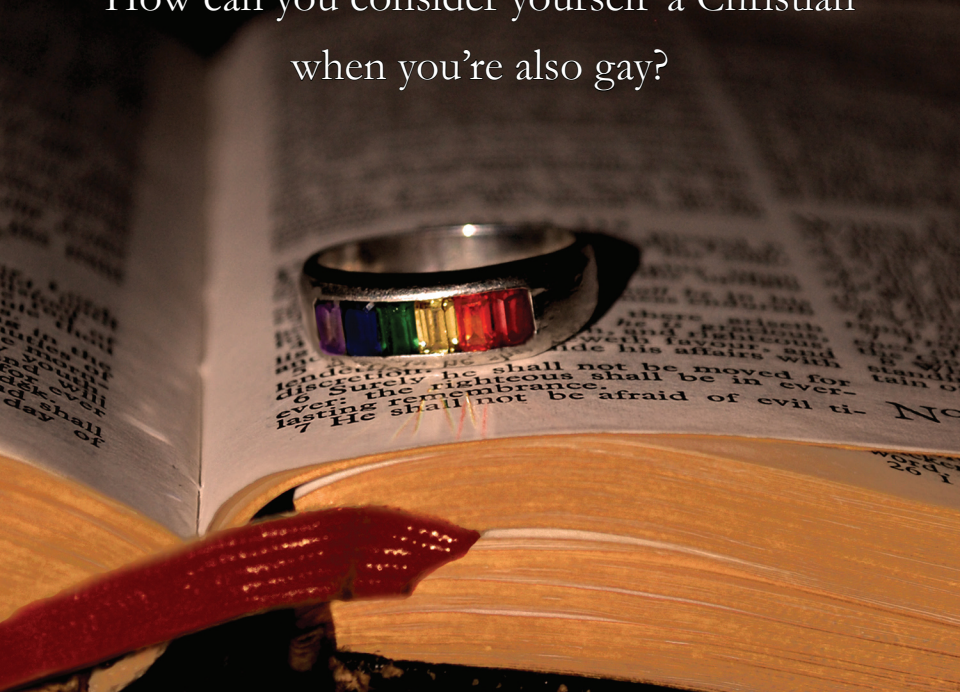


THE REV. DR. MEL WHITE

What the Bible Says and Does Not Say about Homosexuality

A Biblical response to the frequently asked question:

How can you consider yourself a Christian
when you're also gay?



Like you, I take the Bible seriously.

Many good people build their case against homosexuality almost entirely on the Bible. These folks value Scripture, and are serious about seeking its guidance in their lives. Unfortunately, many of them have never really studied what the Bible does and doesn't say about homosexuality.

We gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Christians take the Bible seriously, too. Personally, I've spent more than 50 years reading, studying, memorizing, preaching, and teaching from the sacred texts. I earned my master's and doctoral degrees at a conservative biblical seminary to better equip myself to "rightly divide the word of truth." I learned Hebrew and Greek to gain a better understanding of the original words of the biblical texts. I studied the lives and times of the biblical authors to help me know what they were saying in their day so I could better apply it to my own.

I'm convinced the Bible has a powerful message for gay and lesbian Christian — as well as straight Christians. But it's not the message of condemnation we so often hear. I'm not expecting you to take my word for it, though. I ask only that you'd consider what my research has taught me about the passages used by some people to condemn God's gay and lesbian children. Then decide for yourself...

"... rightly dividing the word of truth.

— 2 Timothy 2:15



1 My First Premise

Most people have not carefully and prayerfully researched the biblical texts often used to condemn God's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender children.

As you may know, biblical ignorance is an epidemic in the United States. A recent study quoted by Dr. Peter Gomes in *The Good Book* found that 38 percent of Americans polled were certain the Old Testament was written a few years after Jesus' death. Ten percent believed Joan of Arc was Noah's wife. Many even thought the epistles were the wives of the apostles.

This same kind of biblical ignorance is all too present around the topic of homosexuality. Often people who love and trust God's Word have never given careful and prayerful attention to what the Bible does or doesn't say about homosexuality.

For example, many Christians don't know that:

- Jesus says nothing about same-sex behavior.
- The Jewish prophets are silent about homosexuality.
- Only six or seven of the Bible's one million verses refer to same-sex behavior in any way — and none of these verses refer to homosexual orientation as it's understood today.

Most people who are certain they know what the Bible says about homosexuality don't know where the verses that reference same-sex behavior can be found. They haven't read them, let alone studied them carefully. They don't know the original meaning of the words in Hebrew or Greek. And they haven't tried to understand the historical context in which those words were written. Yet the assumption that the Bible condemns homosexuality is passed down from generation to generation with very little personal study or research. The consequences of this misinformation are disastrous, not only for God's gay and lesbian children, but for the entire church.

The apostle Paul says, "Test all things and hold fast to that which is good." By reading this little pamphlet, you are taking Paul seriously.

"Test all things and hold fast to that which is good."

— 1 Thessalonians 5:21

2

My Second Premise

Historically, people's misinterpretation of the Bible has left a trail of suffering, bloodshed, and death.

Over the centuries people who misunderstood or misinterpreted the Bible have done terrible things. The Bible has been misused to defend bloody crusades and tragic inquisitions; to support slavery apartheid, and segregation; to persecute Jews and other non-Christian people of faith; to support Hitler's Third Reich and the Holocaust; to oppose medical science; to condemn interracial marriage; to execute women as witches; and to support the Ku Klux Klan. Shakespeare said it this way: "Even the devil can cite Scripture for his purpose."

We'd like to believe that no person of good will would misuse the Bible to support his or her prejudice. But time and time again it has happened with tragic results.

