

THE MASTER'S SEMINARY JOURNAL



Homosexuality—An Abomination or Purely Irrelevant?:
Evaluating LGBT Claims in Light of the Old Testament
(Gen. 18–19; Lev. 18:22; 20:13)

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GUEST EDITORIAL

A Memory of Robert Lewis Thomas (June 4, 1928–September 6, 2017)

A Loyal Soldier Reports to Headquarters Following Active Duty

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Professor of New Testament
The Master's Seminary

On September 6, 2017 one of God's finest top commanders in the field of New Testament studies, Robert Lewis Thomas (1928–2017), was called home to God's heavenly headquarters after his Lord summoned him for final report on his duty station in this life. He served from 1959 to 2009, fifty years of service. I received much of my training in New Testament boot camp from General Thomas. I remember him so very well. I not only trained under him in boot camp for my New Testament training, but I also fought together with him in sustained battle for twelve years at The Master's Seminary as he rigorously, fearlessly, and unrelentingly conducted an unwavering defense of the absolute integrity and inerrancy of the Word of God against all opponents, foreign and domestic. No one was ever able to out-maneuver or out-fight him in battlefield engagements. His battle acumen was "precision" and a constant refrain of perfect execution of orders. His standards for soldiers in training never countenanced weakness or laziness, but due diligence. A watchword from him was "discernment" concerning the implications of issues. The epitome of a soldier of Jesus Christ, Thomas fit that profile perfectly. His loyalty of devotion to the Lord never wavered.

I look back at my first days in the training camp of seminary at the old Talbot Theological Seminary (now Talbot School of Theology). It was 6 February 1979 in the early morning hours on the campus of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles at the headquarters of Myers Hall. Classes began promptly at 07:30 hours and were characterized by the need for supreme focus and discipline to surmount the challenges presented by the General. Of all the New Testament commanders I have been associated with, General Thomas was quite unique. No exaggeration. Class began promptly with a laser-like focus on learning. I learned the rigor of study and execution of orders from him. Under him, I studied for both my Master of Divinity and Master of Theology. No one that I studied with before or after ever commanded the subjects he taught as he did. No one thought through battlefield maneuvers, tactics, and results as he did. The rigors of his training caused sore intellectual "muscles" for many in his boot camp. The stress of those days still echoes in my mind and haunts my

thoughts. The discipline needed to surmount a successful completion under him resulted in many returning from seminary to civilian life—some with an “honorable discharge” and others with “dishonorable discharge” because of a failure to develop or maintain the high standards he insisted upon. How many times I heard the General inform a candidate in his office in boot camp that they were being discharged or held back because they did not surmount the standards he expected!

Of all the memories I have of General Thomas one stands out above all. I have served under many New Testament soldiers before, and especially after him. None equaled him in one area. I have attended other “boot camps” in my training to the level of “Ph.D.” But General Thomas surpassed them all, hands down; no question, no doubts in my mind; no exceptions; no comparison. What was that qualitative distinction? The exceptional quality was his unwavering, *absolute devotion to the Word of God* as a soldier of Jesus Christ.

How so? Why so? His rigor for the absolute authority and absolute inerrancy of God’s Word had no equals. Indeed, General Thomas stands out in these two areas above all others that surround the Christian’s training manual, God’s Word. His belief in the absolute authority of God’s Word was seen in his championing the plain, normal interpretation or grammatico-historical hermeneutic. Truly, he wrote the book on it (*Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New vs The Old*). He took the God of the Bible, the Commander and Chief, at His Word. It was that plain and simple. What God said, God meant in Thomas’s thinking. For General Thomas, God did not play games with the text. Only those who interpret and understand the Word of God plainly truly understand the authority of God’s Word. They take what it says at face value without attempting to accommodate its contents to the subjective whims of current, popular views that come and go over time. Nor do they succumb to the hallowed halls of vaunted academic pride.

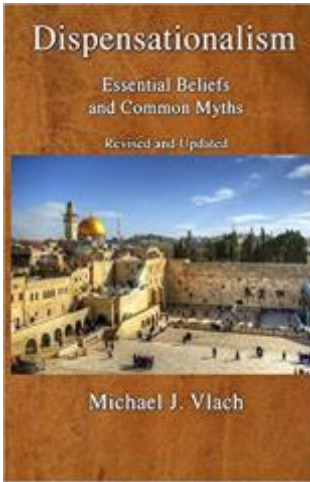
Indeed, “Thus says the Lord” for General Thomas signified that the Lord meant what He said and said what He meant. No other soldier held such devotion. General Thomas stood out as an example to his students concerning how to take God’s Word as absolute truth. His students knew that he played no games here; he set the highest example for all who trained under him. He fearlessly went against anyone who would dare vaunt man’s thinking about God’s Word. For this reason, many disliked and also feared him. He angered many, yet he never backed down in battle, not even once. No one was able to out-argue or maneuver him. How often many tried. His opponents often fought together in a unified effort to defeat him. They failed miserably. How often I laughed when opponents were bested by his tactics and logic in both his writings and oral debates. To have General Thomas array hardened battle tactics against your thinking meant a formidable defeat for your cause. He defeated all enemies, took no prisoners, and countenanced no fools. He was often victorious because the evidence of God’s Spirit informing his thinking stood out as plainly evident. He was God’s man—God’s devoted soldier.

One other area stands out. Not only did General Thomas champion plain, normal interpretation, taking God seriously at His Word, General Thomas also rigorously fought for and championed the inerrancy (no errors) of God’s Word. For Thomas, God’s Word was sure. This was an absolute that was more sure than any other principle. His students never faced any lesson from him when this belief in the absolute integrity, truthfulness and unerring nature of God’s Word was questioned or discounted. This conviction stood out as the central focus of Thomas’s belief. Indeed, evident in his example to his students was General Thomas’s belief in the Lordship of Jesus Christ over the scholarship of men. Never did Thomas compromise in this belief. For Thomas, dialogue and compromise on the inerrancy

of God's Word for the sake of gaining academic respectability or "a say at the table" with those in influence was "GOD FORBID" (*me genoito*). His loyalty to his Commander in this regard was unequaled by anyone in New Testament studies. In fact, WOE to anyone who compromised here, for Thomas would quickly launch an excursion on anyone who overstepped these bounds. He never attempted to change the meaning of "inerrancy" to "limited inerrancy" or "inerrant according to ancient standards" away from the plain understanding that the Bible is "without error" so rigorously maintained in both the OT (Ps. 119) and NT (2 Tim. 3:16). He knew that God's Holy Spirit of truth (John 14:26; 16:13; 1 John 4:4-6) produced the document that testifies of the true God. Any error would render God a liar and to say the Word has error would be to insult (blaspheme) the Spirit of God who authored it. Indeed, God's Word is alive and active (John 4:12) because it comes from the Spirit of the Living God. Sadly, so many today in New Testament scholarship are attempting to move away from its orthodox understanding.

Why did Thomas firmly maintain this standard? Because he knew that God cannot lie and would not therefore let His Word fail. He knew that Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will never pass away" (Matt. 24:35). Indeed, he fought alongside many other soldiers who worked on the International Council of Biblical Inerrancy, both in its championing of inerrancy (1978) and also its championing of grammatico-historical, plain, normal hermeneutics (1982). I remember when he flew to Chicago in my seminary days as he fought for the rigors of these historical documents. He offered discussions in class about these events and their importance. How his warnings in his "boot camp" to maintain integrity in these two areas echo in many today.

In ancient times a warrior often was buried with his armor. As we remember a fallen soldier who has reported to headquarters, Robert Lewis Thomas, we lay beside his memory the testimony of his defense of both the inerrancy of God's Word and the plain, normal interpretation of what God said. We also know that what he taught in the classroom he also practiced in his work outside the classroom. Like General Robert Thomas, may God raise up soldiers that are surrendered and subservient to the Word of God, fully devoted to God's glory and not the praises of men (John 12:43).



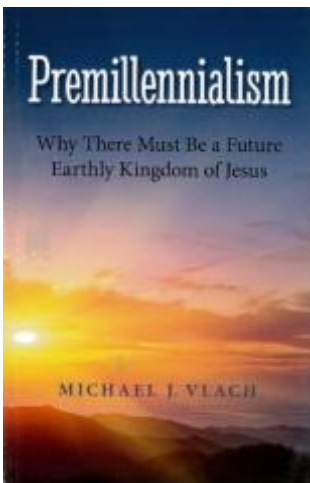
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HOMOSEXUALITY—AN ABOMINATION OR PURELY IRRELEVANT?: EVALUATING LGBT CLAIMS IN LIGHT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT (GEN. 18–19; LEV. 18:22; 20:13)

Michael A. Grisanti
Professor of Old Testament
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*This article considers God’s revelation concerning homosexuality in three key OT passages: Genesis 19:1–11, Leviticus 18:22, and Leviticus 20:13. These three passages provide a consistent message: **homosexuality is a violation of God’s created order** and stands opposed to God’s intentions that His people of all ages conduct lives that put His surpassing character on display.*

* * * * *

Introduction

At first blush one might wonder why another article (or a series of lectures¹) dealing with the LGBT beliefs and practices is needed in 2017? Most know that the debate about the morality or immorality of LGBT behavior has raged for the last few decades, even increasing in fervor over the past several years. However, I believe that the issues we face as Christ-followers have great significance. According to James DeYoung:

Western Civilization has been undergoing as dramatic a shift in its ways of thinking and living as at any point in history. Many describe this turned corner as the rise of postmodernism, which is replacing modernism as the contemporary worldview. That new standards of public morality, ethics, and law have been advanced is not surprising, given the downward spiral of appreciation for any outward role for religion in life. At least from the standpoint of culture and law, **our society no longer tolerates public endorsement of Christianity; rather,**

¹ This and other articles in this issue of *The Master’s Seminary Journal* are drawn from the 2017 TMS Faculty Lecture series dealing with “Believers, the Bible, and the LGBT Community.”

the only acceptable public positions are distrust of, or outright antagonism toward, religion in general and Christianity in particular.

Ethical issues that have become matters of public morality—such as abortion, state lotteries, euthanasia, and homosexuality—have become storm-centers of that debate Now questions about its morality [i.e., homosexuality], its legality as a civil right, and its acceptability as a religious ethic are freely, openly, ubiquitously, and passionately discussed.²

Francis Schaeffer, an amazingly perceptive thinker, was unfortunately correct when he wrote that people “drift along from generation to generation and the morally unthinkable becomes thinkable as the years move on.”³ As an illustration of this, a recent study published by the Pew Research Center (December 18, 2015) affirmed that most U.S. “Christian” groups had become more accepting of homosexuality from 2007–2014.⁴ Here are some of their findings:

	<u>2007</u>	<u>2014</u>
Catholics	58%	70%
Mainline Protestants	56%	66%
“All Christians”	44%	54%
Evangelical Protestants	26%	36%
Southern Baptist Conv.	26%	30%

This evidences roughly, generally a 10–12 percent increase in support. Roughly half (51%) of evangelical Protestants in the Millennial generation (born between 1981 and 1996) say homosexuality should be accepted by society, compared with a third of evangelical Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964). What is most disconcerting in the above statistics is the growing support of the LGBT agenda by evangelical Christians.

Notice what one conservative law professor wrote after a court case in Indiana that paved the way for the Supreme Court ruling about same-sex couples having the fundamental right to marry:

Cultural pressure is going to radically reduce orthodox Christian numbers in the years to come. The meaning of what it means to be a faithful Christian is going to come under intense fire, not only from outside the churches, but from within.

² James De Young, *Homosexuality: Contemporary Claims Examined in Light of the Bible and Other Ancient Literature and Law* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2000), 9–10.

³ C. Everett Koop and Francis Schaeffer, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1983), 2.

⁴ Caryle Murphy, “Most U.S. Christian groups grow more accepting of homosexuality,” <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/12/18/most-u-s-christian-groups-grow-more-accepting-of-homosexuality/> (accessed February 1, 2017).

There will be serious stigma attached to standing up for orthodox teaching on homosexuality.⁵

What has contributed to this growing support of the LGBT agenda, even in “believing” communities? I would suggest there is a growing tendency of people to not submit their thinking and beliefs totally to the clear teaching of the Word of God. This is absolutely central to the problem and an essential part of the solution.

So what are believers, as well as seminary students and professors, to do in the face of these changing times?

First, we need to make sure the Bible is always the ultimate authority for how we think, believe, and act. This may seem obvious. But the way we teach, preach, counsel, and invest in lives must always turn our flock’s attention to the truths found in God’s Word. Second, we must know how to lovingly, but accurately, explain what the Bible says about the issues that are part of the LGBT agenda. That will involve having a basic idea of what others are saying about this or that biblical passage and how best we should respond. Third, we must be prepared for increasing challenges to our faith and practice that are coming our way.⁶

In light of those concerns, here are my objectives in this article. First, I hope to remind ourselves about the clarity of the Bible on this issue. God has not left us without biblical clarity concerning how to think biblically about this complicated issue. Second, my desire is that this article will provide a greater understanding of how the larger world understands (and often dismisses) the passages discussed below. Finally, my prayer is that as a result of this study each believer would be better able to respond to those dismissals by correctly handling these texts.

This article will consider the contributions that Genesis 19:1–11 and Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 make to the way believers should understand homosexuality. It considers the key features of each passage, the interpretive options, and argues for a certain understanding. In the end, Genesis 19 as well as Leviticus 18 and 20 clearly teach that homosexuality is not biblically acceptable conduct. In addition, the Bible clearly teaches that believers must honor God in how we interact with all sinners, including those who struggle with or practice homosexuality.

The Men of Sodom (Genesis 19:1–11)

Contextual Development

After Yahweh established His covenant with Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 12:1–3), Abraham’s and Lot’s flocks and herds became quite numerous and their servants began to quarrel with each other (13:1–7). Abraham suggested to Lot that they choose different regions for their herds and flocks, and Lot chose the Jordan Valley, setting up his tent near the city of Sodom (13:8–12). The very next verse states that “the men of Sodom were evil, sinning greatly against the Lord” (13:13).

⁵ Rod Dreher, “After Obergefell, Revisiting Prof. Kingsfield,” <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/revisiting-prof-kingsfield-obergefell-religious-liberty/> (accessed February 1, 2017).

⁶ I will leave it to others in this issue of the *Journal* who have addressed the issue more pastorally to provide some more precise direction in this area.

Several chapters later Yahweh sent messengers to Abraham and told him that “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is immense, and their sin is extremely serious” (18:20). Abraham, apparently concerned that God might judge righteous people along with the wicked inhabitants of Sodom, repeatedly asked Yahweh whether He would destroy Sodom if a number of righteous people lived there. He reaches the lowest number in Genesis 18:32: “Then he said, ‘Let the Lord not be angry, and I will speak one more time. Suppose 10 [righteous people] are found there?’ He answered, ‘I will not destroy it on account of 10.’” God’s stated intention to destroy Sodom indicates that *there were fewer than 10 righteous people in the entire city.*

Key Features of the Passage

The two angels whom Abraham had entertained, appearing as men, arrived in Sodom, and Lot invited them to spend the night at his home. After initially expressing their desire to spend the night in the town square, they eventually accepted Lot’s invitation to host them. After they ate the evening meal, notice what happened (the most significant elements are in italics):

Before they went to bed, the men of the city of Sodom, both young and old, the whole population [NRSV “*to the last man*”], surrounded the house. They called out to Lot and said, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Send them out to us so we can have sex with [*know*] them!” Lot went out to them at the entrance and shut the door behind him. He said, “Don’t do this evil, my brothers. Look, I’ve got two daughters who haven’t had sexual relations [*known*] with a man. I’ll bring them out to you, and you can do whatever you want to them. However, don’t do anything to these men, because they have come under the protection of my roof.” “Get out of the way!” they said, adding, “This one came here as a foreigner, but he’s acting like a judge! Now we’ll do more harm to you than to them.” They put pressure on Lot and came up to break down the door. But the angels reached out, brought Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. They struck the men who were at the entrance of the house, both young and old [lit., *from the least to the greatest*], with a blinding light so that they were unable to find the entrance.

Key Questions to Ask

In order to better understand this passage, we need to ask (Q) and answer (A) several important questions.

Q: *Who is involved?* **A:** v. 4—all men of all ages who lived in Sodom

The pack who “surrounded” the house is inclusive, involving men from every sector of the city and each age group. The merism “both young and old,” that is, everybody (also v. 11), shows that their homosexual practices had become generational. The NIV’s translation, “every part [lit., “end”] of the city,” accents the inclusiveness of the crowd. The participants in this gathered mob came from all over the

city. The Hebrew term *qāṣeh*, which means “end, extremity,” emphasizes this point. It can refer to the population directly, that is, “to the last man” (NRSV; cf. Num 22:41).⁷ According to both expressions the point is essentially the same—Sodom’s sexual immorality was pervasive.⁸

Q: How did they approach Lot’s house? A: v. 4— “surrounded the house”

They totally “surrounded” the house before even addressing those inside, showing their hostile intentions from the beginning (e.g., Josh. 7:9; cf. Judg. 16:2; Job 16:13).⁹ The wicked men of Gibeah employed the same tactic (Judg. 19:22; 20:5). The only ones inside the house at this time were Lot, his wife and two daughters, and two angels seen as men.

Q: What did they want? A: To have sex with (or “know”) the angels/men in the house

For the sake of clarity, read the text of verses 5 and 7:

v. 5: “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them.”

vv. 7–8: “Don’t do this evil, my brothers. Look, I’ve got two daughters who haven’t known a man.”

The next section will consider the interpretive controversy around this verb.

Interpretive Options for the Key Expression “To Know”

The primary issue relates to the meaning of the verb *yādaʿ* in Genesis 19. The main alternatives involve a sexual or non-sexual significance of the verb. One’s interpretation of this verb’s meaning must also consider the impact of Ezekiel’s evaluation of Sodom’s rebellious conduct (Ezek. 16:49–50).

Does the Hebrew verb yādaʿ mean “to get to know” or “to have sex” in Genesis 19?

⁷ Claus Westermann renders this phrase, “the whole people to the last man” (*Genesis 12–36*, Continental [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995], 295). He also points out that “The expression refers to the inquiry whether the whole city is really corrupt and so must be destroyed” (p. 301).

⁸ K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 235.

⁹ Leslie Allen, “סבב,” *NIDOTTE* 3.219. According to Allen, the verb “is often used in a hostile (e.g., Gen 19:4; Judg 19:22) or military (e.g., 2 Sam 18:15; 2 Kgs 6:15) sense.”

Supporters of Homosexuality

According to pro-homosexual proponents, this Hebrew verb means “to get to know” and not “to have sex” in this context. They claim that the Hebrew verb “to know” (*yāda*’) does not necessarily mean sexual knowledge.¹⁰ They also argue (correctly) that this verb only relatively rarely signifies “to have intercourse with” (15 times/948 occurrences, e.g., Gen. 4:1).

According to this view, the men of Sodom wanted only to become acquainted with these strangers. They gathered outside of Lot’s home because Lot had exceeded his rights by receiving two foreigners whose credentials had not yet been examined (to see if they were spies).

Perhaps the most developed view involves Morschauser’s¹¹ contention that when the men say they want to “know” the visitors, they are expressing distrust in Lot’s ability to protect the city from spies and they want to “interrogate” the men. Lot identifies this intention as “wicked” because interrogations in the ancient world were typically not gentle. In this view, Lot offers his daughters as hostages to be held as warranty that he has the situation well in hand.¹²

Biblical Position

In this passage and several others, the Hebrew verb “to know” (*yāda*’) clearly signifies sexual intercourse. **The meaning of a word** in any passage is not determined solely on the basis of the number of times it is translated that way in the Bible, but on the *contextual usage* of the word. **Once Lot offers his daughters to the men surrounding his home, it becomes clear that sexual intercourse and not getting acquainted is the issue being proposed.**¹³ As V. Hamilton observes: “Lot would never have made such an unusual suggestion if the request was only for a handshake and moments of chitchat.”¹⁴

It is true that only 15 instances out of the 948 occurrences of the verb “to know” refer to sexual intimacy.¹⁵ These fifteen passages include instances where the man is

¹⁰ John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 93–94; cf. D. S. Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (London: Longmans, 1955), pp. 4–8; John McNeill, *The Church and the Homosexual* (Boston: Beacon, 1993), 42–50. Many other sources could be cited.

¹¹ S. Morschauser, “‘Hospitality,’ Hostiles and Hostage: On the Legal Background to Genesis 19:1–9,” *JSOT* 27, no. 4 (2003): 472–76.

¹² *Ibid.*, 461, 474–82.

¹³ Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1982), 136–37; P. M. Ukleja, “Homosexuality and the Old Testament,” *BSac* 140 (1983): 260–62; D. L. Bartlett, “A Biblical Perspective on Homosexuality,” *Foundations: Baptist Journal of History and Theology* 20 (1977): 134.

¹⁴ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 34.

¹⁵ These statistics are taken from G. J. Botterweck, “*yāda*’,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, trans. David E. Green, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 5:453.

the subject (Gen. 4:1, 17, 25; 24:16; 38:26; Judg. 19:25; 1 Sam. 1:19; 1 Kings 1:4) or where the woman is the subject (Gen. 19:8; Num. 31:17, 18, 35; Judg. 11:39). In only two cases a man is both the subject and object of the verb (i.e., homosexual intercourse—Genesis 19:5 and Judges 19:22).¹⁶ A more challenging obstacle for the pro-homosexual interpretation of this verb is that whenever the Hebrew verb “to know” has a personal direct object (i.e., to know someone, not something), the verb always has a *sexual innuendo*.¹⁷ Another linguistic feature is often overlooked by pro-homosexual proponents. Even though it is well known that the Hebrew verb *yāda* ‘ can connote sexual knowledge, what is less known is that Hebrew shares this feature with several other Semitic languages.¹⁸

Finally, Jude 7 characterizes the conduct of Sodom and Gomorrah this way: “In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.” According to Jude, sexual perversion was at least a key aspect of the rebellion that characterized the city.

What about Ezekiel 16:49–50?

“Now this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, plenty of food, and comfortable security, but didn’t support the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before Me, so I removed them when I saw this.”

Supporters of Homosexuality

They affirm that the only sin committed by the men of Sodom involved breaking the laws of hospitality. Any idea of sexual assault is arbitrarily read into the text. In addition to this, various scholars point out that none of the numerous passages (Deut. 29:23; 32:32; Isa. 1:9–10; 3:9; 13:19; 49:18; Jer. 23:14; Lam. 4:6; Amos 4:1–11; Zeph. 2:8–11; Matt 10:5–10; et al; esp. Ezek. 16:49–50) that refer to Sodom and Gomorrah as a paradigm for sinful conduct ever mention sexually aberrant behavior.

One of them concludes: “If Sodom’s sin had indeed been same-sex behavior, it’s highly unlikely that every written discussion of the city for centuries following its destruction would fail to mention that.”¹⁹ John McNeill affirms that “the sin of

¹⁶ Interestingly, as Hamilton points out, “in Gen. 19:5 but not in Judg. 19:22 or anywhere else, the LXX renders *yāda* ‘ with *synginōskō* (‘to meet, converse with’) instead of the usual *ginōskō*. The LXX has here chosen a word capable of innocuous interpretation in the context” (Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 33–34); cf. John A. Lee, “Equivocal and Stereotyped Renderings in the LXX,” *RB* 87 (1980): 109–10.

¹⁷ John H. Walton, “Genesis,” in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, ed. John H. Walton (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 93.

¹⁸ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 34.

¹⁹ Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* (New York: Convergent, 2015), 64; Michael Carden, *Sodomy: A History of a Christian Biblical Myth* (London: Equinox, 2004), 42–78.

Sodom was never interpreted in the Old Testament times as being primarily sexual; rather, it is portrayed as a sin of pride and inhospitality.”²⁰

According to Gordon Wenham:

What is surprising and deeply shocking is their total disregard for the accepted principles of eastern hospitality. Visitors, whether anticipated or not, must be treated with the utmost courtesy and kindness. Here the men of Sodom show utter disregard for the rules of hospitality, and suggest Lot’s visitors submit to the most demeaning treatment they can devise, a treatment elsewhere used on prisoners of war. So the sin of Sodom is not primarily homosexuality as such, but an assault on weak and helpless visitors who according to justice and tradition they ought rather to have protected (Ezk 16:49).²¹

Biblical Position—Ezekiel 16 does not just refer to inhospitable conduct, but also “detestable acts.”

Here are a handful of points that will help us understand how Ezekiel 16 relates to Genesis 19. First, the sin of Sodom (and Gomorrah) must not be minimized. Notice these two passages from Genesis:

Then the LORD said, “The *outcry* (תִּקְרָא; זֵעָ ‘*āqāh*) against Sodom and Gomorrah is immense, and their sin is extremely serious. I will go down to see if what they have done justifies the cry that has come up to Me. If not, I will find out” (Gen. 18:20–21).

for we are about to destroy this place because the *outcry* (תִּקְרָא; זֵעָ ‘*āqāh*) against its people is so great before the LORD, that the LORD has sent us to destroy it (Gen. 19:13).

According to N. Sarna, these two nouns for *outcry*, very similar in Hebrew, “connote the anguished cry of the oppressed, the agonized plea of the victim for help in the face of some great injustice. In the Bible, these terms are suffused with poignancy and pathos, with moral outrage and soul-stirring passion . . . [the second term] is especially used in connection with the suffering of the poor and the impoverished

²⁰ McNeill, *The Church and the Homosexual*, 68; Marin also writes: “None of the themes in Ezekiel 16 are even remotely close to resembling the committed monogamous same-sex relationships we know of today. Because of that, pro-gay theologians assert that the overarching theme to Genesis 19 is not homosexuality.” Andrew Marin, *Love Is an Orientation: Elevating the Conversation with the Gay Community* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 118.

²¹ Gordon J. Wenham, “Attitudes to Homosexuality in the OT,” *Expository Times* 102, no 12 (1991): 361.

victims of avaricious exploitation.”²² He concludes his treatment of this issue by stating: “In 18:20f. the guilt of the city is still to be proved. Now its guilt is established beyond all doubt. Its punishment is inevitable.”²³

Also, remember some verses in the near context of Genesis 19 that we have already seen:

Now the men of Sodom were **evil**, sinning greatly against the Lord (Gen. 13:13).

Then he said, “Let the Lord not be angry, and I will speak one more time. Suppose 10 [righteous people] are found there?” He answered, “I will not destroy it on account of 10” (Gen. 18:32).

Second, the sin that was *intended but averted* in Genesis 19 did involve homosexual rape. That was surely not all the sin that characterized Sodom, but it represented a very dark side of the city. Ezekiel uses several words that point to the widespread and offensive nature of Sodom’s sin—not just inhospitality and a lack of compassion:

Didn’t you walk in their ways and do their detestable practices? It was only a short time before you behaved more corruptly than they did. “As I live”—the declaration of the Lord GOD—“your sister Sodom and her daughters have not behaved as you and your daughters have. Now this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, plenty of food, and comfortable security, but didn’t support the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before Me, so I removed them when I saw this” (47–50).

Third, Ezekiel uses Sodom as his example to draw on two aspects of Sodom “symbolism” found throughout the Old Testament: (1) Sodom as the pinnacle example of wickedness; and (2) Sodom as the arch-example of the destructive wrath of God.²⁴

Fourth, as a core part of Yahweh’s expectations of His chosen people—made evident through Mosaic Law—the Lord wanted Israel to put His surpassing character on display to each other and the surrounding nations by excelling in their pursuit of justice and equity as well as kindness and compassion in their dealing with each other (fellow citizens) as well as Gentiles passing through their region (Exod. 19:4–6; Deut. 26:16–19).

Fifth, we must keep in mind that Ezekiel is indicting Judah (and Jerusalem) for their covenant treachery—consistent rebellion against Yahweh. **The prophet Ezekiel compares Jerusalem to two sisters—Samaria to the north and Sodom to the south.** Judah’s main problem was not the practice of homosexuality (though it existed as part of the pagan worship that happened too frequently in their midst). Their refusal

²² Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 132.

²³ *Ibid.*, 137.

²⁴ J. A. Loader, “The prophets and Sodom: The prophetic use of the Sodom and Gomorrah theme,” *Theological Studies* vol. 47, no. 1 (1991): 14–15.

to practice justice/equity and kindness/compassion in everyday life represented their rejection of the agenda God had given them—put Him on display before all around you. Guess what that kind of rebellious conduct could be called—inhospitality, pride, lack of kindness, etc.! Consequently, what Ezekiel emphasizes in this passage does not minimize or rule out the sexual nature of Sodom’s sin in Genesis 19. Instead, the prophet focuses on aspects of Judah’s sin that did not match the sexual sin of Sodom in this passage.

