

**A BIBLICALLY FAITHFUL
RESPONSE TO SAME-SEX
MARRIAGE**

By

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Introduction

Twenty years ago, any argument about homosexuality¹ was effectively ended with the unequivocal statement that, “the Bible forbids any sex outside marriage,” and the average Christian or church did not need to wrestle with this too deeply; we were content with a vague understanding that the Bible is against it. Today, legalised same-sex marriage has meant that suddenly, churches and individuals cannot ignore this any longer and instead we must delve into the Bible to see what it really says.

Goddard states that, “nobody has claimed any biblical text is affirmative about homosexual conduct and so a more positive Christian moral judgment would have to be based on other grounds than scripture,”² and to attempt this, “requires a... credible critique of the traditional account.”³ Few would disagree with this, and yet here I am, trying to do exactly that. I want to argue that the onus is not on so-called “revisionists” to critique the so-called “traditionalist” view, but on *all* Christians to give a good exegesis of scripture. I want to assert that much of our interpretation of the five⁴ passages in scripture, that apparently refer to homosexuality, has passed through a contemporary cultural lens and superimposed our constructs onto ancient texts.

I will look at the modern concept of homosexuality, then at these five passages of scripture, normally cited to argue against it, the creation account and ask questions in the light of current scientific understanding and I will look at what Jesus says that can provide a hermeneutical key to ascertain whether homosexuality is something that is biblically permissible.

¹ I am going to make the assertion from the beginning that if homosexuality is permissible then same-sex marriage is, also, as the *only* valid environment for its expression.

² Andrew Goddard, *Homosexuality and the Church of England* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2004), 13.

³ Goddard, *Homosexuality*, 10.

⁴ I will not deal with the Sodom account in Genesis 19 as “very few Biblical interpreters think this story is about ‘homosexuality,’” (David P. Gushee, *Changing Our Minds* (Canton: Read the Spirit Books, 2017) but rather domination and humiliation, and it does not seem a good use of the limited space to engage with it.

The Concept of Homosexuality

The concept of someone being “a homosexual” in terms of someone having a *sexual orientation*, is a relatively modern one, first recorded as being used in 1868.⁵ Indeed, Vines states that, “all Christian writings before the past century that mention same-sex behaviour carry this explicit assumption: even if some people are more tempted by same-sex relations than others, no one is *exclusively* orientated to members of the same sex.”⁶

This should cause us to question Goddard’s claim that the scriptures merely describe, “the most acceptable forms of homosexual conduct,” and thus they are, “rejecting homosexuality *per se*.”⁷ David Bentley Hart asserts that, “the ancient world possessed no comparable concept of a specifically homo-erotic identity.”⁸ If the concept of homosexuality was alien to the ancient world, this does not necessarily make any kind of argument for its acceptance but should force us to examine the texts and cultural setting to establish whether each of these five references is actually about something else, and we are in danger of missing the main focus of the passages. To fail to do this properly would be the equivalent of reading Exodus 23:19, “do not cook a young goat in its mother’s milk,” and interpreting it as about food and, as has been done by the Jews, making it into a law about not having red meat with dairy and missing the whole *point* about the cultic fertility practices of the nations around them.⁹

⁵ Rictor Norton, “A Critique of Social Constructionism and Postmodern Queer Theory,” *RickNorton.co.uk*, 19 June 2008, <<http://rictornorton.co.uk/social14.htm>> (4 June 2018). This was found in a proposed revision of the Prussian Penal code. (See also Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian* (New York: Convergent Books, 2014), 39,40). The first English usage was in 1892, in Chaddock’s translation of Kraft-Ebbing’s, “*Psychopathia Sexualis*” (David Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* (Routledge, 1990), 15. (See also James L. O’Leary and Walter L. Moore, “Charles Gilbert Chaddock: His Life and Contributions,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 8 (1953), 301)). It is certainly not reasonable to assume that the concept of someone having a *sexual orientation* did not exist before 1868, but it is clear that it was only at this time that the idea was beginning to be more widely recognised and accepted as a phenomenon.

⁶ Vines, *Gay Christian*, 41.

⁷ Goddard, *Homosexuality*, 12.

⁸ David Bentley Hart, *The New Testament: A Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), footnote, 327.