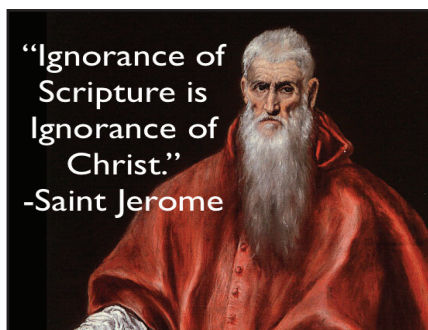


In the 16th century, John Selden pointed at two Latin words carved into a marble wall in an ancient church in Rome: *Scrutamini Scripturas*, which means *search the Scriptures*. "These two words," Seldon said, "have undone the world."

In one way, John Selden was right. Misusing the Bible has drenched the planet in blood and tears. But in another way, he was wrong. Most people who misuse the Bible *don't* search the Scriptures. They simply find a text that seems to support their prejudice and then spend the rest of their lives quoting (or misquoting) that text.

The way certain Bible verses are used to condemn homosexuality and homosexuals is a perfect example of this.

On September 22, 2000, a 55-year-old man named Ronald E. Gay, angry for being teased about his last name, entered the Back Street Café in Roanoke, Virginia, a gathering place for lesbians and gays just a few miles from Lynchburg. Confident that God's Word supported his tragic plan of action, Mr. Gay shouted, "I am a Christian soldier, working for my Lord." Claiming that "Jesus does not want these people in his heaven," he shot seven innocent gay and lesbian people. One man, Danny Overstreet, died instantly. Others still suffer from their physical and psychological wounds.



In July 1999, Matthew Williams and his brother, Tyler, murdered a gay couple, Gary Matson and Winfield Mowder, in their home near Sacramento, California. Speaking to his mother from the Shasta County jail, Matthew explained his actions in this way: "I had to obey God's law rather than man's law," he said. "I didn't want to do this. I felt I was supposed to. I have followed a higher law. ... I just plan to

defend myself from the Scriptures."

After Matthew Shepard was killed in 1998, a pastor in North Carolina published an open letter regarding the trial of Aaron McKinney that read: "Gays are under the death penalty. His blood is guilty before God (Lev. 20:13). If a person kills a gay, the gay's blood is upon the gay and not upon the hands of the person doing the killing. The acts of gays are so abominable to God. His Word is there and we can't change it."

Most of the people I know who say "the Bible condemns homosexuality" would never condone these acts. Most Christians have no idea that the people killing gay and lesbian persons go around quoting those few verses of Scripture as justification.

But it's important to hear these stories, because I'm not writing this little pamphlet as a scholarly exercise. It's a matter of life and death. I'm pleading for the lives of my lesbian sisters and gay brothers who are rejected by their friends and families, fired by their employers, denied their civil rights, refused full membership in their churches, and kill themselves or are killed by others — all on the basis of these six or seven verses.



Ignorance is produced with a closed Bible.

3

My Third Premise

We must be open to new truth from Scripture.

Even heroes of the Christian faith have changed their minds about the meaning of various biblical texts.

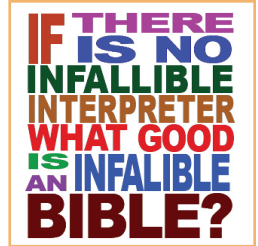
It took a blinding light and a voice from heaven to help the apostle Paul change his mind about certain Hebrew texts. A sheet lowered from the sky filled with all kinds of animals helped the apostle Peter gain new insights into Jewish law.

Jerry Falwell believed the Bible supported segregation in the church until a black shoeshine man asked him, “When will someone like me be allowed to become a member of your congregation?” Through those simple words, the Holy Spirit spoke new truth about the ancient biblical texts to the Rev. Falwell, and in obedience he ended segregation at Thomas Road Baptist Church.

Even when we believe the Scriptures are “infallible” or “without error,” it’s terribly dangerous to think that *our understanding* of every biblical text is also without error. We are human. We are fallible. And we can misunderstand and misinterpret these ancient words — with tragic results.

Almost 1,000 people believed Jim Jones was a faithful interpreter of God’s Word. They died with him in the jungles of Guyana. I studied Jones and leaders of other cults while writing the book and documentary film *Deceived*. I found that the only people who were able to break free of the dangerous influence of such Bible-quoting cultic gurus were the ones who took the Bible seriously enough to study the texts themselves and make their own decisions about their meaning. The others “leave their bones in the desert.”

What if someone asked you, “Is there a chance you could be wrong about the way you’ve interpreted the biblical texts sometimes used to condemn homosexual orientation?” How would you respond? What does it say about you if you answer, “No, I could *NOT* be wrong?” I am asking you to re-examine these texts — carefully and prayerfully. Lives hang in the balance.



There are far too many tragic stories of what happens when we fail to study these texts. Mark B. was a young man who accepted his sexual orientation “until he became a Christian” and was told on the basis of these texts that he couldn’t be both a Christian and a gay man. Mark committed suicide and wrote this suicide note to God: “I just don’t know how else to fix this.” Mary Lou Wallner, one of our most faithful Soulforce volunteers, was led by these texts to condemn her lesbian daughter, Anna, who hanged herself. Mary Lou now says, “If I can steer just one person away from the pain and anguish I’ve been living, then maybe Anna’s death will have meaning.”

If heroes of the Christian faith could change their minds about the meaning of certain biblical texts, shouldn’t we be prepared to reconsider our own interpretations of these ancient words when the Holy Spirit opens our minds and hearts to new truth? That’s why we study the Bible prayerfully, seeking the Spirit of Truth, God’s loving Spirit, to help us understand and apply these words to our lives.