Finally, if the gang rape had taken place in Sodom, it would have represented the height of indignity and an absolute lack of hospitality to guests of the city. However, that does not at all temper the morally detestable conduct that gang rape would have involved.

Wasn't it homosexual rape and not loving, committed, consensual same-sex relationships that were described in Genesis 19?

Supporters of Homosexuality

Numerous scholars point out that the narrative of Genesis 19 does not depict homosexual desires or general homosexual behavior.²⁵ Consequently, for them the Genesis 19 narrative is not relative to the question of the morality of same-sex relationships.²⁶

On the one hand, it is a fair observation that the worst-case scenario of homosexuality in the Old Testament (along with Judges 19) should not be our first, only, or greatest support for our biblical position. Nevertheless, this sad narrative is not without relevance to understanding the biblical perspective on homosexuality. Rather, the OT and NT statements about God’s intentions for marriage, the Leviticus examples, and the statements about the ongoing practice of homosexuality are better places to build our strongest case.

²⁵ According to John Boswell, Genesis 19 is “only tangentially related to sexuality” (*Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980], 114. L. W. Countryman states that there is no basis for finding a “universal condemnation of homosexuality or even of homosexual acts” in Genesis 19 (L. William Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988], 31. George Edwards equates any linking of Sodom with homosexuality in general as “essentially heretical” (*Gay/Lesbian Liberation: A Biblical Perspective* [New York, Pilgrim, 1984], 68, cf. 44, 46). For others examples, see Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1982), 164; Daniel A. Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality* (Tajique, NM: Alamo Square, 2000), 43–50; Michael B. Regele, *Science, Scripture, and Same-Sex Love* (Nashville: Abingdon 2014), 127–31; Choon-Leong Seow, “Textual Orientation,” in *Biblical Ethics & Homosexuality*, ed. Robert L. Brawley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 21–22; Dan O. Via and Robert A. J. Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 4–5; many others could be cited.

²⁶ Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 65–66; Preston Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is Not Just an Issue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 42. Sprinkle concludes that Genesis 19 “does not contribute” to the question of the morality of same-sex relationships (*idem*).

Biblical Position

Although this passage does describe the averted threat of homosexual rape, it still has significance for the biblical outlook on homosexuality. There are various OT passages that use certain verbs that connote “abuse,” “violate,” “seize,” “lay with,” “humble” (Shechemites and Dinah—Gen. 34:2; Amon and Tamar—2 Sam. 13:14; biblical laws about rape—Deut. 22:25–27). In the “parallel” passage to Genesis 19 (Judg. 19:12–30), the host brusquely offers his virgin daughter and the levite’s concubine to the crowd gathered outside. He tells these men to oppress/humiliate/rape them and to do whatever else they wanted (Judg. 19:24).

In Genesis 19, the narrator (Moses) chooses to use the verb “to know” throughout this passage, a verb that never has the nuance of rape or abuse. Lot did not say: “Do not rape my visitors . . . Here are my daughters—rape them.” Lot (or the narrator) avoids using any verb that has clear-cut indications of sexual aggression. Clearly, then, the incident frowns on homosexual relations for whatever reason.²⁷ In the book of Judges, where moral anarchy is the norm, the host had no similar inhibitions.

What happened and could have happened in Genesis 19 is horrific, to say the least. Lot’s offer of his daughters to the gathered crowd of lustful men is incomprehensible. It does seem, however, that the biblical narrator (Moses) chose words that would have clearly violated what “to know” should have meant—sexual intimacy in a committed male-female relationship. Consequently, the sad narrative of Genesis 19 does present homosexuality as a departure of God’s intention for His creation.

Passages in Leviticus

Larger Context of Leviticus

Yahweh established a special, covenantal relationship with Abraham and his descendants in Genesis 12:1–3 (cf. Gen. 15 and 17). He worked in and through the patriarchs over the following centuries (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). After leading them down to Egypt, where Israel eventually became Egyptian slaves, God raised up Moses to deliver His chosen people from their bondage as part of His bringing to pass His promised plan for the covenant nation—establishing them in the land of promise.

It is essential to recognize that the Lord chose Israel to be His special people, not because of their own merit or righteousness, but simply for His own purposes. He intended that both they and the world might know Him (Gen. 1:26–27; Exod. 6:7).

After delivering them from Egypt and enabling them to cross the Red Sea, God led them to Mt. Sinai where He gave them His covenant demands (the Mosaic Law). The Ten Commandments are a short form of the stipulations of the covenant and the rest of the Law (Exodus 21–40, Leviticus, parts of Numbers, and much of Deuteronomy) provide a fleshing out of the meaning and implications of the commandments.

²⁷ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, 34–35.

These covenant demands did not merely involve a loose collection of arbitrary laws, but were part of a covenant (a binding agreement based on an ongoing relationship) between God and His people.

One could summarize this covenant agreement as follows: “I agree to be your God. I commit myself to you to care for you, defend you, and bless you. You agree to be my people. You must therefore live lives like Mine. You must” (Exod. 6:7–8; 19:3–8).

As Exodus 19:4–6 make clear, God gave Israel these clear, objective, and propositional stipulations to His covenant people to enable them to represent Him before each other as well as the surrounding nations. These laws provided the Israelites with a clear and concrete understanding of how they could conduct their lives so as to put God’s surpassing character on display.

On the one hand, many of the regulations were very relevant to Israel because they prohibited many corrupt practices that were prevalent in the land of Canaan (the land they were about to enter). To emulate those godless practices would destroy any witness for God’s marvelous character.

On the other hand, homosexuality (along with adultery, incest, and bestiality in this context) are not prohibited just because they are the incidental practices of Israel’s pagan neighbors. They are prohibited because they deny the creation order of God and thus the very nature of God Himself.

In summary, the laws of Leviticus were part of an ongoing relationship between the Israelites and their sovereign God. They describe what those who are in covenant with the Creator must do or not do in order to direct the attention of their fellow Israelites and surrounding Gentiles to the surpassing character of their God.

Before considering the two other OT passages in Leviticus that relate to the issue of homosexuality, we must first consider the *more narrow context* of Leviticus 18 and 20.

The Near Context of Leviticus 18 and 20

In Exodus 25–40 God gave all the instructions for the building of the Tabernacle. The climax of the section occurs in 40:34–38 when the Shekinah Glory (God’s presence manifested in a cloud) swept into residence. *This* is the clue to what Leviticus is all about. No one can understand the laws and the details of the book without meditating first on what this passage means. It is the manifestation of the eternal God dwelling in the midst of the people. He is their Immanuel (“God with us”). Consequently, the defining concern of all of Leviticus is the arrangement of life around His presence: *How should (would) people live if the eternal, holy, almighty God lived with them—God is in their midst?* Leviticus answers the specific questions in relation to this.

First, how do profane and sinful people live around such a holy presence? Leviticus 1–7 provides the answer—the *manual of sacrifice*. Second, how shall profane people reach the Holy God in worship, and God reach them? Leviticus 8–10 offers the answer—the *consecrated mediatorial priesthood*. Third, how shall the holiness of God dominate and sanctify the profane life? Leviticus 11–16 gives the answer—the *manual of purification*. Finally, how shall God’s covenant people obey God so

that their distinctive living would point to God's surpassing character? Leviticus 17–27 points to the answer—the laws of holiness.

The Details of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

In this last section of Leviticus (chs. 17–27), Moses first delineates how God's character demands that the Israelites offer sacrifices to him at the Tabernacle and avoid eating blood. Leviticus 18 presents different prohibitions against various kinds of sexual relationships that represented covenant treachery. Leviticus 20 has many similarities with chapter 18, giving more attention to the penalties for sinful behavior. Between these two chapters, chapter 19 serves as an important summary of the Law of Moses. 19:1–18 focuses on aspects of loving your neighbor as yourself while the rest of the chapter gives attention to various detailed stipulations of that Law. Throughout Moses's presentation of these covenant requirements, he keeps his focus on the relational core of those requirements by repeating the expression, "Yahweh your God" thirteen times (18:2, 4, 30; 19:2, 3, 4, 10, 25, 31, 34, 36; 20:7, 24).

After addressing incestuous unions (18:6–18), Moses delineated several abhorrent Canaanite customs, including homosexual sex (18:22). Here are the two related passages in Leviticus 18:

Lev. 18:22: "You are not to sleep with a man as with a woman; it is detestable."

Lev. 20:13: "If a man sleeps with a man as with a woman, they have both committed a detestable thing. They must be put to death; their blood is on their own hands."

Leviticus 18:22

Canaanite (and broader ANE) Background

It is fair to assume that the practices condemned in Leviticus 18 were common in Canaanite society. Yahweh prohibited the Israelites from conducting their lives like the Canaanites and thereby damaging their ability to demonstrate God's surpassing character to each other and the surrounding nations.

Various ANE laws provide a spectrum of attitudes toward homosexuality. Some law codes mention nothing about it. Egyptian mythology refers to examples of the god Seth having sexual relations with his younger brother, Horus. Hittite law declared that sodomy with one's son was a capital crime, but allowed it with other men. Assyrian law appears to make a blanket prohibition against sodomy, but that may only apply to homosexual rape.²⁸

²⁸ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AYB (New Haven, CT; Yale University Press, 2008), 1566.

It must be emphasized that the difference between the biblical legislation and other Near Eastern laws not be overlooked: the Bible allows for *no exceptions*—all acts of sodomy are prohibited, whether performed by rich or poor, higher or lower status, citizen or alien.²⁹ Yahweh’s prohibition of any Israelite involvement with homosexuality represented one facet of their distinctive witness in a sinful world.

Theological Background

In addition to the clarity of these two passages in Leviticus, the theological backdrop for this law would have framed the reader’s understanding—God’s design is that human sexuality must be expressed in marital, heterosexual relationships (Gen. 1:27–28; 2:22–24; cf. Matt. 19:4–5).³⁰

We will briefly consider key features of both passages³¹ and then give attention to the ways they may or may not relate to the LGBT agenda. In Leviticus 18:22 there are two primary issues that are debated by scholars (with regard to meaning/significance).

Key Feature #1—What is the basic point of the verse? Leviticus 18:22 begins with “a male” in the Hebrew text, giving it emphasis. What the verse presents as abhorrent is a man lying with another man “as with a female.”

Almost all modern translations explain the expression “as with a woman” to refer to sexual intercourse between two men as if one of the men were a woman. A brief overview of a number of the major commentaries on Leviticus³² demonstrates a consensus that these two passages in Leviticus clearly refer to homosexuality, which was firmly prohibited for Israelites as part of their covenant loyalty. In addition, this is the consistent Jewish interpretation until later in their history.³³ As Roy

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Jay Sklar, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 238.

³¹ This article cannot pursue many of the details in this verse that demand attention. A chapter in a recent dissertation by one of our TMS Ph.D. students (Peter Goeman, “The Role of the Law in the Homosexuality Debate: Assessing the Old Testament Prohibitions Against Homosexuality from a Perspective of Discontinuity,” [unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, The Master’s Seminary, 2017], 79–140), provides a marvelous summary of the interpretive debate of the verse’s key features. The overview of those features here draws heavily on Goeman’s chapter.

³² Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 321; R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1980), 194–95; John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1998), 297; Richard S. Hess, “Leviticus,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Genesis–Leviticus*, rev. ed. eds. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 1:742–43; Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus*, JPS (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 123; Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1566; Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 246–67; Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 259.

³³ Immanuel Jakobovits, “Homosexuality,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (New York: Macmillan Reference, 2007), 9:516.

Gane writes, “The language is devastatingly untechnical, leaving no room for ambiguity.”³⁴

Other scholars have narrowed the interpretation of this expression to other options: only anal intercourse and not other sexual acts,³⁵ only male-male incest,³⁶ forbidding a man from choosing to be a passive sex partner for another man,³⁷ or prohibiting only sexual relationships between married men.³⁸ Because of space and time limitations, this article does not present the support offered for those alternative views.

Key Feature #2: What does “abomination” signify? One’s understanding of this term also impacts their interpretation of both passages. The noun translated “abomination” or “detestable” occurs 117 times in 112 passages.³⁹ This noun occurs six times in Leviticus 18 and 20 (18:22, 26, 27, 29, 30; 20:13). The term “abomination” generally refers to “a thing or practice considered reprehensible in the eyes of another.”⁴⁰ We will explain this term further below. Having provided a *brief overview* of the key interpretive issues in 18:22, let’s turn to 20:13, where we will provide a fuller treatment of some of the key issues.

Leviticus 20:13

This verse reads: “If a man sleeps with a man as with a woman, they have both committed a detestable thing. They must be put to death; their blood is on their own hands.”

When compared to Leviticus 18:22, covered above, this verse provides one additional insight concerning men who might participate in homosexual relations: both men who engaged in homosexual relations “must be put to death”. The offenses of adultery (20:10), incest with the father’s wife (20:11), incest with a daughter-in-law (20:12), as well as homosexuality (20:13) all receive the same punishment—both

³⁴ Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 321.

³⁵ Saul M. Olyan, “‘And with a Male You Shall Not Lie the Lying Down of a Woman’: On the Meaning and Significance of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5 (1994): 204.

³⁶ David T. Stewart, “Ancient Sexual Laws: Text and Intertext of the Biblical Holiness Code and Hittite Law” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2000), 72–74.

³⁷ Jerome T. Walsh, “Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13: Who Is Doing What to Whom?,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 205–6.

³⁸ Bruce Wells, “The Grammar and Meaning of the Leviticus Texts on Same-Sex Relations Reconsidered” (unpublished paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, San Diego, November 24, 2014), 13–18.

³⁹ Word statistics are provided by the Logos 7 database unless otherwise noted. The cognate verb form also occurs twenty-two times and means “to become abhorred” or “to abhor,” “to desecrate,” or “to act abominably”. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols., revised by Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob Stamm, trans. and ed. by M. E. J. Richardson (New York: Brill, 1994–2000), 765–66.

⁴⁰ Sklar, *Leviticus*, 238. Cf. Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament—Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 379–406.

guilty parties were to be put to death. Scholars do not debate what Leviticus 20:13 affirms, but differ on the way to understand any normative meaning.

The Interpretive Options for Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

Lev. 18:22: “You are not to sleep with a man as with a woman; it is detestable.”

Lev. 20:13: “If a man sleeps with a man as with a woman, they have both committed a detestable thing. They must be put to death; their blood is on their own hands.”

Key Feature—What Does “Abomination” Mean?

Supporters of Homosexuality

Supporters contend that the term “abomination” is not an ethical or moral term, but a kind of boundary marker, having the basic idea of “taboo.”⁴¹ They recognize that the Book of Leviticus condemned homosexuality, but it also called menstruation unclean, rejects the charging of interest on loans, and refers to burning incense as an abomination. Matthew Vines concludes this: “So while *abomination* is a negative word, it doesn’t necessarily correspond to Christian views of sin.”⁴²

These scholars conclude that Leviticus reflects primitive thinking about ancient taboos. Because Christians do not have the same fears that the ancients had, those laws that were part of the ritual of ancient Israel have been done away with now in the New Testament.

Biblical Position

In this passage “abomination” refers to morally detestable conduct. The noun, “abomination,” can signify things that are broadly repulsive or that God finds *generally offensive* (Prov. 6:16). It can refer to acts that are detestable for *cultural* rather than intrinsic moral reasons. For example, this would include the Egyptians’ avoidance of eating with Israelites (Gen. 43:32; cf. 46:34; Exod 8:26). It could point to *ritual limitations* that were part of the Mosaic Law, as with unclean foods (Deut. 14:3). Most seriously, it refers to acts that are detestable because they go *against the moral fiber* of God’s created world.⁴³ This would include idolatry (a denial of Israel’s covenant Lord—Deut. 7:25–26; 12:31; 17:4; 20:18; 27:15), unacceptable worship (ignoring God’s demand for unblemished animals, an act of treachery—Deut. 17:1),

⁴¹ Phyllis A. Bird, “The Bible in Christian Ethical Deliberation concerning Homosexuality: Old Testament Contribution,” in *Homosexuality, Science, and the “Plain Sense” of Scripture*, ed. David L. Balch (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 152; cf. Olyan, 180; Daniel Boyarin, “Are There Any Jews in ‘The History of Sexuality’?,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5, no. 3 (1995): 334.

⁴² Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 85.

⁴³ Sklar, *Leviticus*, 238.

human sacrifice (worshipping God like some pagans—Deut. 12:31), practicing occult (turning to empty sources for guidance, thereby rejecting God—Deut. 18:12), and dishonest business practices (representing Yahweh as a cheater rather than committed to justice and equity—Deut. 25:16; Prov. 11:1; 20:10, 23; cf. Lev. 19:36; Deut. 25:13–15). In Leviticus 18 incest, adultery, bestiality, and child sacrifice are also called an abomination.

Consequently, homosexuality involves detestable conduct because it denies God's created order and involves the rejection of Yahweh's stated intention for sexuality (Gen. 1:27–28; 2:22–24), something that the New Testament emphasized (Rom 1:26–27; cf. Matt. 19:4–5).

How do some pro-homosexual scholars seek to dismiss these Mosaic laws?

I can only briefly mention and respond to these suggestions in this article. First, some scholars affirm that these rules were intended for priests and are irrelevant to Christians in the church.⁴⁴ In response, the holiness laws of Leviticus 18–20 were for all Israel, not just for the priests of Israel (18:1—“Speak to the Israelites and tell them . . .”).

Second, others contend that the only reason homosexual behavior is condemned in Leviticus is because of its association with idolatry in pagan worship. For example, one proponent writes:

From this priestly point of view, it is clear that above all else, Israel was to be uncontaminated by her pagan neighbors. In all things, she was to remain a separate “pure vessel unto the Lord.” At this time, male prostitutes in the temples of the Canaanites, Babylonians, and other neighboring peoples were common features of pagan rites. There, it is understandable that this “homosexuality” connected with the worship of false gods would certainly color Israel's perspective on any and all homosexual activity.⁴⁵

A related conclusion is that homosexuality that is not associated with idolatry would be acceptable. In response, various kinds of covenant treachery are cited in Leviticus 18 and 20 that are morally offensive and would introduce a breach in an Israelites' relationship with Yahweh. Idolatry represents a serious offense, but is not presented as the umbrella offense for these chapters.

Third, some propose that the laws prohibiting homosexual activity, along with the other varied regulations in the context, are limited to Judaism and are irrelevant to the present age. Proponents of this idea refer to rules about clean and unclean food, rules about not mixing clothing (e.g., linen and wool, etc.). They affirm that these Mosaic requirements are part of the priestly holiness code and are concerned only

⁴⁴ Mark Olson, “Untangling the Web: A Look at What Scripture Does and Does Not Say About Homosexual Behavior,” *Other Side* (April 1984): 25.

⁴⁵ Ralph Blair, *An Evangelical Look at Homosexuality*, rev. ed. (New York: Evangelicals Concerned, 1977), p. 3; cf. N. H. Snaith, *Leviticus and Numbers*, NCB (London: Nelson, 1969), 88.

with ritual purity (conditioned), not moral teaching (normative). In response, Allen Ross offers a helpful reply: “This argument is frequently effective because people are ignorant of Leviticus. It is true that the regulations connected with the sanctuary have been done away with (for different reasons); but the moral infractions of God’s created order were never merely part of the purity ritual of the sanctuary. And they have not been done away with. That the New Testament fully endorses the law on this point should be sufficient to settle the matter.”⁴⁶

Summary

The text of Leviticus 18 and 20 is very clear—“The text simply refers to the Canaanite practices that must be avoided—and one of them is homosexuality.”⁴⁷ It is essential that believers grasp the essential truth that Yahweh gave the Mosaic Law to Israel to teach His people about God and His expectations of them as well as to enable them to be witnesses of this great God to the Ancient Near Eastern world around them. His covenant requirements were meant to enable His covenant people to have a concrete understanding of how they could conduct their lives in a way that put God’s surpassing character on display—to each other as fellow citizens as well as to the Gentiles all around them.

Conclusion

This article has briefly considered God’s revelation concerning homosexuality in three key OT passages: Genesis 19:1–11, Leviticus 18:22, and Leviticus 20:13. These three passages provide a consistent message: homosexuality is a violation of God’s created order and stands opposed to God’s intentions that His people of all ages conduct lives that put His surpassing character on display.

Unfortunately, we live in a day when the Bible’s authority and clear relevance to this topic is rejected. As an example, a pro-homosexual writer, Robin Scroggs, writes this: “Not only is the New Testament church uninterested in the topic, it has nothing new to say about it.”⁴⁸ A few pages later, he writes: “Biblical judgments against homosexuality are not relevant to today’s debate . . . [the Bible] does not address the issues involved.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Allen P. Ross, *Holiness to the Lord: A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 375. A related idea is that the Mosaic laws are irrelevant to NT Christians in general. Although this author enthusiastically believes that the Mosaic laws do not function as laws for NT Christians, those laws are still relevant since they provide a clear revelation of God’s surpassing character.

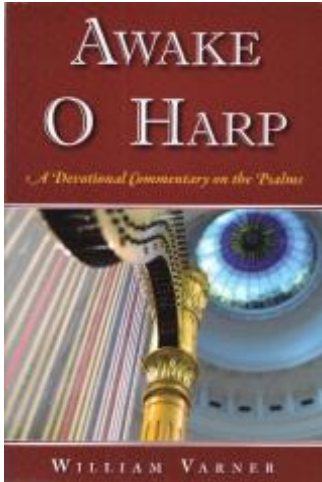
⁴⁷ Ross, *Holiness to the Lord*, 347.

⁴⁸ Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress, 1984), 101.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 127.

Where Does that Leave Us?

- We need to make the Bible our sole authority on how we understand God's view of homosexuality.
- We need to present the message of the life-transforming Gospel of Jesus Christ to all around us, including those who might be convinced that they have been made to be homosexuals.
- We must lovingly bring the clarity of God's Word to bear to the people God has entrusted us in our contexts of ministry as well as people we encounter who embrace the world's general rejection of God's intentions about homosexuality as revealed in Scripture.



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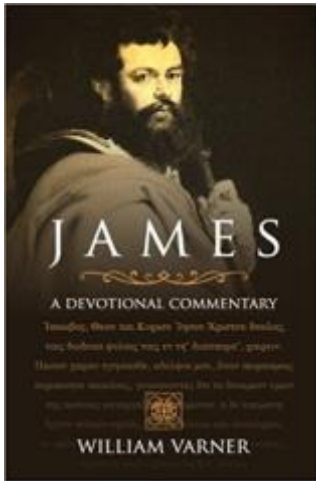
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IS SAME-SEX MARRIAGE A SIN?

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The recent legalization of same-sex marriage in the United States has heightened the debate on whether homosexual relations are truly sinful in consensual monogamous, same-sex marriage contexts. This article demonstrates that based upon God's definition of sin from a study of the biblical terms for sin, trespass, and iniquity, and from the biblical definition of marriage from Genesis 1–2, that all physical relations outside of the context of a one man to one woman, one flesh relationship for life is sin.

* * * * *

Introduction

There are several passages in both the Old and New Testaments that specifically address differing forms of same-sex relations as sin. Those typically referenced in this context are Leviticus 18 and Romans 1. However, there are other texts which speak to this issue as well (cf. Gen. 19:1–9; Lev. 20:13; 1 Cor. 6:9). Additionally, one might expand the discussion into the numerous other passages which speak of sexual sin and all forms of immorality to bolster the argument.

For many Christians in the church today, this issue is cut and dried. There is no need to address it, discuss it, or debate it. However, even if one is convinced the issue is settled, there is still the need to give honest and thorough answers from Scripture that both teach truth (Eph. 4:11–16; 1 Tim 3:2) and refute error (Tit. 1:9). This holds true any time a biblical truth comes under attack. For contemporary Christianity, the issue of same-sex marriage is a major social, cultural, and ethical issue. The legalization of same-sex marriage has radically changed both the dynamic of the debate and popular opinion regarding the issues. It is no longer adequate to simply point to what some have referred to as the ‘clobber’ passages and say, “See, the Bible is clear. Same-sex relations are sin.”¹ That answer alone is no longer convincing without entering into the many and varied debates concerning the applicability of each passage

¹ Preston Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 41.

to today's society.² Several of these issues will be handled elsewhere in this journal.³ This article seeks to address the more fundamental issue behind all these arguments—i.e., the definition of marriage itself.

The contemporary legalization of same-sex marriage in the United States has raised a new challenge that, on the surface, seems to circumvent all the prohibition passages. The modern argument is that these refer to sinful same-sex relationships.⁴ But now, it is legal to establish a consensual, monogamous, same-sex marriage relationship. Since the government recognizes this as a marriage, intimate relations between consenting adults in this kind of a monogamous same-sex relationship are no longer sinful in God's sight.

In order to address this issue, the focus of this article will be on God's definitions of sin and marriage. What does God define as sin? What does God define as marriage? In answering these questions, it will become possible to determine whether God considers a legal, consensual, monogamous, same-sex marriage as acceptable or sinful.

What Does God Define as Sin?

There are three primary words used in the OT to describe sin. They have overlapping but distinct meanings. They are typically translated transgression, sin, and iniquity. David uses all three of these terms in the opening verses of Psalm 51. What is most relevant to the present discussion is the fact that he uses them in an overlapping way to describe his sins of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah.

² For a recent introduction to the debate and issues, see Preston Sprinkle, gen. ed., *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015). For a contemporary treatment of the issues from an evangelical perspective, see Mark Christopher, *Same-sex Marriage: Is it Really the Same?* (Day One Publications, 2009). For a more recent scholarly treatment of the primary forbiddance passages, see Peter James Goeman, *The Law and Homosexuality: How Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 Should Influence the Church's Understanding of Homosexuality*, (Ph.D. Dissertation, The Master's Seminary, 2017).

³ See Michael A. Grisanti, "Homosexuality—An Abomination or Purely Irrelevant?: Evaluating LGBT Claims in Light of the Old Testament (Gen. 18–19; Lev. 18:22; 20:13)," *MSJ* 28, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 115–33; Brad Klassen, "The Pauline Response to Today's Sexual and Gender Confusion," *MSJ* 28, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 145–66; Michael Riccardi, "WWJD about LGBT?: Evaluating LGBT Claims in Light of Christ's Teaching," *MSJ* 28, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 167–80.

⁴ This view is not new. Boswell argued in 1980 that Christianity has historically condemned only exploitive same-sex behaviors—not consensual ones. See John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). Later works have challenged this position. See for example, Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2001); Daniel A. Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality* (Estancia, NM: Alamo Square, 2000). But there seems to be a contemporary agreement among the majority of pro-gay writers today that the Bible does not specifically address or condemn same-sex marriages which are both monogamous and consensual.

PSALM 51⁵

For the choir director.

A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

¹ Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness;
According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.

² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity
And cleanse me from my sin.⁶

Psalm 51 begins with a heading indicating authorship (by David). It also directly relates the subject of this psalm to the events recorded in 2 Samuel 11–12 and David's sin with Bathsheba. It is a beautiful expression of repentance from sin and a petition for forgiveness from God by David. As such, a look at the way David uses the terms transgression, sin, and iniquity is helpful in defining clearly what sin is biblically.

The first word David uses is transgression [עֲוֹן]. It is typically translated as transgression or trespass. The root idea of the term is either to commit a crime (i.e., to break a law) or to rebel against an authority. It essentially describes the act of doing something forbidden by a higher authority.

David uses the word to refer to his own sins against Bathsheba and Uriah. It is not difficult to identify many ways that David crossed the line and broke several of God's commandments. In 2 Samuel 11 there is a clear record of David coveting Uriah's wife, committing adultery with her, and ordering the murder of Uriah. Each of these 'sins' are transgressions, because they cross the line and violate God's Law by doing things He has specifically forbidden (Exod. 20:13–14, 17).

The second word is sin. It is from the verbal root [חָטָא] which means to miss the mark. The primary idea of this word is to fall short of a target or a standard. It was used in military contexts to describe a sling bullet that fell short of the target or missed the mark to the left or right. Later, the same word was used similarly in archery contexts. The obvious context in Psalm 51 refers to falling short of God's moral standards as expressed in His Law.

Again, it is a simple matter to see how David fell far short of God's expectations in 2 Samuel 11. The entire event is prefaced with the statement that it was "the time when kings went off to battle" (2 Sam. 11:1–2), but David was still at home and in bed. When he gets up from his bed at the end of the day (implying he has been inactive all day), he stands on his roof and notices a woman bathing. Instead of looking away, he takes note of her and—ignoring the warning of his servant ("is this not Uriah's wife?")—sent his men to take her and bring her to him. God's anointed king has fallen far short of divine expectations indeed! Instead of leading his men as a faithful king, he is taking the wife of one of his soldiers for himself.

