *coming salvation*. We are encouraged to live into this new reality with confidence and joy. Undoubtedly this will require prophetic resilience and costly love.

²⁸ William J. Webb, "Gender Equality and Homosexuality," in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, Editors Ronald Pierce, Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, Gordon Fee (Downers Grove, IL.: IVP, 2004) 407-408. "In many texts having to do with women's relationships to men (usually husbands), and in many slavery texts, the isolated words on the page do not reflect an ultimate social ethic; yet the redemptive movement within the text is certainly heading in a liberating direction. On the other hand, when the texts prohibiting homosexual behavior are read against the backdrop of the ancient world, we discover a biblical spirit that creates movement in a more *restrictive* direction. The biblical text moves restrictively compared to the openness toward and acceptance of homosexuality in the social realm and in pagan worship of the day. . . . A commitment to biblical authority means that our modern application honors the direction and meaning of the redemptive spirit within the Bible. Although this is not a popular answer to the homosexuality question in our society, only a sexual ethic that excludes homosexual behavior retains the spirit and redemptive movement found in Scripture, as its words are understood in the light of the ancient world context."

A Select Bibliography

The author's quotations are selected to represent the book's theme.

Mark Achtemeier, *The Bible's Yes to Same-Sex Marriage*. Louisville, Kentucky: WJK, 2015.

“At this point in my journey, I find that the biblical case in support of gay marriage is overwhelming. As I hope this study has shown, the case for gay marriage is grounded in multiple, mutually reinforcing scriptural arguments, that together take into account the broad sweep of the Bible's witness. Support for same-sex relationships does not require discounting, overlooking, or ignoring any portion of the Scripture; it simply requires an accurate understanding of the Bible's witness. . . . I have become increasingly aware of the enormous toll that is being exacted, in the form of shattered lives and devastated spirits, as so many branches of the church cling stubbornly to the traditional condemnations” (131).

Sam Allberry, *Is God anti-gay?* UK: thegoodbook company, 2013.

“In each instance where the Bible directly addresses homosexual behavior it is to condemn it. The consistent teaching of the Bible is clear: God forbids homosexual activity. Given what the Bible says about God's purpose of sex and marriage this should not surprise us. In fact, the situation is worse than many people might think. God is opposed to all sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage. It's not that the Bible opposes all homosexual activity but approves of any and every sexual act between heterosexual people. But for those who experience homosexual feelings themselves, or for those who are close to people who do, these teachings in the Bible can be very hard indeed. . . . The Christian message is the best news that anyone can ever hope to hear. It's all about a God who is more forgiving and loving than we could possibly imagine. It's news we Christians want others to hear. But it is not always easy to share. The gospel message has a number of sharp edges to it that many find difficult to hear. And these days one of the sharpest of those edges seems to be what the Bible teaches about sexuality” (38, 73).

Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*. Pittsburgh, PA: Crown and Covenant, 2014.

“When I became a Christian, I had to change everything – my life, my friends, my writing, my teaching, my advising, my clothes, my speech, my thoughts. I was tenured to a field that I could no longer work in. I was the faculty advisor to all of the gay and lesbian and feminist groups on campus. I was writing a book that I no longer believed in. . . . Conversion put me in a complicated and comprehensive chaos. I sometimes wonder, when I hear other Christians pray for the salvation of the ‘lost,’ if they realize that this comprehensive chaos is the desired end of such prayers. Often, people ask me to describe the lessons I learned from this experience. I can't. It was too traumatic. Sometimes in crisis, we don't really learn lessons. Sometimes the result is simpler and more profound: sometimes our character is simply transformed” (26-27).

S. Donald Fortson III and Rolling G. Grams, *Unchanging Witness: The Consistent Christian Teaching On Homosexuality in Scripture Tradition*. Nashville, TN: B&H, 2016.