On the night he was betrayed, Jesus told his disciples he was going away from them for a while, but that the Father would send them a “Comforter,” an “Advocate,” the “Holy Spirit” who would “teach them all things.”

I believe with all my heart that the Holy Spirit is still teaching us. When we reconsider the texts that are used by some people to condemn God’s gay children, we must fervently seek the Holy Spirit’s guidance, or we risk being misled by our own prejudices.



4

My Forth Premise

The Bible is a book about God — not a book about human sexuality.

The Bible is the story of God's love for the world and the people of the world. It tells the history of God's love at work rescuing, renewing, and empowering humankind. It was never intended to be a book about human sexuality. Certainly, you will agree.

In fact, the Bible accepts sexual practices that we condemn and condemns sexual practices that we accept. Lots of them! Here are a few examples.

- *Deuteronomy 22:13-21*: If it is discovered that a bride is not a virgin, he Bible demands that she be executed by stoning immediately.
- *Deuteronomy 22:22*: If a married person has sex with someone else's husband or wife, the Bible commands that both adulterers be stoned to death.
- *Mark 10:1-12*: Divorce is strictly forbidden in both Testaments, as is remarriage of anyone who has been divorced.
- *Leviticus 18:19*: The Bible forbids a married couple from having sexual intercourse during a woman's period. If they disobey, both shall be executed.
- *Mark 12:18-27*: If a man dies childless, his widow is ordered by biblical law to have intercourse with each of his brothers in turn until she bears her deceased husband a male heir.
- *Deuteronomy 25:11-12*: If a man gets into a fight with another man and his wife seeks to rescue her husband by grabbing the enemy's genitals, her hand shall be cut off and no pity shall be shown her.

I'm certain you don't agree with these teachings from the Bible about sex. And you shouldn't. The list goes on: The Bible says clearly that sex with a prostitute is acceptable for the husband but not for the wife. Polygamy (more than one wife) is acceptable, as is a king's having many concubines. (Solomon, the wisest king of all, had 1,000 concubines.) Slavery and sex with slaves, marriage of girls aged 11–13, and treatment of women as property are all accepted practices in the Scriptures. On the other hand, there are strict prohibitions against



King Solomon

interracial marriage, birth control, discussing or even naming a sexual organ, and seeing one's parents nude.

Over the centuries the Holy Spirit has taught us that certain Bible verses should not be understood as God's law for all time periods. Some verses are specific to the culture and time they were written, and are no longer viewed as appropriate, wise, or just.

Often, the Holy Spirit uses science to teach us why those ancient words no longer apply to our modern times. During the last three decades, for example, organizations representing 1.5 million U.S. health professionals (doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, counselors, and educators) have stated definitively that homosexual orientation is as natural as heterosexual orientation, that sexual orientation is determined by a combination of yet unknown pre- and post-natal influences, and that it is dangerous and inappropriate to tell a homosexual that he or she could or should attempt to change his or her sexual orientation. (see Recommended Resources, p. 26.)

While there are some people now living in heterosexual marriages who once perceived themselves to be gay, there are millions of gay and lesbian persons who have accepted their sexual orientation as a gift from God and live productive and deeply spiritual lives. The evidence from science and from the personal experience of gay and lesbian Christians demands that we at least consider whether the passages cited to condemn homosexual behavior should be reconsidered, just as other Bible verses that speak of certain sexual practices are no longer understood as God's law for us in this day.



“Homosexuality is not a mental disorder and thus there is no need for a cure.”
— The American Psychological Association

5

My Fifth Premise:

We miss what these passages say about God when we spend so much time debating what they say about sex.

If the Bible is the story of God’s love for the world and not a handbook about sex, then that should shape how we read the Scriptures. So as we take a look at the six biblical texts that are used by some people to condemn homosexuality, let’s ask two questions about each of them:

First, what does the text say about God that we need to hear but might be missing?

Second, what might the text be saying about homosexuality?

Passage 1: The Creation Story, Genesis 2:21-25

Let’s start “In the Beginning...” What does the creation story in Genesis 1–2 say about God?

I’m so tired of reading signs carried by protesters that say: “It’s about Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.” In fact, the creation story is as important to Adam and Steve as it is Adam and Eve.

Gays and non-gays alike need to know and celebrate the truth at the center of this story.

This creation story is primarily about God, a story written to show the power of God who created the world and everything in it. It teaches us that ultimately God is our Creator, that God shaped us, and that God said, “It’s good.” Isn’t this the heart of the text?



Now what does the creation story say about homosexuality? Because the text says it is “natural” that a man and a woman come together to create a new life, some people think this

means gay or lesbian couples are “unnatural.” They read this interpretation into the text, even though the text is silent about all kinds of relationships that don’t lead to having children:

- couples who are unable to have children
- couples who are too old to have children
- couples who choose not to have children
- people who are single

Are these relationships (or lack of relationships) “unnatural”? There’s nothing said here that condemns or approves the love that people of the same sex have for each other, including the love I have for my partner, Gary.

So I believe the creation story says a lot about God’s power and presence in the universe—but nothing about homosexuality as we understand it today.

Passage 2: The Story of Sodom, Genesis 19:1-14

Now let’s consider the second biblical text used by some people to condemn God’s gay children. You remember the ancient story of Sodom. First, what does the story of Sodom in Genesis 19 say about God?

When Gary and I arrive at a college or university to speak, there are often protesters carrying signs that read, “Mel White, Sodomite.” (Has a nice ring to it.) Actually, I’m not from Sodom. That city was buried beneath the Dead Sea centuries ago. I’m from California — but perhaps that just confirms their suspicions!