⁵ All Bible citations are from the NAU unless otherwise noted.

⁶ Emphasis added via underline.

The final term David uses is iniquity [רָעָה]. It looks at sin from more than merely the perspective of the offense itself. It includes a sense of guilt-worthiness. A primary aspect of this word includes the fact that this action deserves to be punished because it is a perversion of God's original intention. In other words, it describes sin in a way that stresses the fact that punishment is due because what was done is a corruption of the divine intention. That is precisely what David has done here. In taking another man's wife as his own, he has twisted what God has given as a good thing (namely, physical intimacy in the context of marriage) and turned it into an immoral act (taking her for himself).

Now, when these three terms are examined together, how does God define sin? Sin is anything that falls short of God's standard, rebels against His authority, or perverts His original intention. So, when discussing sin biblically, it is not just the specific things which God forbids in Scripture that are sins. It is not even merely when one falls short of the divine intention. It includes the guilt-worthiness derived from any act which violates the original divine intention for His creation, or for any aspect of His creation. It is bigger than the specific rules and prohibitions He has given. It is any violation or twisting of the divine intention. These kinds of acts deserve to be punished eternally—even if there is not a specific prohibition that addresses it in the Scripture.

What Does God Define as Marriage?

The contemporary cultural context has legalized same-sex marriage. As such, it has defined marriage as two consenting adults in a monogamous relationship—regardless of gender. This is significant, because if it is valid, it means there may be grounds to argue that the prohibitive passages related to same-sex intimate relations do not apply in these cases. Those prohibitions are only addressing 'unbiblical same-sex' relationships—not biblical ones. Today, like never before in history, people can establish a legal, consensual, monogamous, same-sex relationship. What is more, there is not a single passage in the Bible that specifically includes a verbatim prohibition against these kinds of same-sex relationships. So, does that mean it is not sin? The answer to this question is found in God's definition of marriage.

There are many passages in Scripture that speak directly about marriage. But the biblical definition of marriage is given by God in the opening pages of Scripture. Genesis 1 is the divinely inspired account of creation. In it, the details and order of God's creative acts are recorded. It presents the creation of all things by God by divine fiat in six literal days. The week culminates in God's creation of mankind in His image (Gen. 1:26–27). What is most significant, as it relates to the subject of marriage, is that the divine act includes a direct reference to gender distinctiveness.

Genesis 1:27, God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

The unique aspect of man's creation is that he was created in God's image. However, according to this verse, God's image is equally present in both genders. God created mankind in His image. He also created both male and female genders in

that image. As such, neither is either more or less significant in the sight of God. The text goes on to elaborate on why the gender distinctiveness is essential from the beginning.

Genesis 1:28, God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Notice that God blessed 'them' (plural) and spoke to 'them' (plural). These instructions were therefore given after the events described at the end of Genesis 2. The command to be fruitful and multiply implies a marriage based upon what is seen in Genesis 2:18–25 because prior to this time Adam was alone. It is not until both the man and the woman were created and joined in a 'one-flesh' relationship that God could address 'them' and procreation (fruitful multiplication) could take place. The command to fill the earth demonstrates that physical intimacy between the man and the woman in this context is a good thing. It is intended to facilitate the filling of the earth with additional bearers of God's image. This makes it clear from the beginning that gender distinctions are purposefully part of the divine definition of marriage.

The closing statement of Genesis 1 gives God's assessment of the entirety of His creative efforts at this point.

Genesis 1:31, God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

When God finished His creative works on that sixth day, everything was precisely how He wanted it. There was no fatal flaw. There were no inconsistencies or incongruities. All of creation was exactly perfect. There was no sin until Genesis 3. There was no curse until after the fall of man. Everything was good, right, and pure. This includes the definition of marriage and the relationship of that first couple.

The reason for the narrative of Genesis 2:4–25 is to go back and fill in more details about what took place on the sixth day so that a full appreciation of the Fall in Genesis 3 is understood. Here it is explained that Adam was made by a direct act of God from the dust of the ground (Gen. 2:7). Here it is stated that man was given clear instructions regarding both God's gracious provision for him and single prohibition on him, as well as the consequences for disobedience (Gen. 2:15–17). Most important, as it relates to the subject of marriage, the very first negative assessment of creation is made by God in this chapter.

Genesis 2:18, Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."

This is the first negative statement in the Bible—and, it is emphatic. It is NOT GOOD for the man to be alone. This is God's own evaluation of His creation at this point. It is also in direct contrast to His repetitive statements that 'it was good' throughout the creation week (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). This is the only time

prior to the Fall that God evaluated anything as not good. So, this is important. Something needs to change for God’s creation to be the perfect world He intends by Genesis 1:31. What is it that is not good? Man is alone. He has no *ezer-kenegdo*

[עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ]—i.e., no helper suitable for him. As Sailhamer explains, “The point of the narrative is that there was no helper who corresponded to the man among the animals. A special act of creation of the woman was necessary.”⁷

Incidentally, God does not consult the man here before He acts. Man did not spend the day in the Garden and come away with the impression he needed a mate on his own. God made this evaluation. He then paraded the animals before the man to make the point. Finally, He created the woman from the side of the man to be his *ezer-kenegdo*. This is a key point. God did what God determined was right and proper from the beginning. He is the determiner of what is good—not man. It is not about what works for man, what man prefers, or what seems best to man. This is what God Himself has established as what is good from the beginning. God made this determination completely independent of man’s input or wishes. Furthermore, all of this is prior to the Fall. So, this is before any sin has entered the created order. This is God’s definition of marriage, even before sin. So, the one man and one woman in a one-flesh relationship is not a matter of catering to a fallen condition.

The term “helper suitable to him” is a compound expression that occurs only twice in the OT. Both are right here in Genesis 2. The first word ‘helper’ [עֵזֶר] is a term that in a contemporary context typically conveys a negative or lesser sense. The helper in most professions is an assistant, a lackey, or a gofer. Somebody who runs errands, does the dirty jobs, or just stands around waiting for orders from the person they are assisting. However, in Scripture, the word is applied to God more than to anyone else. Moses describes God as a ‘help’ against the adversaries of Israel when He contends for them in battle (Deut. 33:7; see also, 33:26, 29). In Psalm 46 God is introduced as “a very present help in times of trouble.” A helper is one who helps, assists, or comes to the aid of someone in need. It does not speak to the inferiority of the helper, but to the need of the one who is being helped. It is a completely positive term in the pre-Fall Genesis 2 context. It is clear already from Genesis 2:18 that man very much needs this helper. So, while helping implies a certain functional subordination—even when it is God subordinating Himself to the needs of His people—it is not a humiliating or lesser position of value or importance.

The second term is ‘suitable to him’ [כְּנֶגְדּוֹ]. It is a compound expression that is more difficult to define than the first. It is made up of three words in Hebrew that in a wooden literal sense equate to, ‘like his opposite.’ The essence of the word is that of correspondence in a complementary sense. In other words, God said man needs a ‘helper that exactly corresponds to him.’ That is where the idea behind the English word ‘suitable’ comes from. The woman corresponds to the man in a way that makes her perfectly suited to be his helper. Perhaps Cassuto said it best when he said it means, a helper “worthy of him.”⁸

⁷ John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, in *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 2:46.

⁸ U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, translated by Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1998), 127.

The fact that God did not make another male shows that there is a necessary gender distinctiveness required for this correspondence to be complete. What Adam needed was not just another living creature to assist him in fulfilling the divine mandate of Genesis 1:26–30. What he needed was a living creature that exactly corresponded to himself as a bearer of God's image, and who was also specially created to serve as a helping complement to his role of headship. It also had to be a female in gender to coincide with his maleness to facilitate procreation. The term 'helper' identifies the functional distinction of the economic subordination between the roles. The term 'suitable' indicates an ontological equality between the persons despite the distinctives.⁹ This tandem is in complete agreement with the creation declaration in Genesis 1:26–27. God created man in His image—both male and female alike.

The dignity of femininity is rooted in this passage. Woman was created out of the side of the man (Gen. 2:21–22). It was not a separate creative act independent of God's creation of man. God made the man from the dust of the ground (Gen. 2:7). However, He made the woman from a chunk of the man's side. Why? To demonstrate that both are from the very same substance. They are both fully bearers of God's image. They were created by God personally from the very same substance. Neither is more special or independent of the other. The man and the woman belong together since they were created by God from the very same substance. This is the reason for Adam's celebratory expression, "This is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen 2:23). Adam is genuinely thrilled by God's gift to him of the woman. It is because of this that marriage is referred to as a 'one-flesh' relationship throughout Scripture (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5–6; 1 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 5:31).

The biblical definition of marriage throughout the Bible is derived from this very text.

Genesis 2:24, For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

The expression 'for this reason' ties this definition of marriage back to the events of creation in Genesis 2 and establishes it as the pattern moving forward. Adam did not leave his parents since he was created directly by God. So, this verse defines marriage from that point. But, the definition stems from that original pairing.

A man leaves from under the headship of his parents and establishes a new household. He is then joined to his wife. This is how a marriage relationship is enacted because it matches what God established from the dawn of creation. There is no direct reference to the woman leaving from under the authority of her parents because that is a given. She transfers from under the headship of her parents to under

⁹ By itself, the procreation requirement demonstrated from the text of Genesis 1 and 2 justifies the gender distinctives necessary for a biblical marriage. However, this does not rule out that there are additional personal, social, emotional, and relational distinctives that are also included in the complementary creative makeup of the woman. Male to male relationships are not the same as male to female relationships. It is this writer's conviction that part of the greatness of woman is the fact that she has been created by God with a unique correspondence to man that gives her a woman's perspective on everything that is frequently different than a man's. This is divinely intended to have a balancing and enriching effect on a marriage relationship.

the headship of her husband. When they are joined together, they form a new one-flesh relationship as husband and wife.

This one-flesh relationship is first and foremost about a change in loyalties and identity. Both transfer from their parents' household into a new one they form together. They then cling to each other exclusively and co-exist in that one-flesh relationship from that point onward. This is a permanent and exclusive relationship as man and wife. It necessarily includes physical intimacy between the two since (1) procreation is part of the divine mandate (Gen. 1:28), and (2) intimate relations outside of marriage are forbidden based on this same terminology (1 Cor. 6:16).

So, God's definition of marriage is one man joined to one woman in a one-flesh relationship for life. The two are to become one flesh. That is, two people with gender distinctiveness, joined together for life as though they were one flesh. This explains why polygamy is wrong. This explains why same-sex marriage is wrong. This explains why physical intimacy in all forms outside the context of a biblical marriage are wrong. The answer is, they are all wrong because they are contrary to what God has defined as a marriage.¹⁰

So, Is Same-Sex Marriage Sin?

Once same-sex marriage is legalized in society, Romans 13 is no longer violated by a same-sex relationship. As such, it is just a matter of whether it is a biblical marriage or not. Some may argue that a consensual male/male or female/female relationship may be able to equate this 'one flesh' relationship today if they agreed to functionally subordinate roles. If one agreed to assume the role of headship and the other serve as helper, could they not then essentially function in the same capacity?

There is certainly no gender limitation on the term helper. Anyone can serve in this capacity. Likewise, headship can be exercised in varying capacities by both genders. Mothers exercise authority over their children regularly. Women serve in positions of government and industry quite effectively. However, the question is not, could it work? The question is, is it biblical? The clear answer is, no.

Same-sex marriage is a sin for many reasons. First, the divine pattern for marriage was established in Genesis 1–2. It began with gender equality and distinctiveness (Gen. 1:26–27) as well as role distinctives (Gen. 2:18). The original pair was composed of one male and one female.¹¹ Second, the divine mandate included not only a joint exercise of dominion over creation, but also a command to procreate

¹⁰ See M. W. Christopher, "A Grammatical-Historical Critique of the Pro-Gay Hermeneutic in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13," (MTh Diss., North-West University, 2016) 107–11 on the creation ordinance of Genesis 1–2 as a necessary precursor for the sexual ethics detailed in the Mosaic Law. Christopher explains that the "7th Command is informed by a creational understanding of marriage" (110).

¹¹ As an added note: Those who seek to dispense with the gender-distinction requirement, still recognize that the numerical limitation in marriage is for only two people. However, this is an incongruous argument. To suggest gender distinction is no longer necessary but the numerical requirement still applies is selective and dishonest. If marriage is no longer an exclusive monogamous union between a man and a woman, then who is to say it should be limited to only 2 people? Either Scripture and the pattern divinely established at creation is God's standard or it is not. The original created pattern is one man and one woman in a permanent one-flesh relationship for life.

which requires gender distinctives (Gen. 1:28). Third, the divine provision of a suitable helper involved the creation of a woman as the response to the divine evaluation, 'it is not good for man to be alone.' This, at the very least, implies that part of the distinctiveness of the feminine gender is a woman's ability to be the perfect complement to a man. While all marriages today are marred by fallen human nature, this fact remains. Part of the created uniqueness of a woman is her ability to relate in a complementary way to a man.

Furthermore, Scriptures continue to affirm the same pattern for marriage throughout. God established marriage as a one-flesh relationship between one man and one woman in the beginning (Gen. 2:24). Jesus confirmed that as the pattern in His teaching. In fact, when He is questioned about divorce, He makes two appeals to the Genesis narrative (Matt. 19:3–6).

Matthew 19:4–6, And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, and said, 'FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH?' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

It is worth noting that Jesus references both Genesis 1:27 and 2:24. He cites both the creation of the man and woman with gender distinctiveness and the establishment of marriage as a one-flesh relationship. However, the issue of divorce is settled simply by a reference to the latter text. There is no need to specifically reference that God made them "male and female" unless that is fundamentally the definition of marriage—which it is.

Finally, the apostle Paul also based his definition of marriage on Genesis 2:24. His instructions to wives and husbands in Ephesians 5:22–33 clearly identify the divine expectations on both husbands and wives. The expectations are unique and specific. But, he established the basis for these expectations firmly on Genesis 2:24 when he quotes it directly in Ephesians 5:31. God's definition of marriage is the same after the Fall as it was before. It is the same after Christ as it was before. It is founded upon the same clear divine declaration of Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 throughout.

Conclusion

Same-sex marriage is a sin, regardless of what society says. It is a sin because it falls short of what God established in Genesis 1 and 2 as the definition of marriage, which is a one man and one woman, one flesh relationship, for life. It is a trespass because it rebels against God's right and authority to define the pattern for marriage within His creation to begin with. It also violates several biblical commands which specifically prohibit same-sex physical relations. It is iniquity because it is a perversion of the original divine design for marriage and is therefore as worthy of eternal condemnation as any other sin.

Now, it is essential given the volatile nature of this debate today to add in a final note. Same-sex marriage is an eternally condemnable sin. But it is just as worthy of divine wrath as any number of other sins! Adultery is a sin, a trespass, and iniquity

because it too violates God's definition of marriage (Matt. 19:3–6). Divorce is a sin, trespass, and iniquity because it destroys a marriage God intends to be permanent and results in adultery in the case of remarriage (Matt. 5:31–32). Sex of any kind, outside of the context of a biblical marriage, is a sin, trespass, and iniquity—even if two people love each other and intend to marry—because it is contrary to God's Word. Christians need to keep these truths clearly in mind. It is just as essential to address same-sex marriage as a sin, as it is other sins. It is likewise just as essential to call LGBT advocates to repentance and invite them into the kingdom, as it is to share Christ with anyone else. LGBT advocates are sinners in need of Christ just like everyone else. It is time for all Christians in the context of this debate to echo the sentiments of John Bradford, "There but for the grace of God go I."

THE PAULINE RESPONSE TO TODAY'S SEXUAL AND GENDER CONFUSION

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Two arguments are commonly offered by those in the church who are sympathetic towards the LGBTQ movement. Some contend that the biblical writers were simply unaware of the complexities of same-sex attraction and transgenderism. Others contend that the church over the past two millennia woefully misinterpreted the biblical writers. The first argument undermines Scripture's sufficiency. The second undermines Scripture's clarity. The purpose of this article is to survey the teaching of the apostle Paul in response to these claims. In particular, attention will be focused on the emphases of Paul in the areas of anthropology (the doctrine of man), hamartiology (the doctrine of sin), and soteriology (the doctrine of salvation). As will be seen, Paul not only deals directly with many of the issues being debated today, but he leaves a timeless theological framework through which to respond to these issues in our day.

* * * * *

Introduction

The pace of change taking place in the culture around us today is nothing short of stunning. This astonishing transformation is particularly observable in our culture's attitude towards sexuality and gender. What was considered utterly unimaginable by the previous generation is now commonplace. Acts of Congress affirmed by overwhelming majorities to defend the good of the nation just two decades ago are now considered hateful.¹

Sadly, much of what has occurred in the culture is mirrored in the church at large. The number of Christian books and articles being written in defense of the

¹ The Defense of Marriage Act, passed by both houses of the U.S. Congress and signed into law by then President Bill Clinton in September 1996, is strongly opposed by many in today's Congress as inherently discriminatory. President Clinton himself has since expressed regret over his previous support of the bill.

LGBTQ agenda is growing substantially. To justify their support of this agenda, proponents generally employ one of two basic arguments: either the biblical writers were ignorant of the complexities of same-sex attraction and transgenderism, or the church woefully misinterpreted the biblical writers when they did address those issues. The first explanation argues that the Scriptures were timely to their original contexts but not timeless for all (and therefore undermines Scripture's sufficiency). The second explanation depends upon revisionist eisegesis to overturn two millennia of exegetical consensus (and therefore undermines Scripture's clarity). In either case, a return to Scripture is necessary—particularly a return to the writings of the apostle Paul.

The apostle Paul's writings have unique importance. First, as church history illustrates, eras of compromise typically follow on the heels of neglect, particularly the neglect of Paul's letters. Second, Paul's letters are letters to *Gentile* churches. If there ever was a place to look for truth to meet the unique challenges posed by our culture, it would be to this corpus—and that is exactly what we find. The three texts which relate most directly to the issues raised by the LGBTQ movement are found in Paul's writings: Romans 1:26–27; 1 Corinthians 6:9–11; and 1 Timothy 1:8–11.

But Paul provides more than just these three texts. By surveying his writings—particularly his contributions in the area of anthropology (the doctrine of man), hamartiology (the doctrine of sin), and soteriology (the doctrine of salvation)—a solid framework can be established with which to respond to the challenges raised by the LGBTQ agenda. This is the approach this article will take, and as it does, the following Pauline assertions will be made and articulated: –

1. Paul's Anthropological Emphases
 - 1.1. Humanity's Origin Is Traced to an Historical Man and Woman
 - 1.2. Sex Is a Gift, but Reserved for a Man and a Woman in Marriage
 - 1.3. Gender Identities and Expressions Are Based on God's Creation of Male and Female
2. Paul's Hamartiological Emphases
 - 2.1. Adam's Sin Corrupted the Entire Human Race and the Entire Human Being
 - 2.2. Depravity Expresses Itself in Rebellion against the Image and Rule of God
 - 2.3. Increasingly Abnormal Sexual Desires and Behaviors Evidence God's Judgment
3. Paul's Soteriological Emphases
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1. Paul's Anthropological Emphases

The place to turn first is to the apostle Paul's *anthropology*—his teaching regarding the origin, nature, and purposes of humanity. This teaching can be summarized by three fundamental assertions.

1.1 Humanity's Origin Is Traced to an Historical Man and Woman

First, Paul asserted that the human race traces its origin to one historical man and woman who were created directly and suddenly by God, and who served as the progenitors of all human beings to follow. Any meaningful discussion about human sexuality must start with this fundamental truth.

When Paul addressed the Athenian philosophers on Mars Hill, he asserted that “the God who made the world and all things in it” also “made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:24, 26). To proclaim the Christian worldview to those steeped in the cosmology of Stoicism and Epicureanism, Paul not only emphasized the existence of a personal Creator, but also that this Creator made *all* mankind through *one* original, historical man. Paul treated this truth as integral to his defense of the gospel, for it established that all human beings were equally created in God's image, and all human beings were equally responsible before Him (vv. 27–31).

Elsewhere in his own letters, Paul specifically identified this “one man” as “Adam.” Directly citing Genesis 2:7, Paul stated to the Corinthians, “So also it is written, ‘The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL.’ The last Adam *became* a life-giving spirit” (1 Cor 15:45). In the same way that Paul assumed the historicity of Jesus—“the last Adam”—to make his argument, so he assumed the historicity of the first one.

Furthermore, when Paul wrote to Timothy, also referencing Genesis 2:7, he reminded him that “it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve” (1 Tim 2:13). More than simply communicating the concept of origination, the verb *πλάσσω* (NASB: “create”; ESV: “formed”) emphasizes a particular kind of creative activity—the act of *molding* or *sculpting* by hand.² The verb (found in the LXX translation of Gen 2:7) emphasizes physical or material formation, and points precisely to God's careful shaping of the human *body*. Moreover, that Paul affirmed a sequence to this creative act (Adam first, then Eve; cf. also 1 Cor 11:8), and applied the verb *πλάσσω* equally to both Adam and Eve (according to Gen 2:7), indicates *distinction*. God did not create Adam as the first mold, and then use him to create another Adam. To the contrary, after first molding Adam's body, he then likewise molded Eve's body. All other human beings after them would follow in their likenesses.

These and other similar texts from Paul evidence his basic anthropology. Paul affirmed God's direct and sudden creation of both Adam and Eve. He affirmed God's intricate attention to their design. He affirmed that that which characterized their

² BDAG, *πλάσσω*, 823. In the NT this verb is found only elsewhere in Romans 9:20, where it is used by Paul to describe what a potter does with clay.

physical bodies was all part of God’s good design, and that which distinguished one from the other—Adam from Eve, male from female—was neither unremarkable nor inconsequential. He also affirmed that all other human beings trace their identity and likeness to this first, historical couple. Ultimately, Paul affirmed a literal reading of that which Moses recorded in the opening chapters of Genesis.³

While this conclusion may appear inconsequential to the discussion, in reality it is of immense importance. This is where it must begin. If Genesis 1–2 is counted as anything other than factual history (myth, symbol, poetry, accommodation to the naïve presuppositions of the pre-scientific world, etc.), then fundamental discussions about marriage, sexuality, and gender distinctions will be untied from Scripture and tethered to the latest social evolutionary theory. Consider the warning from William Van Doodewaard:

[T]he history of hermeneutics on Genesis and human origins, particularly in the last two centuries, reveals a repeated pattern toward an erosion of scriptural inerrancy, sufficiency, and historic Christian theology. Despite naysayers, the history of Genesis hermeneutics across the centuries does provide numerous examples of sequential changes: if these changes do not indicate a “slippery slope,” they certainly indicate consecutive slides. In the history of each of the “schools” of alternative approaches and the institutions and denominations that grant latitude to them, there is an unbroken pattern of progressive movement, initially away from the literal tradition on Genesis 1, then away from the Adam and Eve of the literal tradition toward an evolved Adam, and then to no recognizable or existing Adam and Eve at all. There have been exceptions to—and reversals of—this trend, but they are rare.⁴

The consequences of the hermeneutical erosion described by Doodewaard can be observed in many who profess the Bible as their authority yet who sympathize with the LGBTQ agenda. Certainly, not all who deny the historicity of Genesis 1–2 embrace the LGBTQ worldview. But there is a definite logical connection. If the existence of human life is the product of evolutionary biological processes, then the experiences of human life—including marriage, sexuality, and gender expression—can hardly be understood as anything other than a product of those same processes. Thus, by equivocating on the historicity of Adam, a significant part of the argument over sexual orientation and transgenderism is conceded.

Paul himself never advanced an anthropology at odds from a literal and historical understanding of Genesis 1–2. He treated these chapters as factual history and used their contents concerning the origin and nature of humanity as the foundation for his own teaching.

³ For a detailed defense of the historicity of Adam, see William D. Barrick, “A Historical Adam: Young-Earth Creation View,” in *Four Views on the Historical Adam*, ed. Matthew Barrett and Ardel B. Caneday. Counterpoints: Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 197–227; William Van Doodewaard, *The Quest for the Historical Adam: Genesis, Hermeneutics, and Human Origins* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015).

⁴ VanDoodewaard, *Quest for the Historical Adam*, 279.

1.2 Sex Is a Gift, but Reserved Exclusively for a Man and a Woman in Marriage

Second, Paul asserted that sex is a gift from God, but is reserved exclusively for one man and one woman in marriage. Paul fully embraced Genesis 1–2 as factual history, and saw its description of the nature and purposes of marriage as binding for all humanity.

For example, in response to the asceticism threatening the church over which Timothy presided, Paul condemned any teaching which diminished the dignity of marriage and maligned its status as a good gift from God. He wrote to Timothy, “But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, *men* who forbid marriage For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude” (1 Tim. 4:1–5).

Similarly, in response to the Corinthian church’s drift towards celibacy (they had stated to Paul that it was “good for a man not to touch a woman”; cf. 1 Cor. 7:1), Paul affirmed that marriage was to be that exclusive relationship where sexual desires could be satisfied in the context of mutual respect.⁵ In antithesis to the cultural extremes of both asceticism and abusive male dominance, Paul commanded that “The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*” (vv. 3–4). To advocate celibacy as the right response to sexual desire —whether in terms of remaining unmarried, or in terms of living as if single although married—was a totally wrong-headed approach (vv. 2, 5, 9).

Yet as Paul made clear through these instructions, the capacity of marriage to provide this sanctified context for fulfillment did not justify its redefinition to include *more* than two human beings (polygamy or polyamory) or to include the same *kind* of human beings (homosexuality). Despite his exhortation that it was “better to marry than to burn” (v. 9), he never opened the door for this “burning” to be satisfied outside of a lifelong, loyal, heterosexual marriage. Simply stated, marriage was to be understood as a man “having his own wife” and a woman “having her own husband” (v. 2). Those who were married were to give themselves only to their spouses for the rest of their lives (vv. 10, 39). If they had for some reason left their spouses, they were to pursue reconciliation and not remain separate. But if they could not achieve reconciliation, they were not permitted to look elsewhere to satisfy their desires (v. 11). New one-flesh relationships were an option only for those whose spouses had died (vv. 39–40). In fact, so sacred was this one-flesh covenant that even in cases where one spouse believed the gospel but the other remained in unbelief, the believing

⁵ Some have contended that Paul exhibited a negative view of marriage and sexuality in 1 Corinthians 7, only to express a positive perspective later in Ephesians 5:22–33. But when it is taken into consideration that Paul’s instructions in 1 Corinthians 7 are in response to a unique set of problems which had arisen in the context of the Corinthian church, there is no need to see discontinuity between Paul’s two key texts on marriage. For a helpful summary on this point, see David E. Garland, *First Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 242–45.

spouse was to remain in the marriage and fulfill all of its responsibilities—unless that unbeliever initiated divorce (vv. 12–14).

Only when a person could successfully restrain sexual desires did Paul advocate celibacy as a “good” option (1 Cor. 7:8). Certainly, there were advantages to singleness in that it enabled one to give much greater attention to the Lord’s work—as Paul knew from personal experience (vv. 6–8, 32–35). But celibacy as a demand of the gospel or as a morally-superior lifestyle was not part of Paul’s doctrine. He assumed celibacy as the exception, not the rule. He even later argued that the apostles had “a right” to “take along a believing wife” on their ministry travels—a right he even reserved as an option for himself (9:5).

Ultimately, Paul’s teaching on marriage was anchored to a key Old Testament text—Genesis 2:24. This comes out most vividly in his instructions to the Ephesian church. After explaining the distinct responsibilities of husbands to wives and wives to husbands (Eph 5:22–30), Paul revealed the principle which provided the basis for such exhortations: “FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH” (v. 31; citing Gen. 2:24). Paul affirmed without reservation the ongoing authority of this creation ordinance. The marriage relationship was not simply defined by the concept of covenant; if Paul had wanted to affirm that, he could have cited many other texts affirming this principle of steadfast covenant loyalty. Rather, the essence of marriage was also defined by its composition of one man and one woman. It included the severing of ties to one’s father and mother, the establishment of an exclusive covenant between the man and his wife, and the entrance into a physical relationship to join them together for life. This principle was derived from the fact that Eve was formed out of Adam’s flesh (Gen. 2:21–23). Although Eve was made from Adam and not from the dust as he was (v. 7), she was not his clone. She was different, uniquely shaped as a complement to Adam in more than just emotional or psychological respects. Separate they would each be incomplete (v. 18). But through marriage they entered into a “one-flesh” existence wherein Eve completed what was lacking in Adam (vv. 23–24), just as every subsequent wife would do for her own husband. So sacred was this enduring one-flesh union between a man and a woman that Paul used it to describe an even greater reality—the mystical union between Christ and his church (Eph. 5:22–30).