“Our work refocuses the debate over homosexuality on the real issue. The issue is not, after all, whether the Bible addresses homosexual practice: it does. It is not whether diverse interpretations on this issue have existed in the history of the church: they have not. The issue is, rather, what is authoritative for the church in the formation of its convictions and in its practices. On the issue of homosexual practice, no person or church or group should say that biblical texts mean something other than what the church has said all along because, as we shall demonstrate, both Scripture and the church have clearly and consistently said the same thing. . . . Gay Christians want to talk about the injustices they face, committed love relationships, and such, but they minimize discussions of their sexual practices. But this is the heart of the issue: homosexual sex as an expression of one's gay identity becomes more important than submission to the revealed will of God” (5, 21).

Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001.

“This book has been aimed at showing that affirming same-sex intercourse is *not* an act of love, however well meaning the intent. That road leads to death: physically, morally, and spiritually. Promoting the homosexual ‘rights’ agenda is an awful and harmful waste of the church's energies and resources. What does constitute an act of love is befriending the homosexual while withholding approval of homosexual behavior, working in the true interests of the homosexual despite one's personal repugnance for same-sex intercourse, pursuing in love the homosexual while bearing the abuse that will inevitably come

with opposing homosexual practice. It is the harder road to travel. It is too hard for many people to live with in that holy tension. Yet it is the road that leads to life and true reconciliation; it is the calling of the church in the world” (493).

David P. Gushee with Brian McLaren, Phyllis Tickle and Matthew Vines. *Changing our Mind*, second edition. Canton, MI: Read The Spirit Books, 2015.

“My mind has changed – especially due to the transformative encounters I have been blessed to have with gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Christians over the last decade. One of them is my beloved sister, who is dearer to me than words can say and who came out as a lesbian not long ago. . . .My mind and heart have changed as God has sent large numbers of ‘sexual others’ into my life. These experiences have gradually led to a sharpening of my understanding of the Christian Gospel and the Christian Church, and some fresh thinking about what Christian sexual ethics should look like. . . .I am a Baptist minister and professor, and we Baptists tend to emphasize quite strongly the responsibility of all individual Christians to think carefully about issues of faith for ourselves, in obedience to Christ. . . .As such, in this book I am asking whether the Church should change our mind and our practices in relation to Christian LGBT people and their relationships – not because we are under pressure from a hostile culture to do so, but because within the terms of our own faith we might now conclude that this is one of those cases in 2,000 years of Christian history where we have gotten some things wrong. . . . The issue is not whether some Christians as individuals change their minds, but whether the Church universal will or should change its mind collectively. And that takes disciplined reflection together in community, with all hands on deck making the best contribution” (5-6, 15-17).

Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*. San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1996.

“Gary, my best friend from undergraduate years at Yale, was dying of AIDS. . . .We agreed that we had a word to speak to the churches. . . .He was going to write an article about his own experience, reflecting on his struggle to live as a faithful Christian wracked by a sexual orientation that he believed to be incommensurate with the teaching of Scripture, and I agreed to write a response to it. . . .This section of the present book, then is an act of keeping covenant with a beloved brother in Christ who will not speak again on this side of the resurrection. I commit it to print in the hope that it will foster compassionate and careful reasoned theological reflection with the community of faith (379-380). My friend Gary, in his final letter to me, wrote urgently of the imperatives of discipleship: ‘*Are homosexuals to be excluded from the community of faith? Certainly not. But anyone who joins such a community should know that it is a place of transformation, of discipline, of learning, and not merely a place to be comforted or indulged*’ (401).

“In the midst of a culture that worships self-gratification, and in a church that often preaches a false Jesus who panders to our desires, those who seek the narrow way of obedience have a powerful word to speak. As Paul saw in pagan homosexuality a vivid symbol of human fallenness, so I saw conversely in Gary, as I have seen in other homosexual friends and colleagues, a symbol of God’s power made perfect in weakness (2 Cor 12:9). Gary knew through experience the bitter power of sin a twisted world, and he trusted in God’s love anyway. Thus he embodied the ‘sufferings of the present time’ of which Paul speaks in Romans 8: living in the joyful freedom of the ‘first fruits of the Spirit,’ even while groaning along with a creation in bondage to decay” (403).

Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010.

“I hope in what follows to convey something of what it’s like to have survived – or, rather, to be surviving – the anguished journey of struggling with homosexuality I am writing for gay and lesbian persons who have experienced stinging rejections from Christians but who nevertheless are convinced that God wants them to try to live pure and faithful lives within the flawed and often hurtful community of the church. I am writing for homosexual persons who have tried – and are trying – to ‘become heterosexual’ and are not succeeding and wonder, for the upteenth time, what exactly it is that God wants them to do” (14, 19).

“More and more, I have a sense that what many of us need is a new conception of our perseverance in faith. We need to reimagine ourselves and our struggles. The temptation for me is to look at my bent and broken sexuality and conclude that, with it, I will never be able to please God, to walk in a manner worthy of his calling, to hear his praise. But what if I had a conception of God-glorifying faith, holiness, and righteousness that included within it a profound element of struggle and stumbling? What if I were to view my homosexual orientation, temptations, and occasional failures not as damning disqualifications for living a Christian life but rather as part and parcel of what it means to live by faith in a world that is

fallen and scarred by sin and death?” (144-145).

“Slowly, ever so slowly. . . I am learning that my struggle to live faithfully before God in Christ with my homosexual orientation is pleasing to him. And I am waiting for the day when I will receive the divine accolade, when my labor of trust and hope and self-denial will be crowned with his praise. ‘Well done, good and faithful servant,’ the Lord Christ will say, ‘Enter into the joy of your master.’” (150).

Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse. *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church’s Moral Debate*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000.

“We have argued that there is evidence that genetic variables, brain differences and psychological/experiential /familial variables are all involved in the causation of homosexuality. . . . Even if the homosexual condition of desiring intimacy and sexual union with a person of the same gender is caused in its entirety by casual factors outside the persons control of the person, that does not constitute moral affirmation of acting on those desires. If it did, the pedophile who desires sex with children, the alcoholic who desires the pursuit of drunkenness, and the person with Antisocial Personality Disorder who desires the thrill of victimization and pain infliction would all have an equal case for moral approval of their exploits. At the broadest level all humans are heirs to a predisposition that we have no chosen and that propels us toward self-destruction and evil – our sinful nature. The plight of the homosexual who has desires and passions that he or she did not choose is in fact the common plight of humanity. We all face the same challenge: how are we to live when what we want is out of accord with what God tells us we should want in this life?” (181).

Tim Keller, “The Bible and same sex relationships: A review article,” Redeemer Report, June 2015 https://www.redeemer.com/redeemer-report/article/the_bible_and_same_sex_relationships_a_review_article Keller critiques the six basic arguments of Matthew Vines (*God and the Gay Christian*) and Ken Wilson (*A Letter to My Congregation*).

Keller is sympathetic to Vines and Wilson’s critiques of bigoted opposition to gays, but challenges their argument that Paul prohibited only exploitive homosexual relationships (pederasty, prostitution, and rape). He does not agree with their recategorization of same-sex relations as a matter on which good Christians differ. Keller writes, “The reason that homosexual relationships make so much more sense to people today than in previous times is because they have absorbed late modern western culture’s narratives about human life.” Vines and Wilson shift “the ultimate authority to define right and wrong onto the individual Christian and away from the biblical text.”

John Stott, *Same-Sex Partnerships? A Christian Perspective*. Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1998.

“In sum, the only ‘one flesh’ experience which God intends and Scripture contemplates is the sexual union of a man with his wife, whom he recognizes as flesh of his flesh. As George Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury, said, ‘I do not find any justification, from the Bible or from the entire Christian tradition, for sexual activity outside of marriage’ (40).