Once again, this story is not primarily about sex. It is primarily about God. Some people say the city of Sodom was destroyed because it was overrun by sexually obsessed homosexuals. In fact, the city of Sodom had been doomed to destruction long before. So what is this passage really about?

Jesus and five Old Testament prophets all speak of the sins that led to the destruction of Sodom — and not one of them mentions homosexuality. Even Billy Graham doesn’t mention homosexuality when he preaches on Sodom.

Listen to what Ezekiel 16:48–49 tell us: “This is the sin of Sodom; she and her suburbs

had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not help or encourage the poor and needy. They were arrogant and this was abominable in God’s eyes.”

Today, heterosexuals and homosexuals alike do well to remember that we break God’s heart when we spend all we earn on ourselves, when we forget the poor and hungry, when we refuse to do justice or show mercy, when we leave strangers at the gate.

I admit, there are a lot of gay folk who are Sodomites (and a lot of straight folk as well). Sodomites are rich and don’t share what they have with the poor. Sodomites have plenty and want more. While millions are hungry, homeless, and sick, Sodomites rush to build bigger homes, buy bigger cars, and own more property — putting their trust in safer stock portfolios and more secure retirement accounts.

Whatever teaching about sexuality you might get out of this passage, be sure to hear this central, primary truth about God as well. God has called us to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our Creator. Sodom was destroyed because its people didn’t take God seriously about caring for the poor, the hungry, the homeless, or the outcast.



But what does the story of Sodom say about homosexual orientation as we understand it today? Nothing.

It was common for soldiers, thieves, and bullies to rape a fallen enemy, asserting their victory by dehumanizing and demeaning the vanquished. This act of raping an enemy is about power and revenge, not about homosexuality or homosexual orientation. And it is still happening.

In August 1997, Abner Louima, a young black immigrant from Haiti, was assaulted by several police officers after he was arrested in Brooklyn. Officer Charles Schwarz held Louima down in a restroom at the precinct, while Officer Justin Volpe rammed a broken stick into Louima’s rectum. These two men and the three other officers involved in this incident and its cover-up were not gay. This was not a homosexual act. It was about power.



Abner Louima

The sexual act that occurs in the story of Sodom is a gang rape — and homosexuals oppose gang rape as much as anyone.

That’s why I believe the story of Sodom says a lot about God’s will for each of us, but nothing about homosexuality as we understand it today.

Passage 3: The Holiness Code, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

Now let’s consider the second biblical text used by some people to condemn God’s gay children. You remember the ancient story of Sodom. First, what does the story of Sodom in Genesis 19 say about God?

Let’s move on. What do the two verses sometimes cited from Leviticus say about God?

Leviticus 18:6 reads: “You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female. It is an abomination.” A similar verse occurs two chapters later, in Leviticus 20:13: “A man who sleeps with another man is an abomination and should be executed.” On the surface, these words could leave you feeling rather uneasy, especially if you are gay. But just below the surface is the deeper truth about God — and it has nothing to do with sex.

Leviticus is a holiness code written 3,000 years ago. This code includes many of the outdated sexual laws we mentioned earlier, and a lot more. It also includes prohibitions against round haircuts, tattoos, working on the Sabbath, wearing garments of mixed fabrics, eating pork or shellfish, getting your fortune told, and even playing with the skin of a pig. (There goes football!)



So what’s a holiness code? It’s a list of behaviors that people of faith find offensive in a certain place and time. In this case, the code was written for priests only, and its primary intent was to set the priests of Israel over and against priests of other cultures.

At the age of 10, I signed a holiness code written by the Women’s Christian Temperance Union that said I would never taste beer, wine, or liquor. I thought signing it would please God and my grandmother. That’s a holiness code. When I was in high school we evangelical Christians had an unwritten holiness code that went like this: “I don’t drink, smoke, or chew,

or go with girls who do.” Now I know what you’re thinking. That last part about “girls who do” proved especially easy for me. But the point is that I obeyed this evangelical holiness code because my parents said that breaking these rules didn’t please God, and I knew it didn’t please them.

We had another evangelical holiness code while I was in high school that prohibited dancing. I was student body president, yet I refused to go to the prom because I had promised not to dance. I did this to please God and my mother — whose mother had made her sign a holiness code that she wouldn’t go to dances either.

What about this word abomination that comes up in both passages? In Hebrew, “abominations” (TO’EBAH) are behaviors that people in a certain time and place consider tasteless or offensive. To the Jews an abomination was not a law, not something evil like rape or murder forbidden by the Ten Commandments. It was a common behavior by non-Jews that Jews thought was displeasing to God.

Jesus and Paul both said the holiness code in Leviticus does not pertain to Christian believers. Nevertheless, there are still people who pull the two verses about men sleeping together from this ancient holiness code to say that the Bible seems to condemn homosexuality.

But wait, before we go any further, let’s ask: What does this text say about God? Even if the old holiness codes no longer apply to us as Christians, it’s important to remember that in every age, people of faith are responsible for setting moral and ethical standards that honor God. But we people of faith must be very careful not to allow our own prejudices to determine what those standards should be.

Instead of selecting one item from an ancient Jewish holiness code and using it to condemn sexual or gender minorities, let’s talk together about setting sexual standards that please God — standards appropriate for heterosexuals and homosexuals alike, standards based on loving concern, health, and wholeness for ourselves and for others.

Now what do the Leviticus passages say about homosexuality? I’m convinced those passages say nothing about homosexuality as we understand it today. Here’s why. Consider this single Bible passage that was used for centuries to condemn masturbation: “He spilled his seed on the ground ... And the thing which Onan did displeased the Lord: wherefore he slew him also” (Genesis 38:9-10).