Consequently, any attempt to experience this one-flesh relationship outside of this narrow standard of a life-long relationship between one man and one woman was considered by Paul to be *πορνεία*, “immorality” or “unlawful sexual expression.”⁶ No amount of burning, mutual consent, fidelity, sacrifice, or love could justify such activity outside of the context of a life-long covenant between one man and one woman. So when a member of the Corinthian church initiated conjugal relations with his father’s wife, Paul called it “immorality” (1 Cor. 5:1), and his response to it was severe (v. 5). He stated that those who practiced adultery or homosexual practice “would not inherit the kingdom of God” (6:9–10). He strongly rebuked those who had entered into a one-flesh relationship temporarily, through a prostitute (v. 16). Indeed, the Gentile culture of Paul’s day presented an abundance of alternatives to

⁶ BDAG, *πορνεία*, 854.

monogamous, heterosexual marriage. But Paul remained steadfast in his narrow teaching on human sexuality, which is summed up well in his exhortation to the Thesalonians: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification; *that is*, that you abstain from sexual immorality [πορνείας]; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God” (1 Thess. 4:3–5).

Ultimately, only through a radical revisionist reading of Paul’s letters can one conclude that Paul viewed marriage as anything other than a life-long covenant reserved exclusively for one man and one woman. For Paul this was not a personal conviction or social construct. It was a fundamental truth established by God at the beginning of history and binding on all humanity.

1.3 Gender Identities and Expressions Are Based on God’s Creation of Male and Female

Third, Paul asserted that gender identities and roles are based on God’s creation of man as male and female. In other words, Paul advocated a binary worldview on gender which portrayed gender identity and expression as fixed by the physiology determined by the Creator.

Before examining Paul’s teaching on the issue, it is important to summarize the debate taking place today over the understanding of “gender.” The *essentialist view* understands gender to be inseparably connected to one’s biology. Since there are only two biological sexes (as determined by chromosomes, hormones, and anatomy), one’s gender—the personal expression of this biological reality—must match the particular biological sex determined at conception. Moreover, although the essentialist view does recognize a degree of cultural relativity to the expressions of masculinity and femininity (what it means to dress like a man in one culture can differ from what it means to dress like a man in a different culture), it still contends that within cultures themselves gender distinctions are to be maintained (a man should not dress as a woman does in his own culture, and vice versa).

But over the past two decades in particular the essentialist view has come under intense attack in the Western world. For more and more Westerners, gender is merely an evolving social construct with little or nothing to do with biological realities. In fact, it is increasingly argued that the issue of gender must be left completely to an individual’s personal preference⁷—a preference which very well may fluctuate back and forth as the individual matures and experiences various relationships. It has become offensive for government, community, parents, or even doctors to presuppose any gender identity based on physiology. Young children in particular are encouraged to imagine and explore the different possibilities of their identity without feeling any limitation imposed by a birth certificate, a bathroom sign, or society at large. Whereas the experience of nonconformity between one’s gender identity and one’s biological sex used to be considered a symptom of psychological illness (“gender

⁷ Beginning in 2014, the social networking website Facebook also began allowing subscribers to choose from over 50 gender options when creating their online profile.

identity disorder”), such nonconformity is increasingly considered normal. The disorder now is identified as the lingering “psychological distress” certain individuals feel over such incongruence (“gender dysphoria”), a distress that is blamed on outdated social, culture, and religious norms.⁸

When turning to the apostle Paul, however, we never see any hint at deviation from a black-and-white, binary framework.⁹ While he emphasizes the equality of male and female through their spiritual immersion “into Christ” (Gal. 3:27–29), he firmly upholds the notion of two genders—male and female—and the distinctions between them. Man and woman were created distinctly; their expressions of manhood and womanhood were thus to be distinct.¹⁰

Paul’s instructions to the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 11:3–16 is of particular importance with respect to this issue. The men and women in the Corinthian church were exhorted to keep their physical appearances different according to their sex (vv. 14–15). It was “disgraceful” for the woman to wear her hair as the men did in that culture, and vice versa (vv. 4–6).¹¹ Moreover, this distinction extended to roles and conduct in the church itself. When praying or prophesying, men were to do so as those with a position of authority; women could only do so while showing that they were under the authority men (vv. 7–10)—a distinction he will even press harder later on in the epistle (cf. 14:34). To ignore this instruction was to dishonor the Creator and sow chaos in the church.

It is important to note that the emphasis of Paul’s exhortations in 1 Corinthians 11:3–16 is not rooted in the desire to appease cultural norms. There are no nuances in the text to suggest Paul’s emphasis on distinctions had anything to do with a lack of educational opportunity among the women in Corinth or anything else related to social status. Rather, Paul anchors his teaching on distinctions in the creation record of Genesis 2, referring both to the order and to the purpose of God’s creation of man as male and female (compare 1 Cor. 11:7–9 with Gen. 2:21–24). This was his consistent teaching throughout the churches (1 Cor. 11:16; cf. also Eph. 5:22–33; Col.

⁸ Compare the entry for “Gender Identity Disorder in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2000) with the entry for “Gender Dysphoria” in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

⁹ William Webb, advocating the “redemptive-movement hermeneutic,” argues that while Paul did not directly advocate the elimination of gender distinctions, he initiated the trajectory for the church to do so later on (*Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001]). For a sound refutation of Webb’s argument, see Wayne Grudem, “Should We Move Beyond the New Testament to a Better Ethic? An Analysis of William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis*,” *JETS* 47 no. 2 (June 2004): 299–346.

¹⁰ It is not the purpose of this article to provide a thorough analysis of the Pauline texts dealing with gender. The reader is encouraged to consult *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, eds. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), particularly chapters 5–9 which deal with the exegesis of 1 Cor. 11:2–16; 14:33–36; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 5:21–33 and Col. 3:18–19; and 1 Tim 2:11–15.

¹¹ This was consistent with what Moses had prescribed in Deuteronomy 22:5, “A woman shall not wear man’s clothing, nor shall a man put on a woman’s clothing; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God.”

3:18–19; 1 Tim 2:8–15). In fact, Paul even argued that the proper expression of gender was a concern for the angels (1 Cor. 11:10).

At the same time, Paul saw no inconsistency with emphasizing these gender distinctions while affirming ontological equality. For Paul, “in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman” and “as the woman originates from the man, so also the man *has his birth* through the woman; and all things originate from God” (vv. 11–12). After all, this equality-diversity framework demonstrated the nature of the Trinity itself: “But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ” (v. 3). Certainly, many who wish to minimize or erase gender distinctions immediately retort with Paul’s supposed Magna Carta on human equality: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).¹² Yet as even some egalitarians admit, Paul in the context of Galatians 3 is arguing for something much different than the elimination of gender.¹³

In reality, Christian egalitarianism must be held responsible for the confusion it has sown in the church over the issue of gender. By minimizing or even denying gender distinctions, egalitarians have cultivated a deep suspicion—if not hostility—towards the notion of identifiable gender distinctions. It considers male-female distinctions largely as the construct of sinful society rather than a gift from God for human flourishing. Physiological differences are necessary for the purpose of procreation, but they do not provide any basis for establishing functional differences in the family, church, or society. Consequently, egalitarianism has advocated arguments that are—as Albert Mohler has argued—“hauntingly similar” to those who advocate same-sex marriage.¹⁴ To hear of evangelical feminists, who previously opposed same-sex marriage, undergoing “a change of heart” regarding homosexuality is not at all surprising.

The apostle Paul, however, leaves no room for confusion—or a continuum. He recognizes no gender spectrum beyond just male and female—and no blurring of the line between them. To live to God’s glory required one to embrace the gender sovereignly determined by God at conception and revealed through anatomy, to understand its distinct vertical and horizontal responsibilities, and to live it out for one’s entire life. Andrew Walker summarizes this well: “The design of humanity is purposeful and good, and part of our design is that we are men and women. To deny or overturn that distinction is to nullify God’s revelation both in nature and in Scripture.”¹⁵

¹² E.g. Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 142; Rebecca M. Groothuis, *Good News for Women: a Biblical Picture of Gender Equality* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 25.

¹³ B. Witherington, “Women,” *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 6:959; N. T. Wright, “Women’s Service in the Church: The Biblical Basis,” a conference paper for the Symposium, ‘Men, Women and the Church’ (September 4, 2004, Durham, England).

¹⁴ Albert Mohler, Jr., “God, the Gospel and the Gay Challenge: A Response to Matthew Vines,” in *God and the Gay Christian? A Response to Matthew Vines*, ed. Albert Mohler Jr. (Louisville, KY: SBTS Press, 2014), 20.

¹⁵ Andrew T. Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate: What Does the Bible Actually Say about Gender Identity?* (The Good Book Company, 2017), 146.

2. Paul's Hamartiological Emphases

The second place to turn in the debate over same-sex orientation and gender confusion is to Paul's *hamartiology*—his teaching about the nature of sin. Any worthy position on these issues must explain why there is even confusion and debate in the first place. The apostle Paul is precisely the place to turn. His teaching can again be summarized by three fundamental assertions.

2.1 Adam's Sin Corrupted the Entire Human Race and the Entire Human Being

First, Paul asserted that Adam's sin corrupted both the entire human race and the entire human being. He taught both original sin and total depravity as described in Genesis 3.

Explaining the origin and spread of sin, Paul declared to the Romans that “just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Rom. 5:12; cf. also vv. 17, 19). He then named this “one man” specifically as “Adam” (v. 14). To the Corinthians he likewise stated, “For since by a man *came* death, by a man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:21–22). Even more specifically, Paul affirmed the history of Genesis 3 when he stated to Timothy, “And *it was* not Adam *who* was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. (1 Tim. 2:14; cf. Gen. 3:6–7).

The impact of original sin extended to all humanity. To the Romans Paul asked, “What then? Are we [Jews] better than they [Gentiles]?” (Rom. 3:9a). He then answered, “Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin” (v. 9b). To illustrate his point as consistent with antecedent revelation he then strung together several Old Testament texts, introducing them with the significant citation formula, “as it is written” (καθὼς γέγραπται; vv. 10–18). Paul also described the depth of sin's impact on all humanity when he wrote to the Ephesians:

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. (Eph 2:1–3; cf. also Col 2:13)

As Paul instructed the churches, he consistently operated upon the conviction that “all have sinned” (e.g., Rom. 3:23), and that such sin was not limited to external behavior but infected the innermost thoughts and desires of the self. Sin could not be traced simply to environmental factors; it sprung from the depth of the soul. It affected every aspect of human existence—every thought, intention, feeling, attitude, word, deed, relationship, culture, and institution. Even in his regenerate state Paul recognized the continuing depravity of his unredeemed flesh: “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh” (7:18a). In fact, Paul taught that sin's

influence permeated the entire realm of creation, which now “groans” because of Adam’s sin (8:19–22; cf. Gen. 3:17–19).

The apostle Paul did not exhibit a positive or optimistic view of the state of humanity. He took Genesis 3 seriously. For him the human heart was more deceitful and wicked than anything else. Human beings were not born with clean slates or in innocence. As those at enmity with God “by nature” (Eph. 2:3), human thoughts, intentions, and desires could *not* be trusted as wholesome or even neutral. They were oriented towards perversity from birth by an attraction that operated from within. In the words of John Calvin, “man’s nature, so to speak, is a perpetual factory of idols.”¹⁶

A proper understanding of Paul’s teaching on original sin and total depravity is critical for this discussion. When these doctrines are even slightly ignored or minimized, forms of Pelagianism quickly spring up and flourish, and that is precisely what has happened. Among the literature of those in the church who are sympathetic to or who directly advocate the LGBTQ agenda there is a woefully deficient view of human sinfulness and an astonishingly positive view of human nature and its desires. A return to the apostle Paul’s understanding of depravity is the need of the hour.

2.2 Depravity Expresses Itself in Rebellion against the Image and Rule of God

Second, Paul asserted that human depravity expresses itself particularly in rebellion against the image and rule of God. Depravity concentrates its efforts on maligning God’s image in human beings and on undermining his authority over them, particularly through sexual sin.

In calling the Ephesians to walk worthy of their divine election, Paul reminded them of their previous life:

So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness (Eph. 4:17–19).

Having made themselves “callous” to the law of God, sinners have intentionally given themselves over to ἀσέλγεια, “sensuality” (v. 19a)—a term which denotes a “lack of self-constraint which involves one in conduct that violates all bounds of what is socially [or in this case, morally] acceptable.”¹⁷ It is a deliberate rejection of the rule and blessing of God evidenced in the pursuit of that which is antithetical to it. And that which is antithetical to God’s law Paul described as ἀκαθαρσία, “impurity” (v. 19b)—a term which refers to “filthiness, dirtiness, vileness, degradation.”¹⁸ In

¹⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, LCC (Philadelphia: Westminster/John Knox, 2006), I.11.8.

¹⁷ BDAG, ἀσέλγεια, 141.

¹⁸ BDAG, ἀκαθαρσία, 34.

other words, in order to defame his Creator the sinner actively strives to debase that aspect he bears which displays God's glory and rule over him through a pursuit of desires and behaviors directly antithetical to God himself.

This effort to defame God is particularly exhibited through sexual sin. As Paul said to the Corinthians, "Every *other* sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body" (6:18b; cf. also Rom. 1:24–27). For the unbeliever, sexual immorality was heinous enough; his body was the image of God. For the believer it was even worse; his body was now also the residence of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). Sexual immorality was the antithesis for the purpose for which the body was created—to glorify God (v. 20).

The same emphasis can be observed in Paul's vice-lists (1 Cor. 6:9–10; Gal 5:19–21; 1 Tim. 1:8–10). Dominant in these lists is the focus Paul places on sexual sins as the manifestation of human depravity. In his letter to the Galatians, three kinds of sexual sin begin his list of fifteen works of the flesh: *πορνεία, ἀκαθαρσία, ἀσέλγεια*—"immorality, impurity, sensuality" (Gal 5:19). Of the ten categories of sinners listed in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10, four are guilty of sexual sins: *πόρνοι, μοιχοί, μαλακοί, ἄρσενοκοῖται*—"fornicators," "adulterers," "effeminate," and "homosexuals" (v. 9).¹⁹

Of particular importance to the discussion is Paul's use of the terms *μαλακοί* ("effeminate") and *ἄρσενοκοῖται* ("homosexuals") in 1 Corinthians 6:9. While Paul's employment of these terms has throughout church history been taken as a clear prohibition of homosexuality in all its forms, in recent times those sympathetic to same-sex orientation have sought to revise this long-held understanding.²⁰ Justification for such a revision has been focused on four lines of reasoning: (a) Paul was ignorant of the true nature of same-sex attraction as it is understood today (i.e., Paul was operating simply according to the social presuppositions of his culture); (b) Paul was not condemning same-sex relationships per se, but only the excessive passions of those who—while heterosexual by orientation—were led against their orientation into relationships with those of the same sex (i.e., adulterous bisexuality); (c) Paul was condemning homosexuality according to its common practice in temple prostitution (i.e., apart from life-long, monogamous commitment); and/or (d) Paul was only condemning abusive homosexuality (i.e., homosexual rape or pederasty—adult male relations with young boys).²¹

¹⁹ In comparison, only one of the "ten words" of the Mosaic covenant, "You shall not commit adultery" (Exod 20:14; Deut 5:18) focused on sexual sin.

²⁰ A noteworthy effort in this regard is Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* (New York: Convergent Books, 2014). Vines states his purpose in writing the book as follows: "My larger argument is this: *Christians who affirm the full authority of Scripture can also affirm committed, monogamous same-sex relationships*" (3).

²¹ For a helpful rebuttal of these arguments, see Kevin DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), especially chapter 7, "Not That Kind of Homosexuality," pp. 79–88. There is real sense in which the advocates of these four arguments mimic the reductionist approach of the Pharisees Jesus referred to in Matthew 5:27–30. Jesus condemned the Pharisees for their cunning restriction of the concept of "adultery" to a particular *form* of adultery. It allowed them to enjoy the sin in its more respectable forms while condemning to death those who engaged in its worst manifestations.

But Paul's choice of the unique term ἀρσενοκοῖται—which is found only in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10—shows his intent to connect his argumentation directly to the teaching of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.²² Paul does this by taking two key words used in the LXX text of both Leviticus texts—the terms ἀρσενο (“male”) and κοίτης (“bed”)—and joining them together to coin this new word.²³ In other words, whatever Moses meant in Leviticus about the “abomination” of “a man lying with a man as one does with a woman,” is what Paul meant here also. The term cannot be defined through the prism of first-century Greco-Roman norms or taboos, as same-sex defenders are forced to do. Instead, it must be read in the light of antecedent Scripture. And even though Paul taught the Corinthian church that it was not under the stipulations of the Mosaic Law (e.g. 1 Cor. 9:20), this particular stipulation regarding same-sex relations remained steadfastly in place. This was no inconsistency, for Moses' prohibition in Leviticus on homosexual relations simply reflected what was already commanded prior to the Mosaic Law—that only a man and a woman were to be joined as one flesh (Gen. 2:24).²⁴

Paul's use of the term μαλακοί (“effeminate,” v. 9) in the vice-list of 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 is also noteworthy. The term has at its root the notion of “soft.”²⁵ Unlike ἀρσενοκοῖται (“homosexuals”), μαλακοί was used more frequently and in a variety of ways prior to Paul, making it more difficult to define precisely in this context.²⁶ It shares lexical similarities with ἀρσενοκοῖται, though it still must be differentiated from it since both terms appear in the same list. Some take it to refer to the *passive* participant in the homosexual act (the male who offers himself as a female, possibly a young male—a catamite), with ἀρσενοκοῖται referring to the *dominant* participant. But in light of how the term is employed elsewhere, Fortson and Gram argue for a slightly broader understanding of μαλακοί and their assessment appears warranted:

The evidence, however, suggests a distinction between those men [μαλακοί] fully immersed in a feminine way of life—including unrestrained, sexually loose behaviors that could be passive, homosexual, or bisexual—and men

²² Leviticus 18:22 – “You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination”; 20:13 – “If *there is* a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them.”

²³ The term is not found in Gk literature prior to Paul. See S. Donald Fortson III and Rollin G. Grams, *Unchanging Witness: The Consistent Christian Teaching on Homosexuality in Scripture and Tradition* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2016), 297; James White and Jeff Niell, *The Same Sex Controversy: Defending and Clarifying the Bible's Message about Homosexuality* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2002), 146–50. But even if Paul himself did not create this word, its etymology nonetheless forces the reader back to the Leviticus texts.

²⁴ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 242.

²⁵ BDAG, μαλακός, 613.

²⁶ For a very helpful survey of the interpretations of μαλακοί in 1 Cor 6:9, see Peter James Goeman, “The Law and Homosexuality: How Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 Should Influence the Church's Understanding of Homosexuality” (unpublished PhD dissertation; Sun Valley, CA: The Master's Seminary, 2017), 216–25.

[ἀρσενικοῖται] engaged in homosexual acts, possibly in secret. The distinction, then, might be between those possessing an open, effeminate orientation [μαλακοῖ] and those who merely commit homosexual *acts* [ἀρσενικοῖται], whether open or secretive.²⁷

In other words, it is as if Paul uses these two terms—terms which are somewhat redundant but also somewhat distinct—to show his intent to cover the entire spectrum, to speak not simply of particular acts related to the behavior but to speak of all acts related to the behavior. As such, Paul’s condemnation extends also to all of it, whether it was practiced openly or in secret, passively or actively, consistently or occasionally. Regardless of role or kind of participation, all who engaged in such activities defiled the image of God and rebelled against the creation ordinance of Genesis 2:24. Paul consequently echoed Moses (who described such male-with-male acts as “an abomination”; Lev. 18:22) by stating twice that those who practiced them “will not inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9, 10).

Ultimately, Paul looked at sexual deviation as a unique kind of sin in that it was an attack on the human body. The body was created to reflect God’s glory and serve as the residence of the Holy Spirit. Sexual sin in all forms—including all forms of homosexual behaviors—perverted this purpose.

2.3 Increasingly Abnormal Sexual Desires and Behaviors Evidence God’s Judgment

Third, Paul asserted that increasingly abnormal sexual desires and behaviors evidenced God’s judgment upon sinners. In other words, although Paul described unbelievers as “having given themselves over [ἐαυτοὺς παρέδωκαν]” (Eph. 4:19) to unrestrained sexual sins, he also described God as one who “gave them over [παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς]” (Rom. 1:24, 26) to unrestrained sexual sins as part of his judgment.

Paul’s argument in Romans 1:18–32 is crucial for understanding the nature of such abandonment. Paul began with a summary assertion: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (v. 18). But prior to this current revelation of divine wrath there was a different kind of revelation—a clear, undeniable revelation of God’s attributes through creation (v. 20). Humanity, however, rejected this creation-based knowledge and refused to give God the glory He deserved. Through a series of three “exchanges” Paul defined humanity’s guilt: they “exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God” for idols (v. 23); they “exchanged the truth of God for a lie” (v. 25); and they “exchanged the natural [sexual] function for that which is unnatural” (v. 26).

In response, the “wrath of God” now manifests itself through various kinds of divine abandonment. First, Paul indicated that “God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among men” (v. 24). As in Ephesians 4:19, where unbelievers give themselves over “to sensuality for

²⁷ Fortson III and Grams, *Unchanging Witness*, 294.

the practice of every kind of impurity [ἀκαθαρσία],” so here in Romans 1:24 the term used for “impurity” is ἀκαθαρσία, a term which refers to “filthiness, dirtiness, vile-ness, and degradation”—primarily of a sexual kind. Thus, while sinners throw off all restraint and plunge themselves into various forms of heterosexual immorality, God also removes natural restraints and in judgment permits sinners to drink the dregs.²⁸

The second kind of divine abandonment is described in Romans 1:26–27: “For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.” Here, the focus is clearly on homosexual practice. While some have sought to restrict these words to “excessive sexual passion” as opposed to moderation within homosexual relations,²⁹ Paul’s language simply resists such reductionism.

First, the problem was not with the quantity of these desires but with their quality. Paul describes these passions with the term ἀτιμία (v. 26), referring to that which is “dishonorable” or “shameful,”³⁰ not simply excessive. Second, these desires themselves are what “God gave them over to” (v. 26). Their desires are in themselves the mark of divine judgment. Third, to emphasize the consensual nature of what is depicted, Paul described the direction of these desires using the reciprocal pronoun ἀλλήλους: they “burned in their desire toward *one another*” (v. 27). Fourth, Paul taught that such desires were realized by “exchanging the natural function for that which is unnatural” (v. 26). The concepts of “natural” and “unnatural” here refer not to Greco-Roman cultural norms (e.g., “patriarchal gender roles”³¹), but to the norms established in the creation account of Genesis 1–2. Both Paul’s reference to “the creation of the world” in the preceding context (v. 20), and his use of the unusual Greek terms referring to “men” and “women” (ἄρσην, “male,” and θῆλυς, “female”—both of which are found in the LXX of Genesis 1, and both of which emphasize physical distinctiveness) suggest Paul is evaluating what is “natural” and “unnatural” according to the standards revealed by God for humanity in Genesis 1–2.³² Fifth, Paul not

²⁸ As Douglas Moo states, “God does not simply let the boat go—he gives it a push downstream” (*The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 111).

²⁹ Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 95–115. Vines argues, “Paul wasn’t condemning the expression of same-sex orientation as opposed to the expression of opposite-sex orientation. He was condemning *excess* as opposed to *moderation*” (105). This kind of thinking appears to be behind Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase in *The Message*: “Don’t you realize that this is not the way to live? Unjust people who don’t care about God will not be joining in his kingdom. Those who use and abuse each other, use and abuse sex, use and abuse the earth and everything in it, don’t qualify as citizens in God’s kingdom” (1 Cor 6:9–10, MSG). His rendering of 1 Tim 1:9–10 and Rom 1:26–27 lean in the same direction. This explains Peterson’s recent ambiguous statements on LGBTQ issues, and why Christians who use his popular paraphrase have difficulty believing claims that the Bible prohibits same-sex relations.

³⁰ BDAG, ἀτιμία, 149.

³¹ Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 108–11.

³² Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 114 fn 114; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 94–95; Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2001), 290–91.

only referred to male-with-male homosexuality in vv. 26–27 but to lesbianism as well. In fact, Paul mentioned lesbianism first in this order, describing female counter-creation behavior before turning to address the same behavior by men. This particular order (females first, then males), coupled with Paul’s other creation terminology in the context, strongly suggests he was deliberately reversing the chronological order of creation (male first, then female, Gen 1:27) to emphasize homosexuality’s perversion of God’s original design.³³

Paul closes this particular argument with the third kind of divine abandonment: “And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper” (Rom. 1:28). He then produces another vice-list which included everything from gossip to deceit to murder (vv. 29–32). Consequently, it is important to observe that while descent into homosexuality is a vivid manifestation of divine abandonment, it is not the only one. God’s judgment in response to humanity’s suppression of the truth revealed through creation is equally revealed in heterosexual immorality and general moral degradation.

As scholars of all perspectives admit, Romans 1:26–27 is the most crucial text in the discussion over homosexuality. When interpreted carefully and in context, it cannot but yield a meaning that is wholly antithetical to the LGBTQ agenda to normalize same-sex attraction and behavior. Only a minority who champion that agenda are bold enough to admit this reality. For example, Louis Crompton—a non-Christian, gay academic—has written in response to Paul’s words in Romans 1, “Nowhere does Paul or any other Jewish writer of this period imply the least acceptance of same-sex relations under any circumstances. The idea that homosexuals might be redeemed by mutual devotion would have been wholly foreign to Paul or any Jew or early Christian.”³⁴ Luke Timothy Johnson concedes the same:

I have little patience with efforts to make Scripture say something other than what it says, through appeals to linguistic or cultural subtleties. The exegetical situation is straightforward: we know what the text says. But what are we to do with what the text says? We must state our grounds for standing in tension with the clear commands of Scripture, and include in those grounds some basis in Scripture itself. . . . I think it important to state clearly that we do, in fact, reject the straightforward commands of Scripture, and appeal instead to another authority when we declare that same-sex unions can be holy and good. And what exactly is that authority? We appeal explicitly to the weight of our own experience and the experience thousands of others have witnessed to, which tells us that to claim our own sexual orientation is in fact to accept the way in which God has created us.³⁵

³³ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 114 fn 114.

³⁴ Louis Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003), 114.

³⁵ Luke Timothy Johnson, “Homosexuality and the Church: Scripture & Experience,” June 11, 2007, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/homosexuality-church-0>, accessed August 30, 2017. Another example is William Loader, “Homosexuality and the Bible,” in *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church*, ed. Preston Sprinkle (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 17–48.

Such tempering of Paul's inspired words with experience, is not an option for those who would claim the Scriptures—including the writings of Paul—as their ultimate authority.

3. Paul's Soteriological Emphases

The third place to turn is to *soteriology*—his teaching on God's solution to humanity's sin problem. This, too, is a critical focus of the discussion, for those who may affirm a Pauline anthropology and hamartiology may still yet disagree over the impact that the gospel should have over those who experience same-sex attraction or gender confusion. In response, Paul's soteriology can be summarized by three fundamental assertions.

3.1 Supernatural Regeneration Begins a New Life and a New Identity

A central emphasis in Paul's writings is the present state of the believer "in Christ" or "with Christ." The frequency with which he employs these prepositional phrases (and other related ones) far exceeds that of the other New Testament writers.³⁶ Over and over again he reminded his readers that "in Christ" their old lives and identities have passed away, they have been made alive to God, and along with this new life comes a whole new identity—a brand new way of understanding themselves and what it means to be a human being. As one writer explained, "The heart of Paul's religion is union with Christ. This, more than any other conception . . . is the key which unlocks the secrets of his soul."³⁷ This is precisely where we must turn, since the issue of "identity" plays such a significant role in the debate over same-sex attraction and transgenderism.³⁸

As Paul explains, this new life begins by God's gracious act of regeneration in those who were formerly by nature children of wrath (Eph. 2:4–5; cf. also Col. 2:13–14). This act of regeneration rendered the sinner "a new creature," bringing to an end "the old things" which defined his past identity (2 Cor 5:17). Christ is now the source of the sum of the believer's life (Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:4), the believer's "wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30).

Paul did recognize that some previous identities remained in place for those who had been united in Christ. He directed identity-specific teaching at the unmarried and married, men and women, husbands and wives, fathers and children, and slaves and masters. He even maintained a distinction between Jews and Gentiles with respect to God's future purposes (e.g. Romans 11). But the identity of being immersed

³⁶ Bruce Demarest states that there are 216 references to the believer's union with Christ in Paul's writings. The next highest amount is found in the writings of John, with twenty-six references [*The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006], 313].