⁹ (J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy* (Leicester: Apollos, 2002), 251.) This is particularly ironic (although not at all relevant) given that Abram gave the angel of the Lord red meat and milk (Gen 18).

The Old Testament (Leviticus 18 & 20)

When Israel entered into the Promised Land they found themselves exposed to the cultic religion practiced by the Canaanite people, and “although there were some similarities in the sacrifices offered in the Canaanite system...to that of the Israelites, the former was highly polytheistic, extremely sensuous and not infrequently violent.”¹⁰ From the outset, YHWH commanded his people to be different from them and not to enter into their religious and sacrificial practices, as they were meant to be a Holy Nation devoted to YHWH and known for their righteousness and justice (Exod 19:6, Deut 12:29-31, 4:8). As Christopher Wright argues, “If Israel absorbed these features of her surrounding cultures... Israel would cease to be distinctive.”¹¹

The Israelites were specifically commanded not to engage in, or sell their children into, the pervasive religious prostitution of the people around them (Deuteronomy 23:17,18). Thompson notes that, “in the Temples of the Canaanites there were male and female prostitutes... and all sorts of sexual excesses were practiced. It was believed that in some way these rites caused the crops and the herds to prosper.”¹² Interestingly Craigie argues that many of the male cultic prostitutes were in fact married and there was, “no conflict between the marital status and professional activities of the [male prostitutes].” He even goes on to suggest that, “both partners had a role to play in the fertility cult.”¹³

It is in *this* context that we should read Leviticus 18 and 20: “you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices... Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable” (Lev 18:3, 22). “If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads” (Leviticus 20:13).

Vines asserts that this commandment is specifically related to cultic religious practices as the word translated as *abomination* in the KJV (and *detestable* in the NIV) is *toevah* and, “in the vast majority of cases, *toevah* refers to the idolatrous

¹⁰ Wayne Jackson, *The Ras Shamra Discovery* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press, n.d.).

¹¹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Nottingham: IVP, 2004), 329.

¹² J. A. Thompson, *The Bible and Archeology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmanns, 1975), 84.

¹³ P. C. Craigie, “Deuteronomy and Ugaritic Studies,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 28 (1977), 161, 162.

practices of the Gentiles.”¹⁴ He goes on to cite Old Testament scholar Phyllis Bird; “it is not an ethical term, but a term of boundary marking,”¹⁵ and so, given that the modern idea of homosexuality did not exist in the ancient world and that the context is the avoidance of ritual, cultic practices of the nations around them, and given that these practices involve the systematic use of male prostitutes, it would seem clear that these passages are not about what we understand as homosexuality. This assertion is strengthened by Craigie’s claim that the male prostitutes were married and so it makes it unlikely that sexual orientation played any part.

These two passages are the only references in the entire Old Testament to this behaviour¹⁶ and for us to try to make this passage about homosexuality is, I fear, to ignore the main point. YHWH is not like the gods of Canaan. They seek to enslave humanity and in response, the Canaanite people tried “to manipulate and control the gods... [through] sexual acts by male and female temple prostitutes... to arouse Baal, who then brought rain to make mother earth fertile.”¹⁷ YHWH loves his people and wants only the best for them. He does not need to be manipulated or coerced. For Israel to attempt to do so, is to worship an entirely different god, and to enslave themselves.

The New Testament (Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6, 1 Timothy 1)

Hays claims that, “with regard to *homosexuality*, the New Testament evidence is univocal, but there are only a few directly pertinent texts.”¹⁸ He appears to mean the current understanding of homosexuality,¹⁹ and so, again, we should question this

¹⁴ Vines, *Gay Christian*, 85.

¹⁵ Phyllis Bird, “The Bible in Christian Ethical Deliberation Concerning Homosexuality: Old Testament Contributions,” in *Homosexuality, Science and the “Plain Sense” of Scripture* (ed. David L. Balch; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 152.

¹⁶ Having said that I would not deal with Sodom, I will make a point here that relates to it. The only other common form of “homosexuality” within the ANE, was for the purposes of domination and humiliation of a victim in a battlefield or prison setting, by treating a man, “like a defenceless woman [because] in sexist social systems, the most outrageous thing you can do to a man is treat him *like a woman*.” (David P. Gushee, *Changing Our Minds* (Canton: Read the Spirit Books, 2017), 63.)