For Jewish writers of Scripture, a man sleeping with another man was an abomination. But it was also an abomination (and one worthy of death) to masturbate or even to interrupt coitus (to halt sex with your spouse before ejaculation as an act of birth control). Why were these sexual practices considered abominations by Scripture writers in these ancient times?



Because the Hebrew pre-scientific understanding was that the male semen contained the whole of life. With no knowledge of eggs and ovulation, it was assumed that the man's sperm contained the whole child and that the woman provided only the incubating space. Therefore, the spilling of semen without possibility of having a child was considered murder.

The Jews were a small tribe struggling to populate a country. They were outnumbered by their enemy. You can see why these ancient people felt it was an abomination to risk “wasting” even a single child. But the passage says nothing about homosexuality as we understand it today.

We've talked about the passages in the Hebrew Scriptures that are used (or misused) by some people to condemn sexual minorities. Now let's look at three verses from the letters of the apostle Paul in the Christian Scriptures that are used the same way. Remember: First, we'll ask what the text says about God; second, we'll consider what it may or may not say about sexual orientation.

Passage 4: Natural and Unnatural, Romans 1:26-27

What does Romans 1:26–27 say about God?

For our discussion, this is the most controversial biblical passage of them all. In Romans 1:26–27 the apostle Paul describes non-Jewish women who exchange “natural use for unnatural” and non-Jewish men who “leave the natural use of women, working shame with each other.”

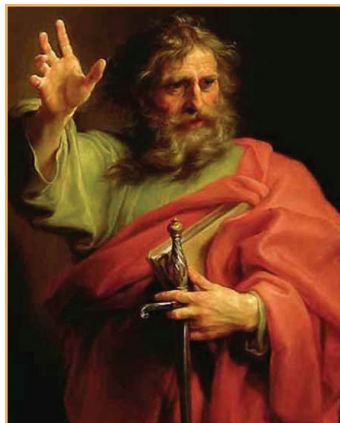
This verse appears to be clear: Paul sees women having sex with women and men having sex with men, and he condemns that practice. But let's go back 2,000 years and try to understand why.

Paul is writing this letter to Rome after his missionary tour of the Mediterranean. On his journey Paul had seen great temples built to honor Aphrodite, Diana, and other fertility gods and goddesses of sex and passion instead of the one true God the apostle honors. Apparently, these priests and priestesses engaged in some odd sexual behaviors — including castrating themselves, carrying on drunken sexual orgies, and even having sex with young temple prostitutes (male and female) — all to honor the gods of sex and pleasure.

The Bible is clear that sexuality is a gift from God. Our Creator celebrates our passion.

But the Bible is also clear that when passion gets control of our lives, we're in deep trouble.

When we live for pleasure, when we forget that we are God's children and that God has great dreams for our lives, we may end up serving the false gods of sex and passion, just as they did in Paul's time. In our obsession with pleasure, we may even walk away from the God who created us — and in the process we may cause God to abandon all the great dreams God has for our lives.



St. Paul

Did these priests and priestesses get into these behaviors because they were lesbian or gay? I don't think so. Did God abandon them because they were practicing homosexuals? No. Read the text again.

In the video, *There's a Wideness in God's Mercy*, the Rev. Dr. Lewis B. Smedes, a distinguished Christian author and ethicist, describes exactly how the Bible says these promiscuous priests and priestesses got into this mess. Once again it has nothing to do with homosexuality:

Smedes: “The people Paul had in mind refused to acknowledge and worship God, and for this reason were abandoned by God. And being abandoned by God, they sank into sexual depravity.”

Smedes: “The homosexuals I know have not rejected God at all; they love God and they thank God for his grace and his gifts. How, then, could they have been abandoned to homosexuality as a punishment for refusing to acknowledge God?”

Smedes: “Nor have the homosexuals that I know given up heterosexual passions for homosexual lusts. They have been homosexual from the moment of their earliest sexual stirrings. They did not change from one orientation to another; they just discovered that they were homosexual. It would be unnatural for most homosexuals to have heterosexual sex.”

Smedes: “And the homosexual people I know do not lust after each other any more than heterosexual people do. ... [T]heir love for one another is likely to be just as spiritual and personal as any heterosexual love can be.”

Thank you, Dr. Smedes (Dr. Smedes’ video *There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy* is available at smedesvideo.org). Getting to know a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender person of faith will help you realize that it is unreasonable (and unjust) to compare



Moses

our love for each other to the rituals of the priests and priestesses who pranced around the statues of Aphrodite and Diana. Once again, I feel certain this passage says a lot about God, but nothing about homosexuality as we understand it. You’ll also note that Romans 2 begins with “Therefore, [referring to Romans 1], you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself.” Even after he describes the disturbing practices he has seen, Paul warns us that judging others is God’s business, not ours.

Passages 5 and 6: The Mystery of Malokois and Arsenokoitai, I Corinthians 6:9 and I Timothy 1:10

Now what do the writings of Paul in I Corinthians 6:9 and I Timothy 1:10 say, first about God, and then about homosexuality? These are the last two places in the Bible that seem to refer to same-sex behavior. We can combine them because they are so similar.

Paul is exasperated. The Christians in Ephesus and Corinth are fighting among themselves. (Sound familiar?) In Corinth they’re even suing one another in secular courts. Paul shouts across the distance, “You are breaking God’s heart by the way you are treating one another.”

Like any good writer, Paul anticipates their first question: “Well, how are we supposed

to treat one another?” Paul answers, “You know very well how to treat one another from the Jewish law written on tablets of stone.”

The Jewish law was created by God to help regulate human behavior. To remind the churches in Corinth and Ephesus how God wants us to treat one another, Paul recites examples from the Jewish law first. Don’t kill one another. Don’t sleep with a person who is married to someone else. Don’t lie or cheat or steal. The list goes on to include admonitions against fornication, idolatry, whore-mongering, perjury, drunkenness, revelry, and extortion. He also includes *malokois* and *arsenokoitai*. Here’s where the confusion begins.