³⁷ James Stewart, *Man in Christ* (1935; repr., Vancouver: Regent College, 2002), 147.

³⁸ This issue of identity is not just pertinent to this discussion but to all of the Christian life. As Paul David Tripp has stated, "We are always living out of some sense of identity. You are constantly telling yourself who you are, and the identity you assign to yourself has much to do with how you respond to the difficulties of life" (*Broken Down House: Living Productively in a World Gone Bad* [Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2009], 35).

into Christ superseded even these: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28; cf. also Col. 3:11). It even transcended the believer’s basic identification with the first Adam (Rom. 5:12–21).

At the same time, past identities related to that for which Christ came to die were definitely gone. Christ conquered sin on the cross, and any true believer had been identified with that crucifixion (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20). Certainly, “the flesh” still lingered and struggled to subvert these spiritual realities and regain control of the believer’s life. Paul called the believer to life-long war against this flesh (Rom 8:13; Col. 3:5–17). But at the same time Paul was quick to remind believers of a fundamental reality: “those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal. 5:24) and “you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3).

Consequently, Paul could not have approved of a believer continuing to conceive of and identify himself according to that condemned and deceased life. To do so would indicate a critical failure in understanding the essence of the Christian life and impede the practical outworking of this spiritual union in the Christian’s life.³⁹ For Paul, you either identified with the first Adam and his transgression, or the second Adam and His righteousness, but not both. The new life in Christ was not an add-on feature to the old nature.

The profundity of this doctrine is perhaps nowhere better expressed than in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, where Paul wrote,

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

Ultimately, 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 is not simply a vice list, but an identity list. The catalogue of descriptions Paul gave is not of behaviors but of persons. Paul’s simple phrase, “and such *were* some of you” (v. 11) expresses in the simplest of language the incredible power and efficacy of the regeneration.⁴⁰ Consequently, the identity titles of “gay Christian,” “transgender Christian,” “queer Christian” and the like not

³⁹ As John Murray argued, “It is not simply a step in the application of redemption; when viewed, according to the teaching of Scripture, in its broader aspects it underlies every step of the application of redemption. Union with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation not only in its application but also in its once-for-all accomplishment in the finished work of Christ” (*Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 171).

⁴⁰ This truth also has definite implications for those who have *not* experienced regeneration. As John Street states, “Many well-meaning Christians have stumbled here, trying to provide biblical help to homosexuals who were incapable of a heart-level spiritual response. This only leads to discouragement and frustration on the part of both” (“Hope, Holiness, and Homosexuality,” in *Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong: A Biblical Response to Today’s Most Controversial Issues*, ed. John MacArthur [Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2009], 99).

only fail to correspond with God's revelation on matters of creation, sexuality, and gender—even if those who use them never act out their desires. These identity titles also malign and obfuscate the purpose and power of the gospel.⁴¹ As Walker states, "Someone can embrace a transgender identity or find their identity in Christ, but not both."⁴²

3.2 Union with Christ Is not only about Justification, But about Transformation also

Second, Paul asserted that spiritual union with Christ experienced by the believer is not only about justification, forgiveness of sins, and the promise of eternal life, but also about real transformation to the likeness of Christ beginning already in this life. Spiritual union inaugurates the process of progressive sanctification, whereby the believer is increasingly transformed to the likeness of the One with whom he has been identified.⁴³

A key concept here is that of the Christian's *walk*, or conduct of life. For example, to the Romans Paul wrote, "Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). Having been recreated in Christ, believers are now God's "workmanship," "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). Again and again Paul exhorted believers to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling" and "no longer just as the Gentiles walked" (Eph. 4:1, 17; cf. also 5:8).

In order to know just what to aim for in this walk, Paul exhorted his readers to look to the example of the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 5:2; Col. 1:10; 2:6; etc.). The more sanctified a person became, the more he reflected the glory of Christ, as Paul explained to the Corinthians, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18; cf. also Rom. 8:29; Col. 3:10).

Consequently, all thoughts, desires, affections, words, and actions must be assessed in the light of Jesus Christ. Anything found which does not conform to him and his creative and re-creative purposes cannot be left in peace. In conformity to Paul, the Christian can never justify thinking, "I was just born with these feelings," "I didn't choose this," or "I am simply a product of this fallen world."⁴⁴ There is a

⁴¹ It is disappointing to read this kind of self-identification used even by writers like Wesley Hill, who comes highly recommended by numerous conservative theologians. While Hill rejects homosexuality as a sin contrary to God's revelation in creation and in Scripture, he nonetheless openly states, "I also refer to myself as a 'gay Christian'" (*Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010], 21).

⁴² Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate*, 146.

⁴³ As Murray again states, "Nothing is more relevant to progressive sanctification than the reckoning of ourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God through Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 6:22)," (John Murray, "The Pattern of Sanctification," in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 4 vols. [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1944], 2:311).

⁴⁴ For example Hill states, "There was nothing, it felt, chosen or intentional about my being gay. It seemed more like noticing the blueness of my eyes than deciding I would take up skiing. There was never an option" (*Washed and Waiting*, 29).

sense in which all of these are true to some degree, but they are not the whole truth. The believer must always conclude, “But I was made alive in Christ, and now I am being transformed into his image.”

This is so important in a context where an increasing number of Christians are thinking that the temptations of same-sex attraction and transgenderism are foes the gospel simply cannot defeat. Some resort to just enduring the pain until glorification comes. Others resort to describing such desires as similar to a physical disability—a terrible consequence of the Fall, something which God does have the power to heal, but something which he usually allows to remain for the purpose of some other good in this life. But the Christian life according to the apostle Paul is all about progressive transformation of the mind, will, and affections. Believers are not just washed and waiting. They are washed, waiting, and transforming.

3.3 The Lordship of Christ over All Areas of Life Is the Essence of Christianity

Third, Paul asserted that the concept of “lordship” was central for understanding the Christian life. Paul contended that the Christian *was not his own*. The “self” did not belong to the believer, nor was “self-expression” a fundamental right.

The popular Christian literature today on LGBTQ issues brims with anecdotal illustrations about the quest for belonging, the need to find self-fulfillment, and the importance of living authentically. Self-denial is out. Happiness and personal flourishing are in. The pursuit of Christian contentment is now defined as learning to be “comfortable in your own skin.” In all of this literature there is a dearth of references to Paul’s doctrine on the lordship of Christ.

But Paul was not ambiguous on the subject. For Paul, the all-important question for the Christian is not “What do I feel?” but “What shall I do, Lord?” (Acts 22:10). This lordship extends over all areas of the believer’s existence.

For one, Paul contended that Christ rules over the physical *body*. To the Corinthians he stated, “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:19–20; cf. also Rom. 6:12–14; Rom. 12:1). Christ also extended full authority over *feelings* and *desires*. Paul reminded the Galatians that those who were owned by Christ “have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal. 5:24). Third, Paul described Christ’s rule as extending over *thoughts* and *intentions*: “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. *We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5).

In other words, no aspect of existence—beginning with the body and extending to the innermost thoughts—could be conceived by Paul as remaining under the personal jurisdiction of the self, or even in some kind of morally neutral territory. As Abraham Kuyper famously stated, “Oh, no single piece of our mental world is to be hermeneutically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole

domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!"⁴⁵

This is crucial for understanding the nature of sexual thoughts and the longings of one to be the opposite gender. Some argue that it is the *intensity* of desire which determines whether it is amoral or immoral. If the thoughts and longings do not rise to the level of infatuation or obsession or physical action, they can be considered amoral and no repentance and mortification is necessary. But this is unhelpful, as there is no objective way in which to measure such intensity. Others argue it is the *chosen-ness* of a desire that decides the issue. A person's sexual desires towards a person of the same-sex (or of the opposite sex outside of marriage) are only sinful if deliberately chosen and cultivated. But this, too, is largely unhelpful, for it fails to take into account the culpability of neglect—the failure to dwell proactively and passionately on what is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute, excellent, and worthy of praise (Phil. 4:8).

A better way to assess the nature of such desires is to identify the *object* upon which they are placed and the *motivation* by which they are produced and consider whether together they conform to the lordship of Christ. Do they esteem his lordship as demonstrated by their conformity to his creation ordinances? Do they exalt his lordship as demonstrated by their conformity to his new creation principles? If not, then *change* is in order, and if Christ is indeed sovereign, then change is possible, as difficult as it may be.

This approach most fully recognizes the claim of Christ upon every square inch, including desires, imaginations, values, and preferences, and seeks to live out intentionally the full extent of this dominion. True human flourishing will be found only here, not in asserting self-fulfillment. As Paul says to the Romans, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts" (Rom. 13:14).

Conclusion

The preamble to the recently-crafted *Nashville Statement* on biblical sexuality captures well the concern of the hour:

This secular spirit of our age presents a great challenge to the Christian church. Will the church of the Lord Jesus Christ lose her biblical conviction, clarity, and courage, and blend into the spirit of the age? Or will she hold fast to the word of life, draw courage from Jesus, and unashamedly proclaim his way as the way of life? Will she maintain her clear, counter-cultural witness to a world that seems bent on ruin?⁴⁶

The answer, in large part, depends on the church's understanding and affirmation of the anthropology, hamartiology, and soteriology of Paul. When impurities are

⁴⁵ Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 488.

⁴⁶ <https://cbmw.org/nashville-statement/>

introduced into the gospel, they usually come through the neglect in these three areas. Conversely, the key to success in remaining pure in conviction, courageous in proclamation, and effective in the Great Commission will be found largely in standing steadfast on Paul's teaching on the nature of man, sin, and salvation.

WWJD ABOUT LGBT?: EVALUATING LGBT CLAIMS IN LIGHT OF CHRIST’S TEACHING

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Given what He taught about the Old Testament, about sexuality and marriage, about the New Testament, and about love, it is clear that Jesus stands united with the Scriptures in condemning homosexuality as sinful. Yet He also stands united with the Scriptures in freely offering forgiveness to any who would confess the guilt of his sins, turn from them, and put his trust in Christ alone for righteousness.

* * * * *

Introduction

As the church of Jesus Christ continues to engage the pro-homosexualist¹ agenda of Western culture, it is increasingly important to look to the teachings of Christ Himself concerning sexuality and marriage. This is not because we ought to be so-called “Red Letter Christians;” contrary to suppositions of an uninformed “cultural Christianity,” the words Jesus Himself spoke—i.e., those appearing in red type in our Bibles—are not any more inspired or authoritative than the rest of Scripture. Instead, it is important to examine Jesus’ teachings precisely because advocates of homosexuality appeal to His supposed silence on the matter in order to build a case for their own position. For the most part, those who argue that homosexuality may be reconciled with Christianity, if they are honest with themselves, realize that they simply cannot make a biblical case for their position. The prohibitions of homosexuality in Leviticus 18 and 20, as well as in Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6, and in 1 Timothy 1, are unmistakable.

¹ By “homosexualist” and “homosexuality” (and so throughout the article), I am referring not just to homosexuals or homosexuality, but to the moral, political, and in many cases theological ideologies of those who believe that homosexuality is a morally acceptable lifestyle to be embraced and celebrated, and regard biblical morality and the traditional view of marriage as discriminatory, oppressive, and deserving to be eradicated from the public square.

Therefore, attempts are made to sever the Old and New Testament Scriptures from Jesus Himself. The Levitical prohibitions of homosexuality are derided as the primitive and outdated prescriptions of an unenlightened people, and therefore irrelevant to morality and ethics in the twenty-first century. The apostle Paul is accused of having corrupted the way of life and the ideology of Jesus, and is slandered as an intolerant, homophobic, xenophobic bigot—so unlike the Jesus who welcomed the marginalized and the outcast, who challenged the religious establishment, and who championed tolerance and love as the highest of virtues. The prevailing sentiment seems to be that conservative Christians have much to say about the Levitical holiness code, the Mosaic legislation, and the letters of the apostle Paul, but that we are misguided and misdirected. Instead, our “progressive” and “affirming” counterparts tell us, we ought to follow Jesus. After all, it is Jesus Himself who is the founder of our religion, not Moses or Paul. And Jesus, the argument goes, in His entire three years of ministry, was silent on the matter of homosexuality. In a culture in which much discourse plays out in social media, one often sees memes and comics in which a young person holds a sign that reads: “As Jesus said about gay people, ‘_____.’” And conservatives are chided, “If Jesus wanted His followers to make as big of a deal about homosexuality as you want to make of it, surely He would have said something about it!” The implication is that Jesus’ teaching is at odds with the antiquated and primitive moral code of the Old Testament, as well as with the oppressive, patriarchal, heteronormative misogyny of the apostle Paul, and that if there is ever a dispute between Jesus and Scripture, Jesus should always win out.

But *is* there such a contradiction between the Law of Moses and the apostle Paul, on the one hand, and Jesus, on the other? Is it true that Jesus’ supposed silence on the matter of homosexuality should be interpreted as a break from the Old Testament teaching and as support for the LGBT agenda? Is it even true that Jesus did not address homosexuality in His life and ministry? Ultimately, the answer to each of those questions is no. The aim of this article is to substantiate that “No” by offering several biblical responses to these popular arguments, and thereby demonstrate that homosexualism finds no support from the teachings of Jesus, but only the same univocal and unequivocal condemnation as the rest of the Scriptures.

Three Brief Responses

Before addressing the teaching of Jesus which bears upon the homosexualist agenda, it is necessary to respond briefly to the argument that “Jesus never addressed homosexuality, and therefore Christians ought to find it permissible.”

Special Pleading

In the first place, such an argument is an instance of the logical fallacy special pleading. Special pleading may be defined as “applying standards, principles, and/or rules to other people or circumstances, while making oneself or certain circumstances exempt from the same critical criteria, without providing adequate justification.”²

² “Logically Fallacious: Special Pleading,” <https://www.logicallyfallacious.com/tools/lp/Bo/LogicalFallacies/163/Special-Pleading> (accessed November 2017).

This argument is thus rightly characterized as special pleading because the very objection rests upon a premise that the objectors explicitly reject—namely, that the Bible is the authoritative revelation of God's mind to man. That is to say, the only source of knowledge for the claim that Jesus never said something about any particular topic is the Bible itself. The argument is, "Jesus never said anything, that is, as we see recorded in the Bible, concerning homosexuality." Yet it is the authority of this very Bible that is denied when such objectors refuse to accept as authoritative the Levitical or Pauline teaching concerning homosexuality. They want to stand on the authority and accuracy of Scripture when they insist that Jesus was silent on the matter, and yet dismiss as irrelevant and non-binding the Bible's other explicit condemnations of homosexuality.

To use a contemporary example, in the context of the current global refugee crisis, many political "progressives" are citing Scripture in an attempt to accuse political conservatives of hypocrisy. A quick Google search yields articles by the Huffington Post,³ Slate,⁴ and the tragically misnamed Relevant Magazine,⁵ all appealing to Leviticus 19:34, which says, "The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt." And yet it was not long ago that these same outlets were hurling derisive epithets at Christians for appealing to Leviticus 18 and 20—i.e., the chapters immediately preceding and following Leviticus 19—concerning their explicit condemnation of homosexuality. It seems that if you cite Leviticus as evidence that homosexuality is forbidden by God, you will be scolded for appropriating your morality from an irrelevant text produced by Bronze-age farmers. But if you cite Leviticus in favor of the privileged progressive talking point of the week, you will be celebrated for your magnanimity and compassion.

Such only illustrates the claim made above: aiming to twist Jesus' supposed silence on homosexuality into support for it is a case of special pleading. It is a case of the enemies of God attempting to manipulate God's Word when it suits them—to *use* the holy Word of God, which sanctifies His people (cf. John 17:17), in order to make provision for their flesh in regard to its lusts (cf. Rom. 13:14). Those making such arguments ought to consider that God is not mocked by the machinations of inventors of evil, that He is omniscient and just, and that there is a day of coming reckoning that ought to terrify those who would use His Word as a plaything (Gal. 6:7). It is as if God Himself speaks to them in Psalm 50, as Asaph records: "But to the wicked God says, 'What right have you to tell of My statutes and to take My covenant in your mouth? For you hate discipline, and you cast My words behind you'" (Ps. 50:16–17). The enemies of God despise His Word; they reject His law as

³ Raymond Chang, "The Immigration Ban And The Refugee Crisis: A 'Bible Issue' Or Not?" http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/the-immigration-ban-and-the-refugee-crisis-a-bible_us_588ec859e4b0de286b25750e (accessed November 2017).

⁴ Benjamin Perry, "Because the Bible Tells Us So," http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2015/11/the_republican_party_s_immigration_and_refugee_positions_defy_the_bible.html (accessed November 2017).

⁵ Jesse Carey, "What the Bible Says About How to Treat Refugees," <http://archives.relevantmagazine.com/god/what-bible-says-about-how-treat-refugees> (accessed November 2017).

the rule of their lives. God's response is, effectively, to sharply rebuke them: "Don't you dare take My holy Word upon your unclean lips!" He goes on to say, "You thought that I was just like you; I will reprove you and state the case in order before your eyes" (Ps. 50:21). This is the language of judgment in a courtroom. It will be a fearful thing for those who *use* the Word of God to contemptuously condemn others, as in the Day of Judgment that very Word which they have cast behind them and failed to obey is revealed to be the standard of their own condemnation. God will not be mocked. Those who attempt to use His Word as a toy in a game of logical volleyball will soon find themselves at the bar of the courtroom of God under the judgment of that very Word.

Argument from Silence

Secondly, in addition to special pleading, attempting to marshal Jesus' supposed silence as support for homosexuality is also an argument from silence. This second logical fallacy demonstrates just how rationally unstable of a foundation on which this argument rests, and is illustrated nicely by a recent article from a well-known Christian satire website, entitled, "Jesus Never Said *Anything* about Felony Home Invasion:"

Want to know what I'm incredibly tired of? Christians speaking out against felony home invasion. I'll never understand why self-described 'followers of Christ' feel so comfortable rallying around a topic that *Jesus never even mentioned*. . . . Please, show me the verse where Jesus says, 'Do not forcefully enter the house of another with the intent to commit a felony, larceny, or assault once inside.' . . . Jesus said a lot of things, but He obviously saw felony home invasion as a non-issue. But that certainly doesn't stop millions and millions of hypocritical Christians from cutting-and-pasting other things He said in order to form a haphazard theology, based on their own personal prejudices and fears, that discriminates against career home invaders and seeks to deprive them of rights essential to their being.⁶

Satire is often a very effective means of communication, especially in our day.

The point, however, is well-made. One searches the Gospels in vain for a single instance in which Jesus used the words "idol," "idols," "idolatry," or "idolatrous." Should we therefore conclude that Jesus is walking back the severity of the Old Testament's condemnation of idolatry? Should we conclude that He is modeling a more broad-minded, inclusive approach to the worship of the gods of other cultures, and that His followers ought to emulate that? Surely not! The entirety of Jesus' teaching testifies to the necessity of true worshipers of God to worship Him in spirit and truth, with single-minded, unyielding devotion (e.g., John 4:24). He exposed the idolatry of the rich young ruler's heart when He called Him to demonstrate His single-minded devotion to Him by giving up his many possessions (Luke 18:22). He explained that

⁶ "Jesus Never Said Anything about Felony Home Invasion," *The Babylon Bee*, <http://babylonbee.com/news/jesus-never-said-anything-felony-home-invasion/>

no one can serve two masters, but must hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other (Matt. 6:24). He explained that love for Him must exceed even one's love for his own family (Matt. 10:37; Luke 14:26). And He taught that the true convert is one who has apprehended Christ as such a treasure that he joyfully parts with everything in His life in order to lay hold of Him (Matt. 13:44). Jesus does not have to explicitly use the word "idolatry" in order to condemn it.

Similarly, the Gospels never record Jesus saying anything about pedophilia. There is no account of Jesus commenting on the wickedness of bestiality. Not a single syllable of the Gospels reports Jesus' thoughts on the evil of rape. Yet it would be beyond absurd to seek to garner support for any of those abominable acts on the basis of such silence. In the same way, the fact that Jesus never uttered the word "homosexual" or "homosexuality" is no more an endorsement of homosexuality than His silence on pedophilia, bestiality, incest, rape, child molestation—and any number of heinous sexual sins—is an endorsement of those practices.

Silence as Tacit Agreement

A third brief response considers that the absence of any explicit mention of homosexuality is evidence for Jesus' tacit *agreement* with what would have been the predominant, traditional view in first-century Israel. Given Jesus' cultural and religious context, silence makes sense. Jesus lived among and ministered primarily to Israel and those familiar with the Law of Moses in an age under the Mosaic Covenant, which explicitly condemned homosexuality as an abomination to God (Lev. 18:22; 20:13). Indeed, it is mentioned in the same breath as God's condemnations of adultery, child sacrifice, and bestiality (Lev. 18:20–24). Unless there was some precipitating issue that would compel Jesus to comment on homosexuality, the only reasonable conclusion is that His view of homosexuality was the Old Testament's view of homosexuality. New Testament scholar, Robert Gagnon, puts it this way. He writes,

The univocal stance against homosexual conduct, both in ancient Israel and the Judaism of Jesus' day, makes it highly unlikely that Jesus' silence on the issue ought to be construed as acceptance of such conduct. . . . Silence on the subject could only have been understood by his disciples as acceptance of the basic position embraced by all Jews. If Jesus had wanted to communicate affirmation of same-sex unions he would have had to state such a view clearly since first-century Judaism, so far as we know, had no dissenting voices on the matter.⁷

What *Did* Jesus Say?

The three preceding responses have sought to explain how Jesus' silence on the matter of homosexuality need not be interpreted as support for the LGBT agenda. The proper way, however, to ascertain what Jesus believed about the LGBT agenda comes from what He *did* say during His life and ministry. Rather than making arguments from silence, the words of Christ, which are recorded for us in Scripture, ought

⁷ Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 188.

to be the focus of our attention. Thus, the remainder of this article will be devoted to examining four topics of Jesus' teaching, and bringing those teachings to bear on His view of marriage and sexuality. We will examine Jesus' teaching concerning the Old Testament, concerning sexuality and marriage, concerning the New Testament, and concerning love.

Jesus' Teaching Concerning the Old Testament

First, it is necessary to understand what Jesus taught concerning the reliability and relevance of the Old Testament. This is so because the view that claims Jesus supports homosexuality by His silence depends entirely upon there being a clear break between the doctrine of the Old Testament and the teachings of Jesus. However, if Jesus affirms the abiding authority and relevance of the Old Testament, then one is constrained to conclude that Jesus' view on homosexuality *was* the Old Testament's view on homosexuality.

What, then, did Jesus teach concerning the Old Testament? In the first place, He taught the doctrine of the inspiration of the Old Testament Scriptures. In Matthew 22:42, Jesus asked the Pharisees, "What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?" They answered the way their Scriptures taught them to answer, i.e., that the Messiah would be the Son of David. Jesus responded, "Then how does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying, 'The Lord said to My Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, until I put Your enemies beneath Your feet''?" (Matt. 22:43–44; cf. Ps. 110:1). The key phrase in Jesus' response is "in the Spirit." In Jesus' view, David was not the sole source of his words in Psalm 110. According to Jesus, when David penned Psalm 110 he was speaking *in*, or *by*, the Holy Spirit of God. The word of the man, David, is the Word of *God* when the Holy Spirit is superintending it (cf. 2 Pet. 1:21). Just as Paul would eventually write in 2 Timothy 3:16, Jesus believed that "all Scripture is inspired by God"—that is, it is θεόπνευστος, breathed out by God, the very Word of God Himself.

In addition to the inspiration of the Old Testament, Jesus taught that the Old Testament was infallible and therefore inerrant. In John 10, the Jews attempt to stone Jesus for blasphemy because He was claiming to be God (vv. 31–33). In response, Jesus answers, "Has it not been written in your Law, 'I said, you are Gods'? If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?" (vv. 34–36). Quoting Psalm 82:6, Jesus reasons that if the writers of Scripture could apply the term 'gods' to corrupt rulers in Israel, it could not be improper for Him, the sinless Son of God, to be called God as well. In the midst of that argument, though, Jesus makes the parenthetical comment that the Scripture cannot be broken. That is to say, the Old Testament Scriptures cannot be set aside; no portion of the Scriptures can violate or contradict any other portion. Notably, He does not merely claim that Scripture *is* not broken, though that would be enough to affirm the doctrine of biblical inerrancy; He says it *cannot* be broken. In Jesus' eyes, Scripture is unbreakable; it is infallible. The Old Testament not only does not err; it is *incapable* of erring.

Jesus also taught that the Old Testament was abidingly authoritative. He speaks of the relevance of the Pentateuch when He informs the Pharisees that they will be

judged by the standard of righteousness revealed in the Mosaic Law (John 5:45). In the proceeding verses, He explains that if they did not believe Moses' writings they would never believe His words (John 5:46–47). Thus, Jesus saw an organic connection between the Pentateuch and His own messianic office and mission. Further, Jesus affirmed the validity and relevance not only of the Pentateuch as a whole but of the Ten Commandments in particular. In the tenth chapter of Mark, when the rich, young ruler asks what he must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus replies, "You know the commandments," and then lists five of the Ten (vv. 17–19). Inasmuch as the Ten Commandments are a summary of the Old Testament, Jesus' citation of them in this interaction indicates their abiding relevance. In the words of Gagnon, then, "Jesus accepted the commandments of the Decalogue as normative and illustrative of a broader sweep of the Torah's legislative authority."⁸ Still more particular than the Ten Commandments, Jesus also regarded single verses of Scripture as abidingly authoritative and relevant in the context of His ministry. The verse He referred to more often than any other during His earthly sojourn, like the prohibitions of homosexuality, was found in the Book of Leviticus: ". . . you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18). Apparently, the Lord Jesus Christ regarded the Book of Leviticus as a legitimate source of moral authority.

Evidence abounds in support of the notion that Jesus believed the Old Testament to be abidingly authoritative. He affirms the Old Testament's negative evaluation of Sodom and Gomorrah by holding those cities up as a byword for extreme wickedness (Matt. 10:14–15; 11:23–24; Luke 10:10–12; 17:26–30); He repeatedly asks those who challenge Him, "Have you not read?"—fully expecting them to have taken heed to the authoritative Word of God (Matt. 12:1–5; 19:4; 22:29–31; Mark 12:10, 24–26; Luke 6:3); and when He finds Himself in the throes of temptation from Satan himself, He battles that temptation by constantly retreating to the Scriptures: "It is written. . . for it is written . . . it is written" (Matt. 4:1–11; cf. Luke 4:1–13). However, chief among Jesus' teachings concerning the abiding authority of the Old Testament are His comments in Matthew 5:17–19:

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

From these words, it is plain that Christ had not come to abolish, set aside, or overthrow the Old Testament, but rather to be its fulfillment. He insists that not a jot or a tittle would be annulled. Being Himself the eternal Word (cf. John 1:1), His own teaching could never undermine even the smallest stroke of the pen from the written Word of God. This is not the attitude of someone who would propose to flippantly set aside the moral principles of the Old Testament!

⁸ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 193.

In summary, the Law taught unequivocally that marriage between male and female is the only legitimate context for sexual intimacy, and that homosexuality is an abomination to God. Jesus taught that that Law was inspired, infallible, inerrant, and abidingly authoritative. Given these facts, one is shut up to conclude that Jesus' view of homosexuality *was* the Old Testament's view of homosexuality.

Jesus' Teaching Concerning Sexuality and Marriage

In the second place, Jesus' teaching concerning sexuality and marriage also disproves the claim that He was, or would have been, favorable or indifferent to homosexuality. While the advocates of pro-homosexualist doctrine would picture Jesus as *relaxing* the inflexible demands of the Old Testament law in favor of a more moderate and inclusive standard of sexual morality, the Bible portrays Him as doing just the opposite. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, He says, "You have heard it that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery;' but I say to you that everyone who *looks* at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:27) The Jews of Jesus' day may have read the Seventh Commandment and concluded that one kept the law of God if he had sexual intercourse with no one but his own wife. But Jesus says the true intent of that commandment is not merely abstinence from fornication and adultery, but the kind of purity of heart that does not even *think* about fornication or adultery.⁹ Far from being more lenient on sexual ethics than the Old Testament and His surrounding culture, Jesus only heightened the standard for sexual purity.