“At the heart of the homosexual condition is a deep loneliness, the natural hunger for mutual love, a search for identity, and a longing for completeness. If homosexual people cannot find these things in the local ‘church family,’ we have no business to go on using that expression. The alternative is not only between the warm physical relationship of homosexual intercourse and the pain of isolation in the cold. There is a third option, namely a Christian environment of love, understanding, acceptance, and support. I do not think there is any need to encourage homosexual people to disclose their sexual inclinations to everybody; this is neither necessary nor helpful. But they do need at least one confidante to whom they can unburden themselves, who will not despise or reject them but support them with friendship and prayer; probably some professional, private, and confidential pastoral counsel; possibly, in addition, the support of a professionally supervised therapy group; and (like all single people) many warm and affectionate friendships with people of both sexes” (81-82).

William J. Webb, “Gender Equality and Homosexuality,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, Editors Ronald Pierce, Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, Gordon Fee (Downers Grove, IL.: IVP, 2004) 407-408.

“In many texts having to do with women’s relationships to men (usually husbands), and in many slavery texts, the isolated words on the page do not reflect an ultimate social ethic; yet the redemptive movement within the text is certainly heading in a liberating direction. On the other hand, when the texts prohibiting homosexual behavior are read against the backdrop of the ancient world, we discover a biblical spirit that creates movement in a more *restrictive* direction. The biblical text moves restrictively compared to the openness toward and acceptance of homosexuality in the social realm and in pagan worship of

the day. . . .A commitment to biblical authority means that our modern application honors the direction and meaning of the redemptive spirit within the Bible. Although this is not a popular answer to the homosexuality question in our society, only a sexual ethic that excludes homosexual behavior retains the spirit and redemptive movement found in Scripture, as its words are understood in the light of the ancient world context” (407-408).

_____. *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals*. Downers Grove, IL.: IVP, 2001.

William Webb argues that a *static* hermeneutic tends to *isolate* the words of the text and freeze the application in the ancient culture. A *secular or radical* hermeneutic lacks direction and true regard for biblical authority. A *redemptive-movement* hermeneutic seeks to preserve the original intent of the passage and apply biblical truth in the contemporary setting. Webb writes, “The Christian who embraces a redemptive-spirit approach cannot help but be profoundly influenced by the resilient character of the ancient text as it continues to speak to our modern world” (57). “It is necessary for Christians to challenge their culture where it departs from kingdom values; it is equally necessary for them to identify with their culture on all other matters” (22).

Douglas D. Webster, “Conviction and Compassion” (130-146) in *Soulcraft: How God Shapes Us Through Relationships*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1999.

“The perception of the truth about same-sex relationships has become gravely distorted, with the result that we are witnessing an unprecedented moral reversal. What was widely condemned as sin is quickly becoming a cause for celebration in many religious circles. But unlike many issues, homosexuality does not lend itself to theological compromise, which has become so typical of the mainline church. The fact that a sexual issue should assume such importance in the church today is symptomatic of a much larger and irreconcilable clash of theological convictions. This crisis has been skillfully dodged for decades by those who have been unwilling to look below the rhetoric at what people actually mean theologically and ethically.” (135-136) “When salvation history has been reduced to the autonomous individual’s faith journey, should we not anticipate a radical change in the recognition of the Bible’s authority on sexuality? If the incarnation, atonement and resurrection are vacated of specific historical meaning and reduced to poetic metaphors for spiritual experience, what discourages a [self-identifying evangelical] theologian from saying that the writers of the Bible never meant to inhibit sexual expression?” (136)

Ken Wilson, *A Letter to my Congregation: An evangelical pastor’s path to embracing people who are gay, lesbian and transgender into the company of Jesus*. Canton, MI: Read The Spirit Books, 2014.

“I am convinced that how the biblical prohibitions apply to monogamous gay relationships is indeed a disputable matter and that the teaching of Romans 14-15 should guide our response. . . .This provides the makings of a third way to guide pastors and local churches in the care of people in the face of the gay controversyThe term ‘third way’ places this approach in the context of two existing alternatives: ‘open and affirming’ and ‘love the sinner, hate the sin’. . . . A third way departs from the ‘open and affirming’ and the ‘love the sinner, hate the sin’ approach by regarding the question of whether and how the biblical prohibitions apply in the case of monogamous gay relationships as a ‘disputable matter’ in the Romans 14-15 sense” (110-112).