Jewish Law

What’s a *malokois*? What’s an *arsenokoitai*? Actually, those two Greek words have confused scholars to this very day. We’ll say more about them later, when we ask what the texts say about sex. But first let’s see what the texts say about God.

After quoting from the Jewish law, Paul reminds the Christians in Corinth that they are under a new law: the law of Jesus, a law of love that requires us to do more than just avoid murder, adultery, lying, cheating, and stealing. Paul tells them what God wants is not strict adherence to a list of laws, but a pure heart, a good conscience, and a faith that isn’t phony.

That’s the lesson we all need to learn from these texts. God doesn’t want us squabbling over who is “in” and who is “out.” God wants us to love one another. It’s God’s task to judge us. It is NOT our task to judge one another.

So what do these two texts say about homosexuality? Are gays and lesbians on that list of sinners in the Jewish law that Paul quotes to make an entirely different point? Greek scholars say that in first century the Greek word *malaokois* probably meant “effeminate call boys.” The New Revised Standard Version says “male prostitutes.”

As for *arsenokoitai*, Greek scholars don’t know exactly what it means — and the fact that we don’t know is a big part of this tragic debate. Some scholars believe Paul was coining a name to refer to the customers of “the effeminate call boys.” We might call them “dirty old men.” Others translate the word as “sodomites,” but never explain what that means.

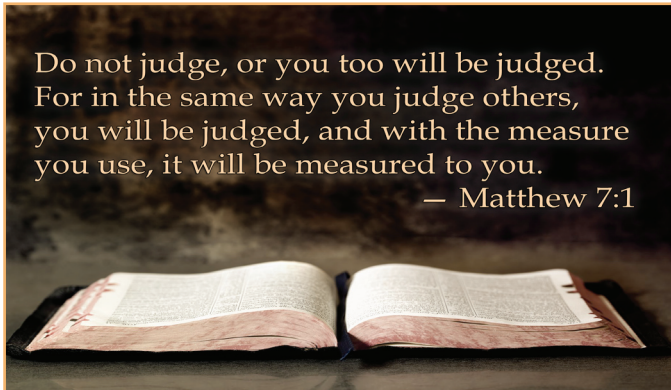
In 1958, for the first time in history, a person translating that mysterious Greek word into English decided it meant *homosexuals*, even though there is, in fact, no such word in Greek or

Hebrew. But that translator made the decision for all of us that placed the word *homosexual* in the English-language Bible for the very first time.

In the past, people used Paul's writings to support slavery, segregation, and apartheid. People still use Paul's writings to oppress women and limit their role in the home, in church, and in society. Now we have to ask ourselves, "Is it happening again?" Is a word in Greek that has no clear definition being used to reflect society's prejudice and condemn God's gay children?

We all need to look more closely at that mysterious Greek word *arsenokoitai* in its original context. I find most convincing the argument from history that Paul is condemning the married men who hired hairless young boys (*malakoi*) for sexual pleasure just as they hired smooth-skinned young girls for that purpose.

Responsible homosexuals would join Paul in condemning anyone who uses children for



6

My Sixth Premise

The biblical authors are silent about homosexual orientation as we know it today. They neither approve it nor condemn it.

We've looked closely at the six biblical texts used by some people to condemn homosexuality. But we must also remember that Jesus, the Jewish prophets, and even Paul never even comment on the responsible love a gay man or lesbian feels for another.

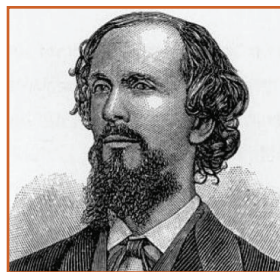
The Bible is completely silent on the issue of homosexual orientation. And no wonder. Homosexual orientation wasn't even known until the 19th century.

The discovery that some of us are created and/or shaped in our earliest infancy toward same-gender attraction was made in the last 150 years. Biblical authors knew nothing about sexual orientation. Old Testament authors and Paul assumed all people were created heterosexual, just as they believed the earth was flat, that there were heavens above and hell below, and that the sun moved up and down.

In 1864, almost 3,000 years after Moses and at least 18 centuries after the apostle Paul, the German social scientist Karl Heinrich Ulrichs was the first to declare that homosexuals were a distinct class of individuals. It was a big moment for all sexual minorities. It's our Columbus discovering the New World. It's our Madame Curie discovering radium used for X-rays. It's our Neil Armstrong walking on the moon. It may seem like one small step for the rest of you, but it's a giant leap for us.

Ulrichs assured the world of what we who are homosexual already know in our hearts. We aren't just heterosexuals choosing to perform same-sex behaviors. We are a whole class of people whose drive to same-sex intimacy is at the very core of our being from the very beginning of our lives.