So many conceive of Jesus as the supreme model of the postmodern version of tolerance. However, the second chapter of the Book of Revelation reveals a Jesus who is decidedly intolerant of the church's tolerance of error and immorality. In Jesus' letter to the church of Thyatira, he commends them for their deeds, their love, their faith, their service and perseverance (2:19). Whereas the church of Ephesus needed to repent and do the deeds she did at first (cf. 2:4–5), Jesus approvingly declares that Thyatira's "deeds of late are greater than at first." Yet while their deeds were laudable, their love could be undiscerning and blindly affirming.¹⁰ Jesus says, "But I have this against you, that you *tolerate* the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality" (Rev. 2:20, emphasis added). He is intolerant of Thyatira's tolerance, and promises severe judgment because of it: "Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts" (Rev. 2:22–23). This is not a Jesus who is soft on sexual immorality! And those churches who compromise the Word of God in an effort to be more "tolerant" and more "affirming"

⁹ Gagnon comments, "Not only is it a matter of great urgency to confine sexual intercourse to one's wife, but it is also a matter of great urgency to constrain one's sexual thoughts as well. It is not enough to refrain from fornication and adultery. One must also refrain from actively imagining one's sexual involvement with another woman" (ibid., 205).

¹⁰ Kevin DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 123.

than Jesus is will find themselves under the judgment of the One whose eyes are like a flame of fire (Rev. 1:14), whose feet are like burnished bronze (Rev. 1:15), whose robe is dipped in blood (Rev. 19:14), and who strikes down the nations with the sword of His mouth (Rev. 19:15).

Besides intensifying the Old Testament's demands for sexual purity and showing Himself to be intolerant of immorality, Jesus also repeatedly condemns the sin of πορνεία (Matt. 5:32; 15:19; 19:9; Mark 7:21), translated by the New American Standard as "fornications," but perhaps more accurately to be rendered as "sexual immoralities," or "deeds of sexual immorality," because of the breadth of its semantic range. Πορνεία encompassed every kind of sexual sin, and would have been unmistakably understood by His hearers to include homosexuality. The leading Greek lexicon defines it as "unlawful sexual intercourse, prostitution, unchastity, fornication,"¹¹ which is to say any sexual activity outside the covenant of marriage. The Septuagint uses the verb form of πορνεία to refer to both male and female temple prostitutes (Deut. 23:18 LXX; Eng. 23:17), which thus includes homosexuality. Extrabiblical Greek also provides occurrences of πορνεία in reference to homosexual practice.¹² All of this leads Robert Gagnon to conclude, "No first-century Jew could have spoken of *porneiai* (plural) without having in mind the list of forbidden sexual offenses in Leviticus 18 and 20 (incest, adultery, same-sex intercourse, bestiality)."¹³ Similarly, Kevin DeYoung writes, "Jesus didn't have to give a special sermon on homosexuality because all of his listeners understood that same-sex behavior was prohibited in the Pentateuch and reckoned as one of the many expressions of sexual sin (*porneia*) off limits for the Jews."¹⁴ Thus, if the semantic range of πορνεία includes homosexuality, as the linguistic evidence demands, and if Christ explicitly and repeatedly condemns πορνεία as sin, He therefore condemns homosexuality as sin.

A common reply to the argument that πορνεία condemns any kind of sexual activity outside of marriage is that marriage is the very institution which homosexuals are seeking, yet which Bible-believing Christians would aim to deny them. However, to those who argue that homosexuals might find legitimate sexual expression in "marriage" to one another, we must respond that Jesus recognized no such relationship as marriage. When Jesus taught concerning marriage, He explicitly defined it as a covenant between one man and one woman. In Matthew 19, the Pharisees asked Him what He thought about divorce, hoping to trap Him into disagreeing with Moses and thereby find reason to condemn Him. Jesus' response to their inquisition is that divorce is an evil thing (cf. Mal. 2:16) and was only provided for in the law of God as a result of the hardness of human hearts (Matt. 19:8–9). However, Jesus prefaces this response with a most instructive commentary on the second chapter of Genesis:

¹¹ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 854. Hereafter, *BDAG*.

¹² E.g., Demosthenes, Nineteenth Oration.

¹³ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 191.

¹⁴ DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?*, 75.

Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate (Matt. 19:4–5).

Three observations concerning this passage bear much on our present discussion. First, observe what Jesus believes is the authority for matters concerning marriage. It is nothing other than the Old Testament Scriptures! His understanding of marriage does not *depart* from the Old Testament, but is rather organically *rooted* in it. Second, observe once again Jesus’ belief in the inspiration of the Old Testament. He says that the same One who created them *said*—and then He quotes *Moses’* words in Genesis 2:24. Surely Jesus did not believe Moses created Adam and Eve; God did. This is another clear indication that Jesus believes that what Scripture says, God says. Third, note Jesus’ intentional ‘inefficiency’ in answering the Pharisees’ interrogation. If He wanted to simply and efficiently answer the question about divorce, He could have skipped immediately to verse 5: “Have you not read that the two become one flesh?” That sufficiently answers their question about divorce: God joins spouses together as one flesh, and therefore man must not separate what God has joined together. Why does He begin, then, by reminding the Pharisees that God made human beings male and female (Matt. 19:4)? For two reasons, at least. First, He wants to underscore that marriage is by nature a divinely-ordained institution; it is not something that man gets to define and redefine as the tides of cultural sensibilities ebb and flow. Secondly, Jesus goes out of His way to make this point, which would otherwise be superfluous, in order to make it clear that *this divinely-ordained institution of marriage exists only between one man and one woman*. Jesus regards the fact that God created humankind *male and female* as inextricably linked to the institution of *marriage*, which was instituted when God brought the man and the woman together to become one flesh as husband and wife.

Therefore, when one considers all that Jesus did say concerning sexual intimacy and the covenant of marriage, it is impossible to reconcile His teaching with the LGBT agenda. In every way, Jesus upholds and even intensifies the Old Testament’s condemnation of any sexual expression outside the covenant of marriage, which covenant He explicitly defines as legitimately entered into only by one man and one woman.

Jesus’ Teaching Concerning the New Testament

In addition to Jesus’ teaching on the nature and authority of the Old Testament, and His teaching on sexuality and marriage, we must consider His teaching on a third topic: the nature and authority of the New Testament.

Some may dismiss the foregoing argumentation and insist on the silence of Jesus concerning homosexuality. Some may discount the Old Testament’s teaching

concerning sexual ethics due to the fulfillment of the Mosaic Covenant in Christ.¹⁵ But for any Bible-believing Christian, it is indisputable that the divine law revealed in the New Testament is in force today, being the Scriptures of the New Covenant. And in that New Testament, which reveals God's directives for those who rightly relate to Him in the New Covenant era, the apostle Paul explicitly condemns homosexuality (Rom. 1:26–28; 1 Cor. 6:9–11; 1 Tim. 1:9–10). Therefore, if Jesus has taught that the New Testament Scriptures are the abidingly authoritative rule of life for His followers, His condemnation of homosexuality will be made clear.

And that is precisely the case. Jesus Himself expressly prophesies of the inspiration of the New Testament. While it is true that He nowhere explicitly mentions homosexuality by name in the Gospels, the Holy Spirit—with whom Jesus shares the full, undivided divine essence,¹⁶ and whom Jesus said He would send to speak His words (John 16:12–14)—superintended what the apostle Paul wrote, so that he wrote exactly what God the Son desired to be written (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21). Strictly speaking, then, Jesus did not stop speaking when Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John finished their gospel accounts. Before His death and resurrection, Jesus told the disciples, “I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now” (John 16:12). In other words, “More revelation is coming, though I cannot give it to you now.” “But,” He promises, “when the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak” (John 16:13). This is a promise from Jesus Himself that the words the Holy Spirit would speak through the disciples would be Christ's own words. In this way, “He [the Holy Spirit] will glorify Me, for He will take *of Mine* and will disclose it to you” (John 16:14, emphasis added). And that is precisely what the Holy Spirit did. As the church was being built, the Spirit spoke Jesus' words to the writers of the New Testament. All Scripture—which included Paul's writings, according to 2 Peter 3:16—is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16); it is the very Word of God, His own breath.

It is objected, “But was not Scripture written by man? Yes, it was. But the Holy Spirit so superintended the minds and wills of the writers of Scripture such that the words they wrote under their own recognizance were precisely what the Triune God wanted to say to His people. That is what Peter means when he says they were “moved” (NASB) or “carried along” (ESV) by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21). It was as if as they were using their pens, the Spirit was bearing their hands as they wrote. Therefore, the Book of Acts, the epistles of Paul, Peter, John, James, and Jude, the letter to the Hebrews, and the Revelation given to the apostle John are all the Word of God Himself. And since (a) God exists eternally as Father, Son, and Spirit, and (b)

¹⁵ In response to that argument, however, see Mike Riccardi, “Shellfish, Mixed Fabrics, and Homosexuality: Picking and Choosing?” *The CrippleGate* (blog) <http://thecripplegate.com/shellfish-mixed-fabrics-and-homosexuality-picking-and-choosing/>

¹⁶ It cannot be overlooked that the orthodox doctrines of the deity of Christ and the trinity of God are at mortal odds with the notion of a pro-homosexual Christianity, for if Christ is God—the Second Person of the eternal Trinity—then the Old and New Testaments, being the Word of God, *are* the Word of Jesus, who is God, and who acts inseparably with the Father and with the Holy Spirit in all His works, including the revelation of Scripture. To pit Jesus against the (Spirit-inspired) Levitical and Pauline condemnations of homosexuality is not only to abandon biblical sexual ethics, but to rob God the Son of His divinity and thereby rend the Trinity.

Jesus Himself is God the Son, all of the New Testament—as well as the Old Testament—is the Word of Christ.¹⁷ Even the words not appearing in red type are nevertheless the Lord of the church speaking to His church by means of the Holy Spirit, through the agency of human writers.

Did Jesus address homosexuality? Yes, He did. He did so by sending the Holy Spirit to superintend the writing of Paul such that what Paul wrote was precisely what Jesus intended, so much so that it could be said to be “God-breathed.” Jesus condemned homosexuality by means of Paul’s condemnation of homosexuality. Therefore, to deny that homosexuality is sinful is to deny Jesus Himself, and that is irreconcilable with genuine, biblical Christianity.

Jesus’ Teaching Concerning Love

Having examined what Jesus taught concerning the Old Testament, concerning sexuality and marriage, and concerning the New Testament, we have discovered that Jesus’ teaching undermines the claims of homosexualism. One final topic of Jesus’ teaching that must be addressed is the topic of love. The homosexualist commonly charges the biblical Christian with missing the forest for the trees. In the midst of all our attention to the details of Scripture, we have lost the big picture. The cardinal virtue that Jesus taught His followers was love (John 13:34–35). If we value love, what problem ought we to have with two consenting adults committing themselves to one other out of love? “Love is love is love,” we are often told, and to insist that homosexuality is sinful and to deny homosexuals the right to be “married” is simply not loving, and therefore not Christian.

Yet like the others, this argument simply does not stand up to biblical scrutiny. The heart of this error is that, in its wisdom, the homosexualist has failed to define *love* biblically. To our self-indulgent, narcissistic, perennially adolescent, self-willed culture, love means nothing more than psychologist Carl Rogers’ notion of unconditional positive regard. To love someone, according to our society, is to affirm every decision they make and to applaud them just for being them. People have confused the idea of being affirmed, accepted, flattered, and made much of with true love. They therefore conclude that to love someone is to make him feel as good as possible by magnifying his own worth, by making much of *him*. Then, those who have imbibed this erroneous conception of love turn to the Bible, where they read about love on almost every page: “God is love,” (1 John 4:8); “For God so loved the world . . .” (John 3:16); the greatest commandment in the law is “You shall love the Lord your God” and the second is “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22:37–40); “All men will know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). These wonderfully biblical themes come flooding into their minds! And then, tragically, rather than surrendering their own preconceptions to the authority of God’s Word and seeking to understand how God defines love, they use their own distorted definition of love that they have imbibed from society, and they foist that definition of love onto the Scriptures and onto their conception of God. Now, when they hear

¹⁷ See footnote 16.

that “God is love,” they think, “God asks no one to change. God does not judge people. God accepts everyone just as they are. So Christians must do the same!”

Yet these conclusions are not true, because that is, emphatically, not how God defines love. “In this is love,” says the apostle John, “not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). “But God demonstrates His own love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ *died* for us,” writes Paul (Rom. 5:8). These passages teach that love is acting—even laboring—to secure someone’s greatest benefit. God labors, at great cost to Himself, and even suffers in the Person of Jesus Christ, in order to secure the greatest benefit of His beloved. When we were dead in our sin, cut off from God, and without hope, what would have been our greatest benefit? Answer: a perfectly righteous, wrath-propitiating, sin-bearing Substitute. That is exactly what God gives us. He demonstrates His own love by benefiting us with Himself in the person of His Beloved Son.

If love labors to secure the beloved’s benefit, what, then, is one’s greatest benefit? Well, it is not to be unconditionally affirmed and made to feel good about oneself “just the way you are,” because God did not design human beings to thrive on and be satisfied by the glory of self. A man’s vision of his own glory and experience of his own exaltation will not satisfy the longings of his soul for eternity. However, the vision of God’s glory revealed in the face of Jesus Christ *will* satisfy that man. God has designed man’s heart, his soul, his affections, and his will so that he would be most satisfied by God’s own glory. He even defines spiritual life as the ability to see the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). This means that love can only be defined by helping the beloved to see, know, enjoy God in the person of His Son, for that is the greatest benefit that can be accomplished for anyone. Love is not unconditional affirmation. Love is laboring, and oftentimes even suffering—even being mocked, being called hateful and bigoted, losing your tax-exempt status, even losing your friends and family—so that those whom you love might find joy in making much of Christ forever, because worshipping Him, not themselves, is what will most truly and lastingly satisfy them.

It is plain, then, that acquiescing to the homosexualist’s agenda of unconditional acceptance is the very opposite of love. Refusing to warn someone that homosexuals will not inherit the kingdom of God (cf. 1 Cor 6:9–11) is in fact hatred, because it is not in the best interest of sinners for Christians to affirm a lifestyle which, if unrepented of, will end in eternal destruction. We do not love like Jesus loves if we unconditionally affirm someone in a choice that robs them of true, abiding satisfaction and leads them to ruin. We love like Jesus loves when we graciously and patiently proclaim a message that has the power to free people from the bondage of their suicidal love affair with themselves—the power to liberate them into the freedom and the joy of making much of the glory of God. We love like Jesus loves when we point people away from worshipping themselves and their own desires, and when we steer them toward their greatest benefit: God Himself.

Conclusion

As the homosexualist agenda of the political left continues to rage on, the biblical-Christian worldview concerning sexuality is going to become less and less tolerated, and more and more scorned and ostracized as hatred and bigotry. Yet those who

take such positions may not appeal to the Lord Jesus Christ for support. Given what He taught about the Old Testament, about sexuality and marriage, about the New Testament, and about love, it is clear that Jesus stands united with the Scriptures in condemning homosexuality as sinful. Yet He also stands united with the Scriptures in freely offering forgiveness to any who would confess the guilt of his sins, turn from them, and put his trust in Christ alone for righteousness. Inasmuch as the repudiation of biblical sexual ethics and virulent support of the LGBT agenda is evidence our society is under the divine *judgment* of Romans 1, then we must follow the divine *prescription* found in Romans 1: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.” Followers of Christ must unashamedly and unrelentingly stand upon Scripture, just as our Lord did, and must boldly proclaim the Good News of salvation from sin and destruction through repentance and faith in Christ Jesus alone.

***SOLUS CHRISTUS* AND THE
PROTESTANT REFORMATION OF EUROPE**

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History shows that a commitment to solus Christus is based upon Scripture and the earliest Christian documents. Commitment to this doctrine was lost, though, after extra-biblical and traditional elements entered the church and became authoritative. The Reformers, on the other hand, understood that these traditions were simply the traditions of men. A commitment to the authority of Scripture for faith and practice resulted in a commitment to salvation mediated by Christ alone. The result is that God receives all of the glory for salvation since it is sought solely through His Son.

* * * * *

The year 2017 marks the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. A famous slogan of this Reformation was *post tenebras lux* (“after darkness, light”). According to the Reformers, a primary source of this darkness regarded the Roman Catholic Church’s errant understanding of Christology. Gradually evolving from the early church, extra-biblical traditions of Orthodoxy and Catholicism shrouded the truth of Scripture that one is justified by grace alone (*sola gratia*), through faith alone (*sola fide*), in Christ alone (*solus Christus*). The question of how this occurred is complicated because Orthodox and Catholics became convinced that salvation could only be attained by adhering to a complex system of tradition found only in their respective churches. As a result, each church believes that salvation can only be received through the grace-giving sacraments that are administered by priests empowered to do so through their ordination, which takes place through one unique, mystical line of succession. As a result, salvation can only be attained through the mediation of the one, true church. The Reformers challenged these traditions with a return to the authority of Scripture (*sola Scriptura*), where it is taught that salvation is experienced immediately through the mediation of Christ alone. It is the goal of this article to show how the Eastern and Western churches fell into error, how the Reformers responded by a return to the Christ of the Scriptures, and how the Eastern and Western churches responded to the Reformers.

Solus Christus: Early to Medieval Church

Guardians of the Truth: Bishops and Apostolic Succession

The early church existed in a context where persecution was felt and heresies fought. The reality of not having a settled canon of Scripture, and the difficulties related to spiritual gifts produced uncertainty, questions, deception, and confusion. Realizing the need for unity in the faith, early leaders such as Ignatius of Antioch (d. ca. 117) emphasized the role of the bishop as the one reliable, authoritative source that could teach, preserve, and defend the faith. The reason for this was that the bishops were in a succession of men that learned from the apostles themselves. This was consistent with 2 Timothy 2:2: “The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” Since there was a succession in teaching, the faithful could trust the instruction of the bishop against the rising tide of false teachers.¹

This background is vital to understanding Ignatius’ teaching on the role of the bishop, which is often misunderstood by contemporary readers, and is anachronistically used by the Orthodox and Catholic churches to justify authoritarianism. On his way to martyrdom, Ignatius wrote seven letters where we see his pastoral concern for unity of the faith in the midst of threats that jeopardized the truth. Offensive to modern ears, but understandable in context, Ignatius writes, “Plainly therefore we ought to regard the bishop as the Lord Himself.”² Furthermore, he states, “He that honors the bishop is honored of God; he that works without the knowledge of the bishop rends service to the devil.”³

Why the emphasis on the authority of the bishop? Was it an evil desire to have an all-powerful church leadership that could not be questioned? No, the anachronistic error of forcing modern views onto Ignatius’ words should be avoided. It must be remembered that this was a time of great instability in a church with brewing heresies. Ignatius, as a good pastor, was to preserve the faith by calling for unity under the authority of the bishop. He wanted to establish stability, uniformity, and correctness in doctrine.

Irenaeus (115–202), largely considered the father of Western theology, had similar concerns as Ignatius. He writes, “Wherefore it is incumbent to obey the presbyters who are in the Church,—those who, as I have shown, possess the succession from the apostles; those who, together with the succession of the episcopate, have received the certain gift of truth, according to the good pleasure of the Father. But [it is also incumbent] to hold in suspicion others who depart from the primitive succession”⁴

One of the unintended consequences of appealing to the succession of bishops

¹ Cf. *1 Clement*, in *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd edition, ed. and trans. Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic), 42–44.

² *Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians*, in *ibid.*, 187.

³ *Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrnans*, in *ibid.*, 257.

⁴ *Against Heresies*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* edited by Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 1:497.

was that it led to a mystical form of apostolic succession that would have been unrecognizable to the early Fathers. While this lineage was previously used as a safeguard for the truth, it later became a spiritual chain of power that was passed from man to man. In this later sense, there is believed to be a spiritual genealogy that is transferred by the ceremony of ordination, and not solely from qualifications. In other words, just as Elijah passed his spiritual power on to Elisha, so successive bishops were thought to transfer their anointing to their successors so that they too had spiritual and ecclesiastical authority to administer the sacraments. This passing of the Spirit, present in ordination and confirmation, was believed to begin with Jesus when he breathed on the disciples (John 20:22) and continued with the apostles when believers received the Holy Spirit after the laying on of hands (Acts 8:14–17; 2 Tim. 1:6).

While it is evident that the early Christians did not understand apostolic succession in a mystical way, this began to change in the early part of the third century with the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus (170–236). Describing the process of ordination, Hippolytus explains that the bishops should lay their hands on the candidate for bishopric, “praying in their heart for the descent of the Spirit.”⁵ The bishop is then to pray to the Father, “pour forth now that power, which is thine, of thy royal Spirit, which thou gavest to thy beloved Servant Jesus Christ, which he bestowed upon his holy apostles . . . by the Spirit of high-priesthood to have power to remit sins according to thy commandment . . .”⁶ Indicating that the rite was not simply liturgical, but exacted an ontological change in the candidate, Hippolytus commands the people in attendance to “offer him the kiss of peace, for he has been made worthy.”⁷ Here is seen the transition from the early understanding of apostolic succession as recognition of a qualified man in ordination, to a ceremony which causes someone to be worthy of the bishopric. Upon receiving this spiritual power, the bishop is then able to transfer power and grace to the sacraments.

Another significant development of this concept is seen with Cyprian of Carthage (200–258). Writing with similar motives to those of Ignatius and Irenaeus, Cyprian penned *On the Unity of the Church* (AD 251) to preserve the true church against those who would divide her. In particular, Cyprian wrote this work against the Novatians, who taught that those who had apostatized (the “lapsed”) under the intense persecution of Decius (250–51) should not be allowed back into the church, even though they had repented.⁸ Novatian (ca. 200–258) believed that the ordination of the bishop of Rome, Cornelius (d. 251), was made invalid because he opposed

⁵ *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus* (USA: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 33.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 35. See the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “1581 This sacrament configures the recipient to Christ by a special grace of the Holy Spirit, so that he may serve as Christ’s instrument for his Church. By ordination one is enabled to act as a representative of Christ, Head of the Church, in his triple office of priest, prophet, and king.” Also, “1582 . . . The sacrament of Holy Orders . . . confers an *indelible spiritual character* and cannot be repeated or conferred temporarily” (See section two on “The Seven Sacraments of the Church,” http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM. Accessed 21 October 2016).

⁸ As an answer to this controversy, Cyprian wrote, *On the Lapsed*, which is largely responsible for the development of the penitential system of forgiveness of sin.

Novatian. As a result, Novatian appointed himself as the Roman bishop and established rival bishops to all those opposing him.

Threatening to divide the church, Novatian was countered by Cyprian, who supported Cornelius as the true successor to the bishopric. Arguing as Ignatius did, for the unity of the faith under the authority of the bishop, Cyprian defended Cornelius as the successor of Peter. Cyprian explains the inherent power in the position of bishop of Rome: “And although [given] to all the apostles . . . He gives an equal power [to all the apostles], and says, ‘As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you: Receive the Holy Ghost: Whosoever sins you remit, they will be remitted to him; and whosoever sins you retain, they will be retained;’ yet, that He might set forth unity, He arranged by His authority the origin of that unity, as beginning from one.”⁹ Cyprian then makes the connection between this apostolic succession and the efficacy of the sacraments when he writes, “And does nay one believe that this unity which thus comes from the divine strength and coheres in celestial sacraments, can be divided in the Church . . . ?”¹⁰ Similarly Cyprian writes of the Eucharist, “the lamb which is slain in the figure of Christ should be eaten in one house,” and in relation to baptism, “Although there can be no other baptism but one, [the Novatians] think that they can baptize; although they forsake the fountain of life, they promise the grace of living and saving water. Men are not washed among them, but rather are made foul; nor are sins purged away, but are even accumulated.”¹¹

The result of this teaching is that salvation became inseparably bound to the catholic (“universal”) church. As Cyprian famously writes, “He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother.”¹² It naturally follows then, “He who does not hold this unity does not hold God’s law, does not hold the faith of the Father and the Son, does not hold life and salvation.”¹³

In the writings of Cyprian the entirety of church tradition comes to a head. As Gregg Allison notes, “With Cyprian, the exclusivity of the church for redemption – ‘there is no salvation out[side] of the church’ – comes to the forefront in the development of ecclesiology.”¹⁴ There is a mystical sense of apostolic succession where spiritual power is passed from bishop to bishop through ordination. This spiritual power is absolutely necessary to make baptism and the Eucharist efficacious, both of which are necessary for salvation in the Eastern and Western churches. Consequently, to reject the God-ordained means of grace in the church is to reject God and His salvation. Cyprian was consistent with the implications of this position,

⁹ *On the Unity of the Church*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* edited by Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 5:422. There are two versions of sections four and five. The “Received” text appeals to the authority of Peter as the unifying principle among equals, and the “Primacy” text mentions Peter’s primacy upon which the church is built. While some claim that the “Primacy” text is a forgery, the likely explanation is that Cyprian originally wrote the “Primacy” text to defend Cornelius, and then redacted it during his disagreement with bishop Stephen of Rome over baptism in AD 255.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5:423.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5:425

¹² *Ibid.*, 5:423.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Historical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 569–70.

holding that the baptism of any sect of Christendom was invalid.¹⁵ It was only logical to him that a person outside of the church could not induct someone into the church. The result of this teaching is clear: salvation could not be attained by appealing to Christ alone, but only by adhering to the traditions of the church where salvation is mediated through an ordained priest in the apostolic line of succession.

Further evidence of this is seen in the fourth century in the Cappadocian Father, Gregory of Nyssa (331/40–395). Making the connection between apostolic succession and the ability to sanctify the sacraments, he writes:

So with the sacramental oil; so with the wine: though before the benediction they are of little value, each of them, after the sanctification bestowed by the Spirit, has its several operation. The same power of the word, again, also makes the priest venerable and honorable, separated, by the new blessing bestowed upon him, from his community with the mass of men. While but yesterday he was one of the mass, one of the people, he is suddenly rendered a guide, a president, a teacher of righteousness, an instructor in hidden mysteries; and this he does without being at all changed in body or in form; but, while continuing to be in all appearance the man he was before, being, by some unseen power and grace, transformed in respect of his unseen soul to the higher condition.¹⁶

Although not found in Scripture, or the earliest of Christian documents, this mystical form of apostolic succession was firmly established as sacred tradition by the fourth century.

Mediating Salvation: The Sacraments

A crucial aspect of the power of the church to mediate salvation involves the sacraments, which were given sanctifying power by the blessing of the ordained priests. Concerning baptism, the simplicity of immersion following a confession of faith is taught in the New Testament, as well as in the earliest documents in church history. Its earliest form dated as early as A.D. 55 by some scholars, making it the earliest Christian writing outside of Scripture, the *Didache* (“the teaching”) describes baptism in the simple terms of Matthew 28:19, with none of the later traditions of remission of sins or laying on of hands for the giving of the Spirit.¹⁷ In stark contrast to this most early testimony, by the third century there is evidence of infant baptism, the requirement of three years of training prior to baptism (except for infants), unique dress prior to and following baptism, ritual cleansing, exorcism, application of holy oil, purification of the baptismal water, requirement of nudity for candidates for baptism, and other necessary traditions which resulted in the remission of sin by the

¹⁵ See the Seventh Council of Carthage.

¹⁶ *On the Baptism of Christ*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, edited by Philip Schaff (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999), 5:519.

¹⁷ See Section 7 “Concerning Baptism” from the *Didache*, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, 355.

act of baptism.¹⁸

A similar phenomenon can be observed in the history of the Lord's Supper. From the earliest account in the *Didache* we learn that the Eucharistic service was very basic, with a presentation of the elements, prayer, and taking of the bread and wine.¹⁹ The idea that the elements mystically changed into the literal body and blood of Christ through the blessing of the ordained bishop came later in the fourth century with Ambrose (337/340–397).²⁰ As he writes,

Before [the bread] is consecrated, it is bread; but when Christ's words have been added, it is the body of Christ And before the words of Christ, the chalice is full of wine and water; when the words of Christ have been added, then blood is effected, which redeemed the people. So behold in what great respects the expression of Christ is able to change all things.²¹

This too became integral to salvation, thus increasingly making people dependent upon the services of the church for eternal life. Ambrose explains further, "If, as his blood is poured out, it is poured for the forgiveness of sins, I should always receive it, so that it may always forgive my sins. Because I always sin, I should always have a remedy."²² As Cyril of Jerusalem (313–86) explains, partaking of the Eucharist causes the faithful to become "partakers of the divine nature." And warning against neglect of the Table by the words of Christ, "Except you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life in you."²³

Coupling the mystical approach to baptism and the Lord's Supper with the doctrine of apostolic succession, church tradition produced a system for salvation. Christians were dependent upon the sacraments for salvation, and the sacraments could only be administered by qualified men that fell in the apostolic succession of a specific tradition. Consequently, if you were outside of the true church that could administer the sacraments, you were outside of the faith because you had no access to the spiritual power that was necessary to enact change in the sacraments. As a result of these developments, the Orthodox and Catholic churches fell into the same

¹⁸ See Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* (chapters 17–24); Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:185; and Tertullian, *On Baptism*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3:669, 672–73, 678–79.

¹⁹ See *Didache*, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, 357–61.

²⁰ See Ambrose *On the Sacraments*, in *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1987) and *On the Mysteries*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, volume 10.

²¹ *On the Sacraments*, in *The Fathers of the Church*, 305. What was known as transubstantiation (the bread and wine literally transform into the body and blood of Christ) was not formalized until the 9th century (Paschasius Radbertus [785–860]). It was then accepted by 1059, and officially recognized at the Fourth Lateran Council of the Western church in 1215. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1353.

²² *On the Sacraments*, 306.

²³ *Catechetical Lectures* in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, 7:151. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* now states, "As often as the sacrifice of the Cross by which 'Christ our Pasch has been sacrificed' is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out" (1364). It is also stated that the Eucharist is offered for purification of those in purgatory" (1371).

error as the Pharisees of the New Testament period: placing the tradition of men above the authority of the Scriptures.

The Medieval Period (500–1500)

Throughout the medieval period, these extra-biblical demands upon salvation only broadened and intensified. Fighting a similar sect as the Novatians, arguably the most influential theologian of church history, Augustine (354–430), supported Cyprian's conception of the church and had a major influence upon its future.²⁴ Codifying the sacramental authority of the church, Augustine writes, "There is no other valid means of making Christians and remitting sins, except by causing men to become believers by the institution of Christ and the church, and through the sacraments."²⁵

Gregory the Great (540–604) developed the doctrine of purgatory for the remission of sin after death and prayer to the saints, while Peter Lombard (1100–1160) codified the seven sacraments in his *Four Books of the Sentences*. The importance of an ordained priesthood to perform the sacraments was fundamental to Lombard. He taught that priests have the "keys," according to Matthew 16:19, to bind and loose, which is received at the priests' ordination. Thus, there is power in the spoken word of the priest. He writes, "We call 'baptism' the bathing, that is, the exterior ablution of the body, performed under the prescribed form of words. Take away the word, and what is water but water."²⁶ He then explains the full significance of the baptismal event: "And this is the thing of the sacrament, namely, interior cleansing . . . Thus, the thing of this sacrament is justification."²⁷ This is not full justification, however, but a one-time event that removes sin. Sin that occurs after baptism is to be remitted by penance: "if someone has, by sinning, tainted the robe of innocence received in baptism, he can restore it through the remedy of penance . . . both are the cause of justification and salvation."²⁸ The process of repentance is then prescribed by Lombard: "it is necessary to make confession to God first, and then to a priest; and that it is not possible to gain entrance to paradise otherwise . . ." ²⁹ Again, based upon apostolic succession, only in the priesthood is there power to

²⁴ See his *On Baptism, Against the Donatists*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, volume 4. While Augustine championed doctrinal advances concerning human depravity, divine sovereignty, and the grace of God, his views on the church ran contrary to those convictions. In fact, Benjamin Warfield famously quipped, "The Reformation . . . was just the ultimate triumph of Augustine's doctrine of grace over Augustine's doctrine of the Church." *Calvin and Augustine* (Philadelphia, 1956), 332.

²⁵ *On Forgiveness of Sins, and Baptism*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, 78.

²⁶ *Sentences* 4, distinction 3, chapter I, number 2, quoted in Philipp W. Rosemann, *Peter Lombard* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 147. Peter also explains how the waters first received this spiritual power: "the institution occurred when Christ was baptized by John in the Jordan . . . because through the contact with His clean flesh He conferred upon the waters His regenerative power, so that someone who would subsequently be immersed while the name of the Trinity was being invoked might be purged from his sins" (*ibid.*, 148).

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 159.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 163.

accomplish salvation through the sacraments.

There is similar dependence upon the mystical power of the ordained priesthood concerning the Eucharist. Lombard continues, “For when those words are spoken, the conversion of the bread and wine into the substance of the body and blood of Christ occurs”³⁰ His commitment to the spiritual authority of the church in salvation inspired his biographer to write, “The sacraments, then, heal the wounds inflicted upon humanity by both original sin and actual sin” and “It was now no longer the Eucharist that made the Church, but the Church that made the Eucharist.”³¹ These concepts were further refined by Roman Catholicism’s greatest theologian, Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), in his monumental *Summa Theologica*.³²

As the means of salvific grace, the church played a vital role in every stage of man’s life through the seven sacraments. In *Baptism* he is justified through the removal of sin, in *Confirmation* he receives the Holy Spirit,³³ in *Penance* forgiveness from post-baptismal sin, in the *Eucharist* and other rituals (indulgences, veneration to the saints, etc.) cleansing in the present and future, in *Ordination* spiritual power in the line of the apostles, in *Marriage* a bond of strength and perfection, and he concludes his life with *Unction* where he is sealed with sacred oil for physical and spiritual healing (or for fortification in the final struggles before entering eternal rest).³⁴ Whereas the earliest Christian documents expressed the simplicity of salvation through Christ alone, this was no longer the case in the medieval church.³⁵ Christ was no longer the central figure in salvation, but His work was mediated through the church. In one of the most brazen papal bulls in Catholic history, Pope Boniface VIII (1235–1303) issued *Unam Sanctum* in 1302, which stated: “We therefore declare, say, and affirm that submission on the part of every man to the bishop of Rome is altogether necessary for his salvation.”

The accumulation of Roman Catholic tradition can now be seen in its fullness. While Christ’s sacrifice on the cross provides the ground of salvation, grace must be communicated by the agency of the church. This can only be done by priests that are in the mystical line of apostolic succession, who have been given the power to administer the saving grace of the sacraments. One may be justified in baptism, and continue through life in the sacramental system to have sin absolved so as to reduce

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 151. This is true for any sacrament, such as the oil of chrism that must first be sanctified by the bishop (*Ibid.*, 169).

³¹ *Ibid.*, 145, 155.

³² See his “Treatise on the Sacraments” in *Summa Theologiae*, ed. by Timothy McDermott (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1989), 541–600.

³³ Early on, the reception of the Holy Spirit was thought to occur at baptism. See Tertullian’s *On Baptism*, 3:671–73.

³⁴ This is a simplistic description of the sacraments, which are each multifaceted. These dynamics can be viewed in detail in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

³⁵ See the earliest extant Christian letter outside of Scripture, *1 Clement*, “And so we, having been called through his will in Christ Jesus, are not justified through ourselves or through our own wisdom or understanding or piety, or works that we have done in holiness of heart, but through faith, by which the Almighty God has justified all who have existed from the beginning; to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.” *The Apostolic Fathers*, 87.

time in purgatory where remaining sin must be purged. There is no concept of justification by faith alone in the substitutionary atonement of Christ. As one Catholic theologian writes,

What did Christ's suffering and death actually accomplish that allowed the Father to provide the human race with salvation? Did Christ take within himself the sin and guilt of mankind and suffer the specific punishment for that sin and guilt, as Protestants contend? The answer is no . . . Christ did not take upon himself the entire punishment required of man for sin. Rather, Scripture teaches only that Christ became a "propitiation," a "sin offering," or a "sacrifice" for sins . . . Essentially, this means that Christ, because he was guiltless, sin-free and in favor with God, could offer himself up as a means of persuading God to relent of his angry wrath against the sins of mankind.³⁶

Therefore, since full justification is not found in the imputation of the righteousness of Christ through His substitutionary atonement, but only through the mediation of the church, it naturally follows that there is no salvation outside of the church. It was this type of theological abuse of the Scriptures, coupled with moral abuses of the Roman Catholic Church, that birthed the Protestant Reformation, which, on the basis of Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*), championed justification by faith alone (*sola fide*) in Christ alone (*solus Christus*), by the grace of God alone (*sola gratia*), to the glory of God alone (*solus deo gloria*).

Solus Christus: The Reformation

Renaissance Humanism

Unlike the contemporary "humanist" movement that is man-centered and godless, Renaissance humanism is to be understood as focusing on the humanities, with an emphasis on rhetoric, grammar, poetry, history, and moral philosophy. Historian Alister McGrath explains the importance of this cultural movement: "Of the many tributaries which contributed to the flow of the Reformation, by far the most important was Renaissance humanism."³⁷ A vital principle of humanism that contributed to the Reformation was its principle of *ad fontes* ("to the source"). Humanists were not satisfied with old translations of documents, or selective quotes taken out of their contexts (as with Lombard's *Sentences*)—they wanted a return to the original sources for renewed understanding, and to appreciate their beauty and value.

Erasmus of Rotterdam (1467–1536) was one of the most renowned scholars of his day and is largely considered to be the father of humanism. Even more important than his translation of the early Church Fathers, the publication of the first printed Greek New Testament in 1516 was revolutionary. Once Erasmus produced this work, however, Catholics started to notice discrepancies between the original Greek text of

³⁶ Robert Sungenis, *Not By Faith Alone* (Santa Barbara: Queenship, 1997), 107–08.

³⁷ *Reformation Thought* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 39.

the Bible and their Latin Vulgate translation. Such was the case for marriage as a sacrament (Eph. 5:31–32), penance as a sacrament (Matt. 4:17), and the understanding of Mary as a reservoir of grace (Luke 1:28). The effect of these discoveries in the original text of the Bible was to result in the subversion of Roman Catholic tradition and authority for that of Scripture.

Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531)

Although there were many Reformers leading up to the Reformation, one of the earliest of the sixteenth century was Ulrich Zwingli.³⁸ Ministering at the Great Minster in Zürich, Switzerland, Zwingli was influenced by humanism. He immersed himself in Erasmus' Greek New Testament and studied the Greek and Latin Fathers. It was his study of the original sources that convinced him that the church needed reform. In particular, he appealed to 1 Timothy 2:5 (“For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”) as proof that a man did not need the mediation of the church to attain salvation. In his “67 Articles” (1523), which were instrumental in the reform of Zürich, Zwingli begins by focusing on *solus christus* to recover the true Gospel.

- 1 All who say that the Gospel is nothing without the confirmation of the church make a mistake and blaspheme God.
- 2 The sum of the Gospel is that our Lord Christ, true Son of God, has made known to us the will of his heavenly Father, redeemed us from death by his innocence, and reconciled us to God.
- 3 Therefore, Christ is the only way to salvation for all who have been, who are, or who will be.
- 4 Whoever seeks or points to another door, errs. Indeed, he is a murderer of the soul and a thief.
- 5 Therefore, all who regard other teachings equal to or higher than the Gospel, err. They do not know what Gospel is.
- 16 In the gospel we learn that teachings and traditions of men are of no use for salvation.
- 17 Christ is the one eternal high priest; from this we deduce that all those who pretend to be high priests, oppose the honor and power of Christ; indeed, they reject it.
- 18 Christ, who has once offered himself as a sacrifice, is for eternity a perpetual enduring and efficacious sacrifice for the sin of all believers. Therefore we conclude that the Mass is not a sacrifice but a memorial of the one sacrifice and a seal of redemption that Christ made good for us.
- 19 Christ is the only Mediator between God and us.
- 20 God wants to give us all things in his name. It follows from this that we need no other mediator but him beyond the present time.
- 21 When we pray for one another here on earth, we do so in the confidence

³⁸ For example, see the life and works of John Wycliffe (1328–1384) and John Huss (1369–1415).

that *all things are given us through Christ alone*.³⁹

- 22 Christ is our righteousness. From this we conclude that our words are good insofar as they are Christ's; but insofar as they are ours, they are neither right nor good.

Jettisoning church tradition for the authority of Scripture, Zwingli writes,

- 13 Whenever we give heed to the Word, we acquire pure and clear knowledge of the will of God and are drawn to him by his Spirit and transformed into his likeness.

Addressing the authority of the Catholic Church and salvation mediated through the priesthood, he continues,

- 27 All Christians are brothers of Christ and of one another and no one on earth ought to be elevated to be called Father. This brings to naught religious orders, sects and illegal gatherings.
- 50 God alone remits sin through Jesus Christ his son, our only Lord.
- 51 Whoever ascribes this to a creature, robs God of his honor and gives it to one who is not God. This is sheer idolatry.
- 52 Therefore, confession which is made to a priest or to a neighbor should not be advocated as the remission of sin, but simply as seeking advice.
- 53 Imposed works of penance derive from human counsel—with the exception of the ban. They do not remove sin and are imposed merely to deter others.
- 54 Christ has borne all of our sorrow and labor. Whoever adds works of penance, which belongs to Christ alone, makes a mistake and blasphemes God.
- 61 Of an indelible character which priests have appropriated to themselves in recent times, scripture knows nothing at all.
- 62 Scripture recognizes no priests except those who proclaim God's Word.
- 63 To them who proclaim God's Word, Scripture bids us show respect by giving them physical sustenance.⁴⁰

As a former priest, Zwingli clearly understood the systemic nature of salvation in the Catholic Church. In his earliest of Reformation writings, he draws his readers' attention to the authority of the Word of God, the priesthood of all believers, and a dependence upon Christ alone for salvation (apart from the mediation of the church sacramental system). Timothy George comments on these articles: "No one preached

³⁹ Italics mine.

⁴⁰ Mark Noll, ed., *Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 39–46.

solus Christus more strongly than [Zwingli] . . . ”⁴¹

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

As the leading figure of the European Reformation, Martin Luther nailed his famed “95 Theses” on the castle door of Wittenberg on 31 October 1517. Although the thrust of this work was against indulgences, he ended it with a focus on the cross of Christ as the true source of peace in salvation:

- 92 And so let all those prophets depart who say to Christ’s people
“Peace, peace” and there is no peace.
- 93 And farewell to all those prophets who say to Christ’s people “the
cross, the cross” and there is no cross.
- 94 Christians are to be exhorted to endeavor to follow Christ, their
head, through pains, deaths, and hells.
- 95 And so let them trust to enter heaven rather through many
tribulations than through the false confidence of peace.⁴²

A year later, Luther participated in the Heidelberg Disputation (1518). In a write-up on the event, Luther penned twenty-eight doctrinal positions that championed his “theology of the cross.” Number twenty-five clearly outlines that justification is by faith alone, and not by works of the law imposed by the Catholic Church.⁴³ In 1520 Luther wrote three significant works, the earliest of which was, *To the Nobility of the German Nation*. In this work, he addressed the idea of the mystical power of the priesthood, which Luther understood as a foundational doctrine upon which the power of the church rested. Arguing for the priesthood of *all* believers, Luther writes, “It is pure invention that pope, bishop, priests and monks are called the spiritual estate, while princes, lords, artisans and farmers are called the temporal estate All Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference between them except that of office.”⁴⁴

His second work of 1520 was a detailed treatment of the sacraments: *The*

⁴¹ *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1988), 125.

⁴² *Documents of the Christian Church*, second edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 191.

⁴³ “For the righteousness of God is not acquired by means of acts frequently repeated, as Aristotle taught, but it is imparted by faith, for ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live’ (Rom. 1:17), and ‘Man believes with his heart and so is justified’ (Rom. 10:10). Therefore I wish to have the words ‘without work’ understood in the following manner: Not that the righteous person does nothing, but that his works do not make him righteous, rather that his righteousness creates works. For grace and faith are infused without our works. After they have been imparted the works follow. Thus Rom. 3:20 states, ‘No human being will be justified in His sight by works of the law,’ and, ‘For we hold that man is justified by faith apart from works of law’ (Rom. 3:28). In other words, works contribute nothing to justification His justification by faith in Christ is sufficient to him. Christ is his wisdom, righteousness, etc., as 1 Cor 1:30 has it, that he himself may be Christ’s vessel and instrument (*operatio seu instrumentum*).” Martin Luther, “The Heidelberg Disputation,” <http://bookofconcord.org/heidelberg.php#25>. Accessed 18 October 2016.

⁴⁴ *To the Nobility of the German Nation in Three Treatises* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 12.

Babylonian Captivity of the Church. In this work, Luther compares the Israelite captivity in Babylon with the captivity of the church by the sacrificial system of Rome. Attacking the heart of the Roman Catholic Church, he reduces the number of sacraments to two: the Lord's Supper and baptism. Luther is clear that the warrant for this conclusion is that the other sacraments are not found in Scripture. A key point of emphasis for Luther is the priesthood of all believers, as is taught in 1 Peter 2:9: "But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD." Luther writes, "Let everyone, therefore, who knows himself to be a Christian, be assured of this, that we are all equally priests, that is to say, we have the same power in respect to the Word and the sacraments."⁴⁵ The results for mystical ordination were evident: "It is clear, therefore, that the ordination, which, as a sacrament, makes clergymen of this sort of men, is in truth nothing but a mere fiction, devised by men who understand nothing about the church, the priesthood, the ministry of the Word, or the sacraments."⁴⁶

The Freedom of the Christian is the final work published in 1520 and is the logical conclusion to what he had thus far written. As a result of his belief in the doctrine of justification by faith alone, he writes, "one thing, and only one thing, is necessary for Christian life, righteousness, and freedom. That one thing is the most holy Word of God, the gospel of Christ."⁴⁷ Thus Luther understood the vital nature of *solus Christus* to the Reformation. In a classic style that exemplifies the Reformation, Luther writes, "This one thing preach: the wisdom of the cross, that is, that man is nothing and can do nothing and thus learns to despair of himself and hope in Christ."⁴⁸

Understanding that he was challenging Catholic tradition, he appeals to the ancient Fathers for support. Using the language of Cyprian, but yet appealing to the authority of Scripture, Luther writes, "The church is your mother who gives birth to you and bears you though the Word."⁴⁹ His goal was to reform the Catholic Church by returning to the authority of Scripture for the benefit of the "true, ancient church, one body and one communion of saints with the holy, universal, Christian church."⁵⁰

John Calvin (1509–64)

Justo L. Gonzales, in his popular textbook on church history, labels Calvin as "the most important systematizer of Protestant theology in the sixteenth century."⁵¹ The reason for this is that he produced the most significant theological work of the Reformation: *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Historian Alistair McGrath observes, "What we do know is that the Institutes were now firmly established as the most influential theological work of the Protestant Reformation, eclipsing in

⁴⁵ *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* in *ibid.*, 248.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 246.

⁴⁷ *The Freedom of the Christian* in *ibid.*, 279.

⁴⁸ *Luther's Works* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1959), 51:14.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 51:166. Cf. *ibid.*, 26:441.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 41:119.

⁵¹ Justo L. Gonzales. *The Story of Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 1985), 2:61.

importance the rival works of Luther, Melancthon and Zwingli The intellectual domination of Protestantism by theologians of the Reformed tradition is due both to the substance and structure of Calvin’s final edition of the *Institutes*.⁵²

In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin goes into detail concerning the authority of the church to forgive sin, and the centrality of Christ in salvation. Book IV of the *Institutes* deals specifically with the nature of the church and its relation to the Christian. Understanding that the mystical powers of the Catholic priesthood lie in ordination, Calvin writes, “But those miraculous powers and manifest workings, which were dispensed by the laying on of hands, have ceased; and they have rightly lasted only for a time.”⁵³ Concerning the Catholic belief that the Holy Spirit was given through the oil of confirmation, Calvin states, “Those who call oil ‘the oil of salvation’ forswear the salvation which is in Christ; they deny Christ, and they have no part in God’s Kingdom.”⁵⁴ Recognizing that the misunderstanding concerning anointing (unction) was the source of so many errors concerning the salvific powers of the Catholic Church, Calvin laments, “how many monsters this grease feeds and nourishes. These anointers say that the Holy Spirit is given in baptism for innocence; in confirmation, for the increase of grace; that in baptism we are regenerated unto life; in confirmation we are equipped for battle What wickedness!”⁵⁵

In Book III, Chapter IV (“The Way We Receive the Grace of Christ”) Calvin writes sections which expound: “Christ has provided full satisfaction” (§ 26); “The Roman doctrine deprives Christ of honor, and the conscience of every assurance” (§ 27); and “Christ’s unique sacrifice can alone remove both penalty and guilt” (§ 30). In this one chapter, Calvin gives us one of the finest definitions of *solus Christus* from the Reformation:

We see that our whole salvation and all its parts are comprehended in Christ [Acts 4:12]. We should therefore take care not to derive the least portion of it from anywhere else. If we seek salvation, we are taught by the very name of Jesus that it is “of him” [1 Cor. 1:30]. If we seek any other gifts of the Spirit, they will be found in his anointing. If we seek strength, it lies in his dominion; if purity, in his conception; if gentleness, it appears in his birth If we seek redemption, it lies in his passion; if acquittal, in his condemnation; if remission of the curse, in his cross [Gal. 3:13]; if satisfaction, in his sacrifice; if purification, in his blood; if reconciliation, in his descent into hell; if mortification of the flesh, in his tomb; if newness of life, in his resurrection; if immortality, in the same; if inheritance of the Heavenly Kingdom, in his entrance into heaven; if protection, if security, if abundant supply of all blessings, in his Kingdom; if untroubled expectation of judgment, in the power given to him to judge. In short, since rich store of every kind of good abounds

⁵² *Reformation Thought*, 246–47.

⁵³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (1559; repr., Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 4.19.6.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.19.7.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.19.8.

in him, let us drink our fill from this fountain, and from no other.⁵⁶

Calvin was also very vocal on these issues in his commentaries and sermons. In his commentary on 1 Timothy 2:5 Calvin writes, “. . . as there is one God, the Creator and Father of all, so he [Paul] says that there is but one Mediator, through whom we have access to the Father; and that this Mediator was given, not only to one nation, or to a small number of persons of some particular rank, but to all; because the fruit of the sacrifice, by which he made atonement for sins, extends to all”⁵⁷ In the footnote there is the following comment: “Christ is said to be one Mediator in the same sense that God is said to be the one God. As there is but one Creator of man, so there is but one Mediator for men. As God is God of all that died before Christ came, as well as of those that died after; so Christ is the Mediator of all that died before his coming, as well as of those that saw his day.”⁵⁸ He continues, “[Let us] remember ‘the man Christ,’ who gently invites us, and takes us, as it were, by the hand, in order that the Father, who had been the object of terror and alarm, may be reconciled by him and rendered friendly to us. This is the only key to open for us the gate of the heavenly kingdom, that we may appear in the presence of God with confidence.”⁵⁹ Calvin then writes about the Roman Catholic position on these doctrines:

[The] sophists of the Church of Rome have resorted to every contrivance for darkening a point so clear. First, the name is so hateful to them, that, if any one mentions Christ as Mediator, without taking notice of the saints, he instantly falls under a suspicion of heresy. But, because they do not venture to reject altogether what Paul teaches in this passage, they evade it by a foolish exposition, that he is called “one Mediator,” not “the only Mediator.” As if the Apostle had mentioned God as one out of a vast multitude of gods; for the two clauses are closely connected, that “there is one God and one Mediator;” and therefore they who make Christ one out of many mediators must apply the same interpretation in speaking of God.⁶⁰

In his commentary on 1 John 2:1, Calvin continues this theme:

For this reason he immediately adds the second clause, that when we sin we have an *advocate*. By these words he confirms what we have already said, that we are very far from being perfectly righteous, nay, that we contract new guilt daily, and that yet there is a remedy for reconciling us to God, if we flee to Christ; and this is alone that in which consciences can acquiesce, in which is included the righteousness of men, in which is founded the hope of salvation . . .

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.16.19.

⁵⁷ John Calvin, *Commentaries on The First Epistle to Timothy* in *Calvin's Commentaries*, 22 Volumes (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 21:56.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 57–58.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

. . . It hence follows, that all the saints who have ever been and shall be, have need of an advocate, and that no one except Christ is equal to undertake this office. And doubtless John ascribed these two things to Christ, to show that he is the only true advocate”⁶¹

As the preeminent theologian of the Reformation, it is clear from Calvin’s theological writings, commentaries, sermons and letters that he was a champion of *solus Christus*.

Cyril Lucaris (1572–1638)

One of the most intriguing and untold chapters in the Eastern response to the Reformation was the conversion of the Archbishop of Constantinople: Cyril Lucaris.⁶² Having studied in Venice, Wittenberg, and Geneva, Lucaris was one of the most educated Greeks of the time. He was elected patriarch of Alexandria in 1602 and patriarch of Constantinople around 1620. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* describes Cyril: “He remains, however, the most brilliant and politically outstanding Greek Patriarch and national leader of the 17th century.”⁶³ Even Orthodox historian Timothy Ware notes, “he was possibly the most brilliant man to have held office as Patriarch since the days of St. Photius.”⁶⁴

Since he was Orthodox, Lucaris was strongly anti-Catholic, and so procured the help of Protestants in his endeavors. Having experienced a kind of conversion to Protestant doctrine, Calvinistic teaching apparently intrigued him, but the Jesuit Catholics attacked his views because they did not want Protestantism succeeding. Additionally, Lucaris’ own people opposed his views that he set forth in his Protestant “Confession of Faith” of 1629, which was published in Geneva. The Protestants were ecstatic at Lucaris’ Confession and had it translated in four French editions, two Latin editions, English, and two German editions—all by 1629. In 1633 it also appeared in Greek. In this document, the bishop of Constantinople emphasized *solus Christus*,

We believe that man is justified by faith and not by works. But when we say by faith, we mean the correlative or object of faith, which is the righteousness of Christ, which, functioning as a hand, faith grasps and applies to us for our salvation. This we declare in order to sustain and not deter works. Truth itself teaches us that works are not to be neglected, for they are necessary means for a witness to faith and confirmation of our calling. But human frailty witnesses it to be false that works are sufficient for our salvation, that they can enable one

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 171–72.

⁶² For a helpful history on Lucaris’ life, see Igor Gerdov, “Cyril Lucaris (1572–1638): His Confession and the Official Response of The Eastern Orthodox Church to Protestant Doctrine.” ThM Thesis. The Master’s Seminary, 2015.

⁶³ “Lucar, Cyril,” edited by F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, third edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1007.

⁶⁴ *The Orthodox Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 96.

to appear boldly at the tribunal of Christ, and that of their own merit they can confer salvation. But the righteousness of Christ alone, applied to those who repent and imputed to them, justifies and saves the believer.⁶⁵

Attacking apostolic succession, he writes, “Of this church our Lord Jesus Christ is sole head, because a mortal man can in no way be head; he holds the rudder and is at the helm governing the church. Yet, because there are on earth particular visible churches, each for order has its presiding officer, who is not, strictly speaking, called head of that particular church except in an improper sense, because he is the leading member in it.”⁶⁶ In reaction to his Confession of Faith, Lucaris’ teaching was condemned at the synods at Constantinople (1638, 1642), Kiev (1640), Jassy (Romania, 1642), and the synod of Jerusalem (also known as the synod of Bethlehem and the “Confession of Dositheus”) in 1672. Lucaris was murdered in 1638.

Solus Christus: The Counter Reformation

Eastern Orthodoxy

Challenged by the evangelistic efforts of Protestantism, the Orthodox Church responded with strong anathemas against Protestantism. It countered the doctrine of the Reformation in several councils, one of which was the Council of Jerusalem that produced the Confession of Dositheus (1672). This synod is important because it approved *The Three Answers of Patriarch Jeremiah II to the Lutheran Scholars in Tübingen (1576–81)* and because Dositheus of Jerusalem answered Cyril Lucaris’ confession point by point. As one of the most important representations of Orthodox theology in the 17th century, the Orthodox Church, with this document, presented an official rejection of the theology of the Reformation.

The following sections directly address the Reformation doctrine of Cyril Lucaris. First, there is an attack on *sola scriptura*:

Decree 2: Therefore the witness of the Catholic Church is, we believe, not inferior in authority to that of the Divine Scripture. For one and the same Holy Spirit being the author of both, it is quite the same to be taught by the Scriptures and by the catholic church the Catholic Church . . . like the Divine Scripture, she is infallible, and has perpetual authority.⁶⁷

Second, Dositheus rejects the doctrine of *sola fide*:

Decree 9: We believe that no one is saved without faith. And by faith we mean the right persuasion with us—as this is contained in the creed of the first and the second ecumenical council—which, working by love, that is to say, by

⁶⁵ “Cyril Lucar, *The Eastern Confession of the Christian Faith*, 1629 (1633),” in Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie R. Hotchkiss, *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 1:553–54.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:553.

⁶⁷ “Dositheus and the Synod of Jerusalem, *Confession*, 1672,” in *ibid.*, 1:616.

observing the divine commandments, justifies us with Christ. Without this faith it is impossible to please God.