Although the word *homosexual* was not used for the first time until later in the 19th century, Ulrichs recognized that homosexuals had been around from the beginning of recorded time, that we were "innately different from heterosexuals," and that our desire for same-sex intimacy and affiliation is intrinsic,



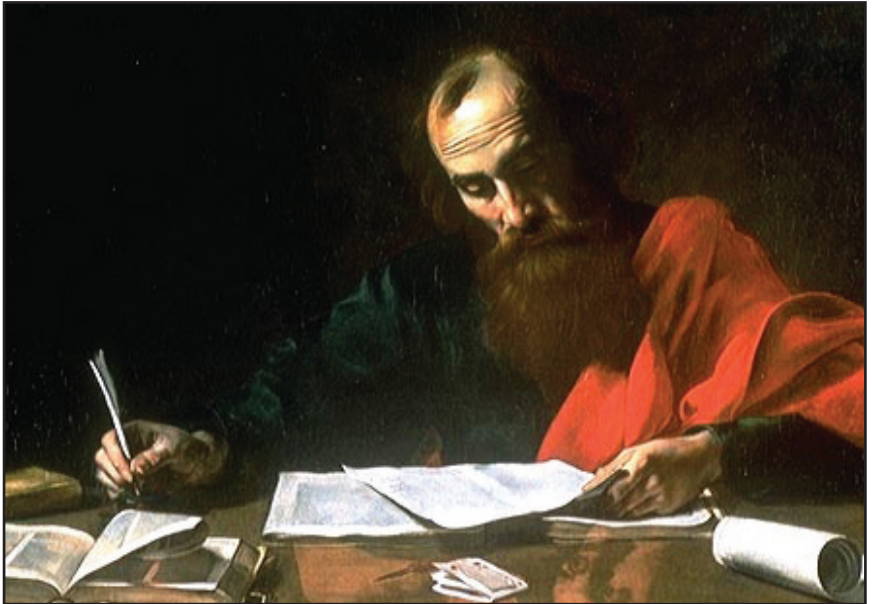
Karl Heinrich Ulrichs

natural, inborn and/or shaped in earliest infancy. According to Dr. Ulrichs, what may have looked “unnatural” to Moses and Paul was in fact “natural” to homosexuals.

So this is my sixth premise. The Biblical authors knew nothing of homosexual orientation as we understand it, and therefore said nothing to condemn or approve it.

The authors of the Bible are authorities in matters of faith. They can be trusted when they talk about God. But they should not be considered the final authorities on sexual orientation any more than they are the final authorities on space travel, gravity, or the Internet.

Since the writers of Scripture are not the final authorities on human sexuality, since they didn't even know about sexual orientation as we understand it today, since Jesus and the Jewish prophets were silent about any kind of same-sex behavior, I am persuaded that the Bible has nothing in it to approve or condemn homosexual orientation as we understand it.



Saint Paul

7

My Seventh Premise

Although the prophets, Jesus, and other biblical authors say nothing about homosexual orientation as we understand it today, they are clear about one thing:

As we search for truth, we are to “love one another.”

We may not be able to use the Bible as our final authority on sexual orientation. But as we search for the truth, we can and should use the Bible as our final authority on how we should treat one another along the way.

A young Jewish scholar asked Jesus, “What is the greatest commandment?” Quoting the prophets, Jesus replied, “The great commandment is this...to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and the second command is like it, to love your neighbor as you love yourself.”

“This is my commandment,” Jesus said, “that you love one another, as I have loved you.” On this the Bible is explicitly clear.

Even if we disagree about what the Bible seems to say about homosexuality, we can agree that above all else we are commanded by the Scriptures to love God and to love one another.

Since God is the God of truth, since Jesus himself told us that the truth would set us free, one way that we love God and love one another is by seeking the truth about sexual orientation wherever we can find it.



There is a growing body of evidence from science, psychology, history, psychiatry, medicine, and personal experience that leads to a clear verdict: Homosexuality is neither a sickness nor a sin.

Unfortunately, the church has always been slow, if not the last institution on earth, to accept new truth.

In 1632 the scientist Galileo (who was a man of faith) dared to support the radical 15th-century idea of Copernicus that all planets, including the earth, revolve around the sun. Immediately, Galileo was proclaimed a heretic by the Pope who quoted Scriptures in his attempt to disprove what science was proving. Earlier, Protestant heroes had joined in quoting Scriptures condemning Copernicus. These weren't evil men. But they couldn't admit that the

Bible was a book about God, not about astronomy — just as good men and women today have trouble admitting that the Bible is a book about God, not about human sexuality.

Martin Luther said, “This fool Copernicus wishes to reverse the entire science of astronomy; but sacred Scripture in Joshua 10:13 tells us that Joshua commanded the sun to stand still, and not the earth.”

John Calvin quoted Psalm 93 in his attack on Copernicus. “The earth also is established. It cannot be moved.” Calvin added, “Who will venture to place the authority of Copernicus above that of the Holy Spirit?”

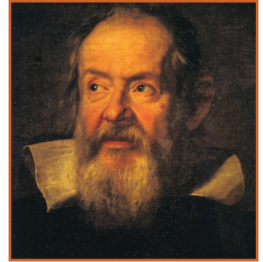
Melancthon, one of Luther’s closest allies, used Ecclesiastes 1:4-5 to condemn Copernicus. “The sun also rises, and the sun goes down and hurries to the place from which it came.” Then he added these dangerous words: “It is the part of a good mind to accept the truth as revealed by God and to obey it.” In other words, believe what the Bible says — even if science disproves it.

Because Christians refused to let their understanding of God’s Word be informed by science, Copernicus was condemned and Galileo was declared a heretic and placed under house arrest for the remainder of his life. In 1992, 359 years later, Pope John Paul II finally admitted the church had been wrong to ignore science and to interpret the Bible literally.

The Pope said something we must never forget: “Recent historical studies enable us to state that this sad misunderstanding now belongs to the past.” Unfortunately, the apology came too late to relieve Galileo of his suffering. What if the biblical scholars of Galileo’s day had said to Galileo, “We don’t agree with your Copernican theories, but we love and trust you. As long as you love God and seek God’s will in your life, you are welcome here.”

Imagine the suffering that could be avoided if the church could say this to their lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender children: “We don’t understand your views about sexual orientation, but we love and trust you. As long as you love God and seek God’s will in your life, you are welcome here.”