Decree 13: We believe that a man is not simply justified through faith alone, but through faith that works through love, that is to say, through faith and works. But the notion that faith, fulfilling the function of a hand, lays hold on the righteousness which is in Christ and applies it to us for salvation, we know to be far from all true piety. For faith thus understood would be possible in all, and so no one could miss salvation, which is obviously false. But on the contrary, we rather believe that it is not the correlative of faith, but the faith that is in us, which, through works, justifies us with Christ.⁶⁸

Third, Dositheus affirms the authority of the bishop in salvation through ordination:

Decree: 10: That the dignity of the bishop is so necessary in the church that without him neither church nor Christian could either be or be spoken of. Having been deemed worthy of being a bishop as a successor of the apostles, and having received in continuous succession by the laying on of hands and the invocation of the Allholy Spirit the grace is given to him from the Lord of binding and loosing, he is a living image of God on earth; and by a most ample participation of the operation of the Holy Spirit, who is the chief functionary, he is a fountain of all the sacraments of the catholic church, through which we obtain salvation.⁶⁹

The importance of this section is seen in its length where Dositheus assiduously explains the vital nature of apostolic succession and the powers of the bishop, as opposed to the priest. He continues:

And the [simple] Priest, indeed, retains to himself the authority and grace of the priesthood, which he has received; but the bishop imparts it to others also. And the one having received the dignity of the priesthood from the bishop, can only perform holy baptism and the sacrament of unction, minister sacrificially the unbloody sacrifice, and impart to the people the allholy body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, anoint the baptized with the holy myrrh, crown Orthodox couples who are entering into holy matrimony in accordance with the law, pray for the sick, and that all men may be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, and especially for the remission and forgiveness of the sins of the faithful, living and dead. And if he is eminent for experience and virtue, receiving his authority from the bishop, he directs those faithful who come unto him and guides them into the way of possessing the heavenly kingdom, and is appointed a preacher of the sacred gospel . . . without contradiction the bishop differs from the simple priest, and that without him all the priests in the world could

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:619 and 1:623.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:620.

not exercise the pastorate in the church of God or govern it at all.⁷⁰

Concerning the unerring authority of the church:

Decree 12: . . . the church is indeed taught by the life-giving Spirit, but through the medium of the holy fathers and doctors (whose rule is acknowledged to be the holy ecumenical councils). And therefore we are not only persuaded, but we confess as true and undoubtedly certain, that it is impossible for the catholic church to err, or to be deceived at all, or ever to choose falsehood instead of truth.⁷¹

Concerning the salvific effects of baptism and the eucharist are explained in light of apostolic succession found only in the Orthodox Church:

Decree 16: The effects of baptism are, to speak concisely, these: first, the remission of the ancestral transgression, and of any other sins that the baptized may have committed; secondly, it delivers him from the eternal punishment to which he was liable, as well for original sin and for mortal sins he may have individually committed; thirdly, it gives to him immortality; for in justifying him from past sins, it makes him a temple of God.

Moreover, baptism imparts an indelible character, as does also the priesthood. For as it is impossible for anyone to receive twice the same order of the priesthood, so it is impossible for any once who is rightly baptized, to be baptized again

Decree 17: . . . they convey remission of sins and life eternal to the pious and worthy, but to the impious and unworthy they involve condemnation and eternal punishment.

. . . it is a true and propitiatory sacrifice offered for all the faithful

Further, the catholic church teaches that this sacrament of the holy eucharist is not carried out by anyone other than an Orthodox priest, and one who has received the priesthood from an Orthodox and legitimate bishop.

. . . . For the catholic church of Christ rejects and anathematizes those who transgress this.⁷²

In addition to these doctrinal stances, Dositheus also appeals to the pseudepigraphal Dionysius the Areopagite as support for his belief in confirmation (Decree 15), the descent of the Holy Spirit upon a person (Decree 15), and baptism (Decree 16).

Roman Catholicism

The popular response to the Reformation by the Roman Catholic Church was

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:621–22.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1:623.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 1:627–27 and 1:629–30.

made by the Council of Trent (1545–63). The council ruled on the necessity of the sacraments for salvation, which involved a direct denial of the Protestant doctrine of *solus Christus*:

Canon 1. If any one denieth, that, in the sacrament of the most holy Eucharist, are contained truly, really, and substantially, the body and blood together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and consequently the whole Christ; but saith that He is only therein as in a sign, or in figure, or virtue; let him be anathema.

Canon 4. If any one saith, that, after the consecration is completed, the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ are not in the admirable sacrament of the Eucharist, but (are there) only during the use, whilst it is being taken, and not either before or after; and that, in the hosts, or consecrated particles, which are reserved or which remain after communion, the true Body of the Lord remaineth not; let him be anathema.⁷³

Specifically addressing the justifying grace of Mass, Trent judged:

Canon 5. If any one saith, either that the principal fruit of the most holy Eucharist is the remission of sins, or, that other effects do not result therefrom; let him be anathema.⁷⁴

Conclusion

It is the testimony of history that a commitment to *solus Christus* is based upon Scripture and the earliest Christian documents. Commitment to this doctrine was lost after extra-biblical, traditional elements entered the church and became authoritative. As Vatican II stated in the 1960s, “Sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God, which is entrusted to the Church.”⁷⁵ Furthermore, “sacred Tradition, sacred Scripture and the Magisterium of the Church are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the others. Working together, each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit, they all contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.”⁷⁶

Opposed to this approach, the Reformers understood that these traditions were simply the traditions of men. A commitment to the authority of Scripture for faith and practice resulted in a commitment to salvation mediated by Christ alone. As such, God receives all of the glory for salvation since it is sought solely through His Son. May the church return to the Christ of Scripture for a modern reformation. *Ad Fontes!*

⁷³ *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent*, ed. and trans. J. Waterworth (London: Dolman, 1848), 82–3.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁷⁵ *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* (Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, 18 November 1965), 10.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

REVIEWS

Andrew David Naselli. *No Quick Fix: Where Higher Life Theology Came From, What It Is, and Why It's Harmful*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017, 123 pp. \$19.99.

Reviewed by Paul Shirley, Pastor of Grace Community Church at Wilmington, DE.

The vast majority of contemporary evangelicals have had their view of sanctification affected by the Keswick movement in one way or another. This is a somewhat ironic reality since most people are not even sure how to pronounce “Keswick” (the “w” is silent). Sadly, the confusion about how to pronounce “Keswick” could serve as a metaphor for the confusion about the Christian life that has arisen from this movement, because many of God’s people have been unwittingly caught up in its teaching. For instance, if you have ever heard the phrase “let go and let God,” you have been exposed to Keswick teaching. If your view of the Christian life was shaped by the study notes in the *Scofield Reference Bible*, you have sat under Keswick teaching. If you have ever been taught or tempted to think there is an attainable higher level of the Christian life that will make the battle with sin easier, you have received a form of Keswick teaching. If you have ever “rededicated” your life to Christ, you have practiced a form of Keswick theology.

The subtle but prevalent influence of Keswick teaching on the modern evangelical world is what makes *No Quick Fix: Where Higher Life Theology Came From, What It Is, and Why It's Harmful* by Andrew David Naselli such a relevant work for the church today. Naselli (Ph.D. Bob Jones University; Ph.D. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) serves on the faculty of Bethlehem College and Seminary in Minneapolis and as an elder at Bethlehem Baptist Church. Having come to the Lord and growing up under Keswick teaching, Naselli is no stranger to “higher life” theology, and therefore his treatment of the subject derives from firsthand knowledge. His description of the formative years of his Christian life will sound familiar to many readers:

Young people in my youth groups or at summer camp commonly told their stories the same way: “I accepted Christ as my *Savior* when I was eight years old, and I accepted Christ as my *Lord* when I was thirteen.” That was the standard God-talk lingo (1).

There were always two steps: first you get *saved*, then you get *serious*. Too many of us Christians were saved but not serious. We were living a lower life rather than a higher life, a shallow life rather than a deeper life, a defeated life rather than a victorious life, a fruitless life rather than a more abundant life. We were “carnal” not “spiritual.” We experienced the first blessing but still needed the second blessing. Jesus was our Savior, but he still wasn’t our Master. So preachers urged us to make Jesus our master. How? Through surrender and faith: “Let go and let God” (2).

Eventually, Naselli became frustrated with this form of teaching when it didn’t work in his own life and, more important, when he realized it wasn’t consistent with what the Bible teaches. This exasperation led him to further study and research on the subject, which resulted in him writing his Ph.D. dissertation on the issue.¹ *No Quick Fix* is a condensed version of his dissertation research that was repackaged “to make it more inviting for thoughtful lay people” (3).

One might wonder why this view, despite the biblical and practical problems, remains so influential in the church. Naselli sheds light on part of the reason for the popularity of Keswick theology:

It is pervasive because countless people have propagated it in so many ways, especially in sermons and devotional writings. It is appealing because Christians struggle with sin and want to be victorious in that struggle—now. Higher life theology offers a quick fix to this struggle, and its shortcut to instant victory appeals to people who genuinely desire to be holy (4).

The body of the book is divided into four chapters, which are intended to explain where “higher life theology” came from (1), what it is (2), and why it is harmful (3–4). Before the reader arrives at the body of the book, the title of this volume alone goes a long way in diagnosing the core problem with Keswick theology: It seeks to replace a life-long battle for sanctification with a one-time experience and active submission to the means of grace with mystical passivity. In the words of the author:

The “let go and let God” approach to Christian living is a quick fix. A *quick fix*, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is “a quick and easy remedy or solution”—or negatively, “an expedient but temporary solution which fails to address underlying problems.” That’s what I think higher life theology is.... And that is why the title of this book is *No Quick Fix* (3).

The history and meaning of higher life theology and the Keswick movement detailed in the first two chapters is a fascinating account of modern church history that traces its way back to two main influences: Wesleyan perfectionism and the holiness movement (8). Wesley taught a form of Christian perfectionism that includes a second work of grace after initial conversion, allowing a believer to live without any *intentional* sins in his life. Thus, even though absolute perfection was impossible,

¹ A revised version of this dissertation is available in digital format under the title “*Let Go and Let God?*” *A Survey and Analysis of Keswick Theology* (Bellingham, WA: Hexham Press, 2010).

Wesley espoused a view of the Christian life that made “entire sanctification” (9) an attainable goal in this life. “When Wesleyan perfectionism blended with American revivalism, the holiness movement emerged” (10). The holiness movement took Wesley’s two-stage view of sanctification and infused it with Pentecostal language. Thus, the second work of grace taught by Wesley was referred to as “Spirit Baptism” or “Spirit Filling.” These extra works of grace were said to be received passively by “entire surrender (‘let go’) and absolute faith (‘let God’)” (12). As a consequence of this view of sanctification, two different classes of Christians emerged, those merely forgiven and those who were also sanctified. Thus, a “higher life” was created.

The higher life view of sanctification that emerged through the various figures of Wesleyan theology and the holiness movement was propelled forward through the Keswick Convention, a week-long conference held each year since 1875 in the town of Keswick located in northwest England. During these conferences, attendees were encouraged to enter into the higher life through a “crisis moment” of total passivity and dependence upon God. Like walking the aisle in American revivalism, this “crisis moment of faith” provided a definite point of entrance into the higher life. This “crisis” event was taught to be an instantaneous event whereby a believer consecrated his life to the Lord. Early Keswick teachers associated this event with a “Spirit-filling” or a “Spirit-baptism” (42), although later proponents dropped this association. No matter the nomenclature, the crisis moment is when a believer enters the higher life, and thus when the actual process of sanctification begins (37–43).

As Naselli points out, the view of sanctification promulgated by these conferences influenced to various degrees countless Christian leaders, including H. C. G. Moule, Andrew Murray, Robert C. McQuilken, D. L. Moody, R. A. Torrey, Lewis Sperry Chafer, John Walvoord, and Charles Ryrie. These views spread especially within dispensational circles where the “Scofield Reference Bible more or less canonized Keswick teachings” (21).

Higher life theology spawned four institutions or movements that have greatly influenced American evangelicalism: the Christian and Missionary Alliance, Moody Bible Institute, Pentecostalism, and Dallas Theological Seminary. Those four successors to higher life theology each began as influential variations on higher life theology (emphasis on *began as*—today the Christian and Missionary Alliance, Moody Bible Institute, and Dallas Theological Seminary do not promote higher life theology like they used to) (18).

One of the most notable remaining influences of the higher life movement was its impact on the various debates concentrated on the relationship between justification and sanctification. For those influenced by higher life teaching, sanctification was an additional work for some believers instead of a necessary consequence of justification. This controversy, known by most as “the Lordship salvation debate” was heavily influenced by the two-stage view of the Christian life exported through the Keswick Convention (24–27).

Naselli’s description of the higher life movement is engaging, and his evaluation of it in chapters three and four is exceptional. After explaining that not everything about every member of the movement is completely bad, he provides ten reasons why the higher life movement is harmful:

1. It creates two categories of Christians (49–76).
2. It portrays a shallow and incomplete view of sin in the Christian life (77–81).
3. It emphasizes passivity, not activity (81–83).
4. It portrays the Christian’s free will as autonomously starting and stopping sanctification (84–86).
5. It does not interpret the Bible accurately (86–88).
6. It assures spurious “Christians” they are saved (88–91).
7. It uses superficial formulas for instantaneous sanctification (91).
8. It fosters dependency on experiences at special holiness meetings (91–92).
9. It frustrates and disillusiones the have-nots (92–94).
10. It misinterprets personal experiences (95–97).

In his criticism of the higher life movement, Naselli demonstrates a faithful understanding of how sanctification works and how the Keswick view falls short of Scripture’s teaching. Furthermore, he demonstrates a pastor’s heart in warning susceptible sheep of inaccurate teaching:

Bad theology dishonors God and hurts people. That’s why I wrote this book evaluating higher life theology. I love God, and I don’t want higher life theology to hurt people. Higher life theology hurt me, and it has hurt many others. Don’t let that happen to you (99).

Naselli’s evaluation crystallizes the key issues that the average Christian needs to understand, and it deals with many of the relevant passages that need to be addressed. His interaction is not thorough, but readers can consult his doctoral work for more information.

The one difficulty readers will have is discerning his many charts and graphs, especially when he attempts to work exegetically through Romans 6. His phrase diagram on this chapter is difficult to follow unless the reader happens to understand the exact process he employs. That being said, his overall point from Romans 6 is thought-provoking and challenging for any who would hold onto a higher life view of sanctification. It is refreshing to read a work on polemical theology that is both pastoral and exegetical.

In addition to Naselli’s work on this issue, readers of this book will be treated to a fascinating afterword by John MacArthur. In his brief biographical contribution, MacArthur traces his spiritual development from his early influences of Keswick teaching to his robust affirmation of Reformed soteriology. These four pages provide a window into MacArthur’s life and ministry development that readers have never had access to before. In fact, for some readers, the whole book might be worth buying just for this brief excerpt of MacArthur’s life.

Even if the afterword does not compel an individual to pay almost twenty dollars for a hundred and twenty-three page book, the totality of this work is worthwhile for every believer who wants to know more about how to grow closer to Christ. The church would benefit if the number of individuals who read this book matched the number of individuals affected by higher life theology and Keswick teaching.

William C. Watson. *Dispensationalism Before Darby: Seventeenth-Century and Eighteenth-Century English Apocalypticism*. Silverton, OR: Lampion Press, 2015. 373 pp. \$24.95.

Reviewed by Michael J. Vlach, Professor of Theology, The Master's Seminary

One common charge against Dispensationalism is that its beliefs are a relatively new perspective with little to no support in church history. Allegedly Dispensationalism's views on a restoration of Israel, Israel's return to the land, and a pre-tribulational rapture of the church are mostly the creation of John Nelson Darby and the dispensational tradition viewed as stemming from him in the nineteenth century. William Watson's book, *Dispensationalism Before Darby*, however, shatters this perspective. Not only was Darby not the originator of these beliefs, these views on Israel and the rapture were held by others in the English tradition before Darby penned his works. As Watson, Professor of History at Colorado Christian University, claims, "Very little of what John Nelson Darby taught in the mid-nineteenth century was new" (177).

As one who specializes in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English history, Watson spent twenty years combing through mostly unnoticed or ignored English works that reveal both belief in a national restoration of Israel to the land of promise and a pre-tribulational rapture of the church. The result of this research is significant evidence showing that Darby was continuing a stream of theological thinking that already existed in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English writings. Watson notes that the idea of restorationism concerning Israel "existed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries long before John Nelson Darby who is considered the father of modern dispensationalism" (2). In fact, Watson lists over 40 seventeenth- and eighteenth-century authors who "were Philo-Semitic and Expected the Restoration of Israel" (280).

Watson also discusses more than just the restoration of Israel and the pre-tribulation rapture view. Broader issues concerning eschatology and apocalyptic expectations are examined. This reveals not only belief in a future restoration of Israel, but an affirmation of futurism—the belief that many significant prophetic events in the Bible concerning Israel and the nations still need to be fulfilled.

While Watson's focus is on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English writings, he also covers material in the early church and the nineteenth century. Those interested in the history of Reformed doctrine should take note that several Reformed theologians of the past held strongly to the restoration of Israel idea. This includes many of the Puritans along with Charles Spurgeon and J. C. Ryle. Ryle in particular expressed very clearly belief in a restoration of the tribes of Israel to the land. In my reading of Watson's book, it made me curious as to why the Reformed tradition of previous centuries was more accurate on eschatology and the future of Israel than what is often seen in much of the Covenantal/Reformed camp today.

The research in this book is very deep and impressive. Watson's documentation is reliant on many sources. I personally think this is one of the more significant historical books on Christian doctrine in recent years. This is so because it explodes a myth in much of Christendom that certain eschatological beliefs were concocted by Darby and Dispensationalism. As this work shows, Darby was not a theological mad

scientist concocting strange new doctrines in a dark office somewhere. His ideas were consistent with a significant English tradition that preceded him. This is not to deny the historical significance of Darby, but it does lay to rest the idea that Darby was creating new things. Darby seems to be following and sharpening already established viewpoints rather than starting them. I highly recommend this book.

Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. *I Will Lift My Eyes unto the Hills: Learning from the Great Prayers of the Old Testament*. Wooster, OH: Weaver Book Company, 2015. 176 pp. \$12.99 (paper).

Reviewed by Michael A. Grisanti, Professor of Old Testament, The Master's Seminary

Walter Kaiser is a well-known OT scholar. He spent most of his teaching ministry at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and then Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (and later served as president there). He has written many scholarly essays, articles, entries, and books. Although now retired from teaching, he still speaks and writes with regularity.

This volume is more practically-focused than many of his other writings, focusing on prayer in the OT. Kaiser interacts with eleven prayers by OT individuals: Abraham's Prayer for a Wicked City (Gen. 18:22–33), Moses' Prayer for Pardon for Israel (Num. 14:13–23), Hannah's Prayer in Thanksgiving for her Son (1 Sam. 1:1–2:11), David's Prayer in Thanks to God for his Dynasty (2 Sam. 7:18–29; 1 Chron. 17:16–27), Solomon's Prayer for a Listening Heart (1 Kgs. 3:5–15), Solomon's Prayer at the Dedication of the Temple (1 Kings 8:22–53), Jonah's Prayer in Thanksgiving for his Rescue (Jonah 2:2–9), Hezekiah's Prayer for Dealing with an Arrogant Enemy (2 Kings 19:14–19; Isa. 37:14–20), Nehemiah's Prayer in a Time of Distress (Neh. 1:1–12), Ezra's Prayer of Confession for Corporate Sin (Ezra 9:6–15), and Daniel's Prayer in Confession of National Sin (Dan. 9:1–27).

This volume is very readable and each chapter is about ten pages long. The book's layout adds to its value and usability. A chapter provides the full text of the prayer under consideration, summarizes the literary and historical context, and then works through the prayer section-by-section. Pointed conclusions and discussion questions conclude each chapter. The volume ends with a brief bibliography and helpful indices (name, subject, and Scripture).

Just a selection of Kaiser's observations is offered in this short review. As any book of prayer does, the reader will sense strong conviction at various points. At the end of the book's introduction, after mentioning the prominent role that prayer occupied in OT believers' lives, Kaiser writes: "We often correctly say that nothing will be accomplished without prayer. And it is also true that if we do not pray we will accomplish precisely nothing—at least, nothing of any true or lasting value. Therefore, we ought to pray!" (p. 6). Abraham's prayer (Gen. 18:22–33) shows that prayer can include hard questions asked of God. Not doubting the pervasive wickedness of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah or questioning that God was indeed perfectly righteous, Abraham asked "Will not the judge of all the earth do right?" (18:25d).

Although many OT prayers show this, Moses' prayer that Yahweh not wipe out the Israelites in the wake of their rebellion at Kadesh Barnea involved both the recognition and celebration of God's surpassing character (Num. 14:17–19).

In Ezra's prayer, Kaiser engages the tension between corporate and individual responsibility. Under the governance of the Mosaic Covenant, the Lord was not just dealing with individual Israelites but a theocratic nation. Some rebellious conduct impacted the nation (corporate) along with God's demand for each Israelite to obey Him and maintain a faith relationship with Him. In that regard, I wonder about one of Kaiser's concluding statements at the end of the chapter on Ezra's prayer. He writes: "God holds us accountable not only for our personal sins but also for those of the group in which we live and participate." On the one hand, we have some responsibility, at times, for choices made by our church or our family, but is there a general divine accountability for group sins?

Kaiser's volume on OT prayers deserves a place on a believer's shelf. Readers might wonder about this or that detailed conclusion along the way, but Kaiser forces us to grasp the importance and key elements of prayers by significant individuals in OT times. Especially with its concluding statements and discussion questions, it would serve as a helpful guide for personal devotions or small group Bible studies.

John A. Beck. *The Holy Land for Christian Travelers: An Illustrated Guide to Israel*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017. 256 pp. \$16.99 (paper).

Reviewed by Michael A. Grisanti, Professor of Old Testament, The Master's Seminary.

As someone who leads at least two trips to Israel each year, I am always looking for solid sources to help me learn more about the land of Israel as well as resources for people who travel with me to Israel. The author of this volume, John Beck, was an OT professor and now focuses on researching and writing material to help people understand the Bible. John shares our (TMS's) high view of Scripture as well as our chronology of the Old and New Testaments.

The first section of this book provides "big picture" information about the land of Israel. In addition to modern-day maps of Israel and Jerusalem, Beck provides an overview of Israel's history as well as the geography and climate of the Promised Land—geographical zones, agricultural year, seasons and culture, winds, water, and rainfall. Then he offers various suggested itineraries—for various numbers of days to visit all Israel as well as smaller itineraries for touring Jerusalem. He ends this "big picture" section with suggestions of things a traveler should know when travelling to Israel.

The central (main) section of the book provides an overview of sites in the Jerusalem area (sites you can walk to and sites you need to drive to around Jerusalem) and then discusses sites in four major regions—Coastal Plain, Central Mountains South, Central Mountains Center, and Central Mountains North.

For each of the chapters that focus on the sites in and around Jerusalem or in the three sections of Israel that Beck identifies, he begins by listing the sites he will explain. As he works through these sites, as needed, he expands his "commentary"

to consider that area in various historical periods. Throughout this explanation, he provides several photos of artifacts and artist reconstructions of various buildings or cities. For example, in his consideration of Jerusalem, Beck includes some helpful artist reconstructions of the appearance and extent of Jerusalem (in the times of David, Solomon, Hezekiah, and Jesus—pp. 48, 52, 56, 65).

In his explanation of Christ's birth at Bethlehem (p. 90), he provides a great artist reconstruction of a home in that period which demonstrates that in Judea many homes were built on top of natural caves. This would provide the family a place for additional storage as well as a shelter for their animals (and where Jesus was likely born). In his explanation of sites in the Galilee region, Beck summarizes (and depicts with artistic reconstructions) three kinds of fishing that took place in that area (cast net, drag net, and trammel net—pp. 227–29). These and many other helpful features of the book do not simply provide some geographic tidbits but shed light on a biblical place or practice that enables a reader to better understand various biblical passages. Finally, every site treatment ends with a blue box with key information—directions to take to get to your desired location.

The last section involves numerous clear and helpful maps—OT and NT cities, the road system, tribal divisions, maps of the united and divided kingdoms, and maps of all Israel and then Galilee in the NT. This section ends with a Bible timeline and an index of locations explained throughout the volume. He provides a key to symbols that occur throughout his explanations that remind the reader whether there are fees or if modest dress is required.

For scholars or lay people who want to have a great resource to help guide their learning about important features of the land of promise, this relatively small volume by John Beck deserves a place in every backpack of people heading to Israel. While there are several good written guides for those travelling to Israel, Beck's volume is the top of this trip leader's list!

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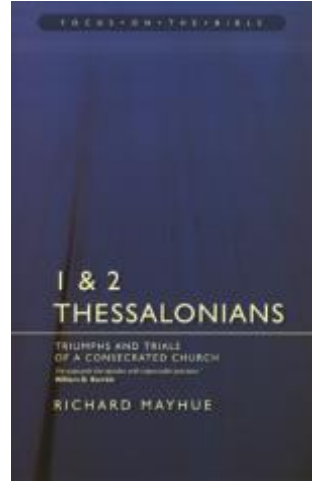
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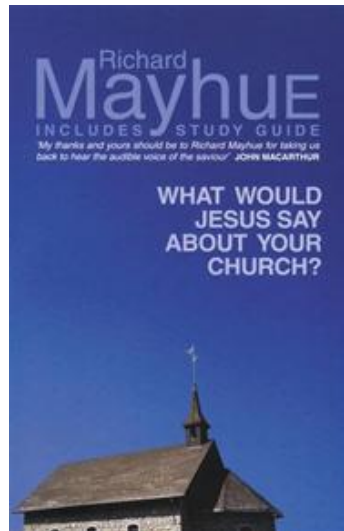
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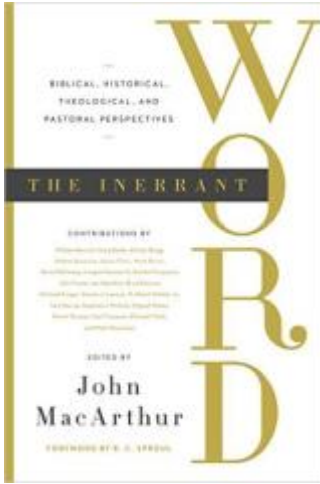
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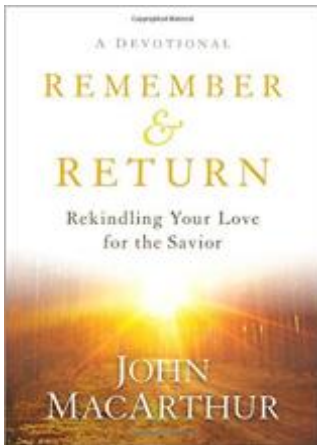
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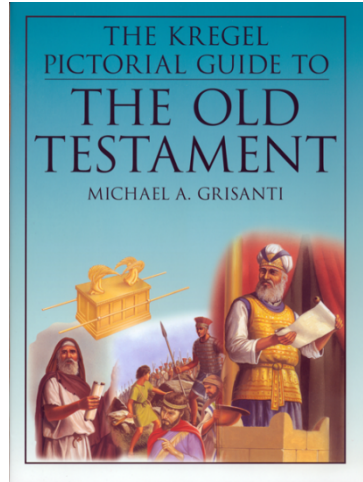
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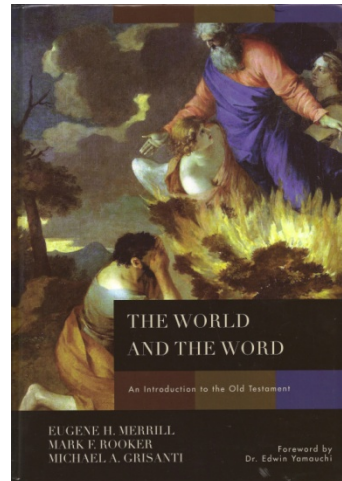


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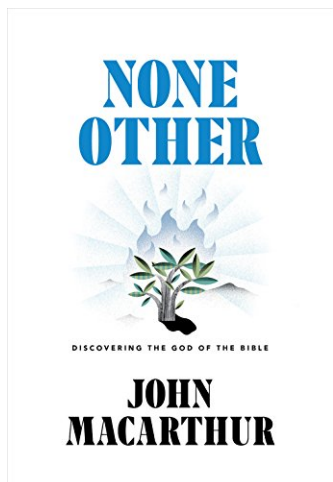


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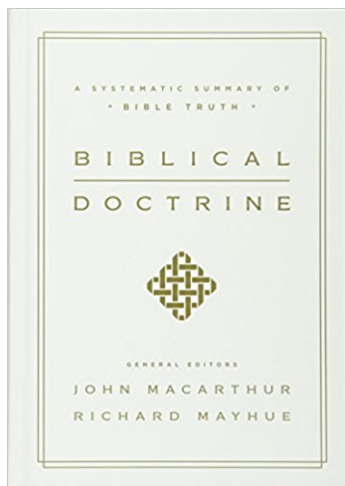
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