Instead, well-intentioned Christians are driving their own children away from the church, using Scripture passages that may not even pertain to sexual orientation as we understand it.



Galileo

8

My Eighth Premise

Whatever some people believe the Bible says about homosexuality, they must not use that belief to deny homosexuals their basic civil rights. To discriminate against sexual or gender minorities is unjust and un-American.

Please consider one last thing. I love the Bible. I read God's Word in it and hear God's Word through it. But the United States is not a nation governed by the Bible. Our nation is governed by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Our laws were created to protect an individual's right to disagree. If the Bible (or someone's view of the Bible) replaces the Constitution as the law of the land, we undermine the great foundation upon which this country was built.



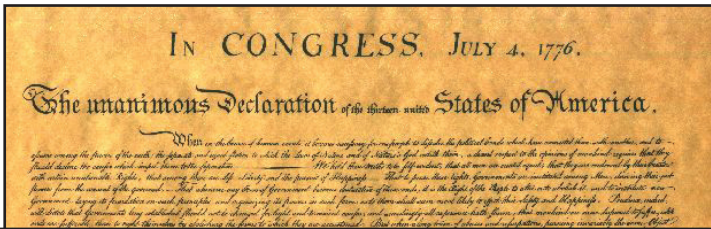
When I was a guest on a talk show in Seattle, I saw what might happen to me and to millions like me if a genuine literalist gained political power over this country. The other guest on the show was an independent Presbyterian pastor. When I told him that I was gay, he said without hesitation, "Then you should be killed." A Christian brother sentenced me to death, guided only by his literal understanding of Leviticus 20:13.

I asked him, "Who should do the killing, you church folk?" He answered, "No, that's the civil authorities' job. That's why we need to elect more good men of God into government." I sat there in stunned silence, until he added, "I know it must be hard for you to hear it, Dr. White—but God said it first and it's our job to obey."

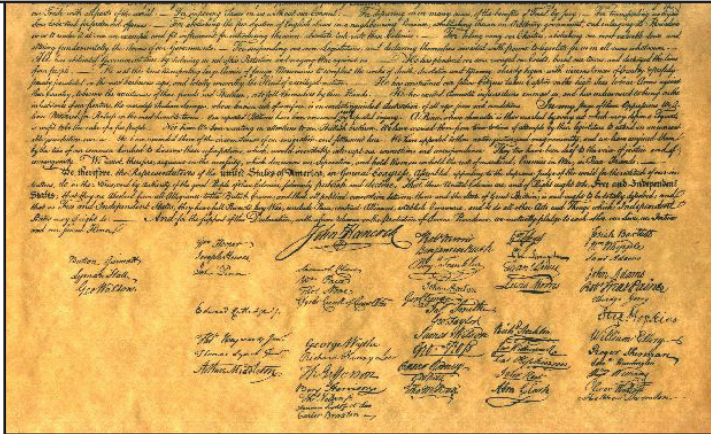
I hope we can agree that all of us must stand together against those who would replace the Constitution with biblical law. That's why, when I lecture on a university campus, I carry a Bible in one pocket and a Constitution in the other.

Can we support full civil rights for all...even if we disagree?

In this last premise, I'm asking you who disagree with my stand on homosexuality to support my stand on full civil rights for all people, including gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Americans.



“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness...”



I hope you'll agree that we are family, all sisters and brothers of the same heavenly parent. We may be different, but we can still live together in peace. Thanks for reading this pamphlet. I'm grateful.

Mel White

Recommended Resources

Visit Mel:

melwhite.org
www.facebook.com/revmelwhite
twitter.com/melwhite

www.soulforce.org

Mel's Books:

Stranger at the Gate: to be Gay and Christian in America
Grace and Demion: A Fable for Victims of Biblical Intolerance

Other Books:

Adam's Gift: A Memoir of a Pastor's Calling to Defy the Church's Persecution of Lesbians and Gays — Jimmy Creech

Coming out to God: Prayers for Lesbians and Gay Men their Families and Friends
— Chris Glaser

Defrocked: How a Father's Act of Love Shook the United Methodist Church
— Franklyn Schaefer

God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case for Same Sex Relationships — Matthew Vine

Homosexuality and the Christian Faith — Walter Wink

Jesus, the Bible and Homosexuality — Jack Rogers

The Children are Free: Reexamining the Biblical Evidence on Same-Sex Relationship
— Jeff Miner and John Tyler

What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality — Daniel A. Helminiak

Recommended Websites:

An Interfaith and Interdenominational Directory of Open and Affirming Religious Communities www.wikihow.com/Find-a-Gay-Friendly-Church

Metropolitan Community Churches: www.mcccchurch.org

United Church of Christ: www.openandaffirming.org

Affirmation: United Methodists: www.umaffirm.org

Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists: www.awab.org

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ): www.gladalliance.org

Integrity - Episcopal Church: www.integrityusa.org

More Light Presbyterians: www.mlp.org

Friends for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Concerns: flgbtqc.quaker.org

Roman Catholic: www.dignityusa.org

Seventh Day Adventists Kinship: www.sdakinship.org

L, G, B, T & Q Ministries of the Unitarian Universalists: www.uua.org/lgbtq

Affirmation: LGBT Mormons Families and Friends: www.affirmation.org

World Congress of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Jews: www.glbtejews.org

Muslim Alliance for Sexual and Gender Diversity: www.muslimalliance.org

Gay Buddhist Fellowship: www.gaybuddhist.org

Gay and Lesbian Vaishnava Association (Hindu): www.galva108.org

Other Helpful Resources:

PFLAG: Parents, Friends, Families and Allies United with LGBTQ People: www.pflag.org

GLSEN: Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network: www.glsen.org

American Psychological Association on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity
www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/index.aspx