¹⁷ Peter Mungo Jupp, “Baalbeck Temple Prostitutes and Holy Prostitution for Baal,” *Ancient Destructions*, 19 July 2012, <<http://www.ancientdestructions.com/baalbek-temple-prostitutes-holy-prostitution-baal/>> (4 June 2018).

¹⁸ Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: HarperOne, 1996), 314.

¹⁹ See earlier – “there is not comparable concept in the ancient world.” (Hart, *New Testament*, footnote 327.) Hays, himself notes that there are, “no convenient words for ‘heterosexual’ and ‘homosexual’” (Hays, *Moral*, 387), and yet stops short of recognising that this could be because the *concept* did not exist.

assertion, because while there *are* three references to same-sex sexual behaviour, we must look in detail at the context of these before superimposing this contemporary concept.

According to Classics Scholar, Sarah Ruden, “only quite fresh boys or youths had any charm for grown-up males,”²⁰ and often, the passive partners were slave boys²¹. Regardless of their former status, they would be forever tarnished and considered “lower than women.”²² For the active partner, however, there was no such shame, and, “he positively strutted between his wife, his girlfriend, female slaves and prostitutes, and males. Penetration, after all, signalled moral uprightness.”²³

This was a world where boys were violently abused, raped and physically, mentally and socially scarred for life and it was believed that homosexual rape was “divinely sanctioned.”²⁴ This was a society where, “there were no gay households; there were in fact, no gay institutions or gay culture at all - in the sense of times and places in which it was mutually safe for men to have anal sex with one another.”²⁵ In fact, it seems that there was no such thing as consensual homosexual sex, particularly for the passive partner and arguably, there was virtually no homosexual sex *at all* between adults,²⁶ consensual or otherwise. So what Paul understands in his culture and we understand in the 21st Century Western world are *very* different, and this gap must be very carefully traversed in to avoid, “distort[ing] the Bible’s historical context” in what Ruden calls a “violation of the Bible’s purposes.”²⁷

Let us tread carefully as we explore these three passages.

²⁰ Sarah Ruden, *Paul Among the People* (New York: IMAGE, 2010), 51.

²¹ Ruden, *Paul*, 48.

²² Ruden, *Paul*, 49.

²³ Ruden, *Paul*, 53.

²⁴ Ruden, *Paul*, 54.

²⁵ Ruden, *Paul*, 48.

²⁶ Ruden notes one exception to this in Roman society, the *glabri*, slaves who continued into adulthood but essentially had to act and dress as boys (Ruden, *Paul*, 51, footnote). Also, Gushee talks about the homosexual rape of a military officer by the Emperor Caligula (Gushee, *Changing*, 88).

²⁷ Ruden, *Paul*, 46.

Romans 1

“Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men...” (Romans 1:18-27)

According to Hays, Romans 1 is “the most crucial text for Christian ethics concerning homosexuality... because it is the only passage in the New Testament that explains the condemnation of homosexuality in an explicitly theological context.”²⁸ Linebaugh notes that this theological message is that Paul “reduces false worship to a common denominator: worshipping and serving the creature rather than the creator (Rom 1:23),”²⁹ and certainly Paul sees the behaviour described as a result of the idolatry and a sign of humanity’s degeneration. However, his only possible frame of reference with regard to same-sex sexuality is pederasty, humiliation and abuse and thus, he can *only* be referring to this sanctioned, often violent, systematic abuse of boys by primarily, “privileged men who had the power to take and use other people’s bodies for pleasure,”³⁰ which was, “an expected – although not exclusive - experience for the average [wealthy] man.”³¹

Ruden argues that the word translated as “wickedness”, should better be rendered “injustice” and says, “there is nothing vague about it. It is about hurting people.”³² To make the leap from this abusive behaviour towards young slave boys to *all* consensual, same-sex sexual activity is to make a very big jump and one that I would argue is very hard to justify.³³

²⁸ Hays, *Moral*, 382.

²⁹ Jonathan A. Linebaugh, “Wisdom of Solomon and Romans 1:18-2:5: God's Wrath against All,” in *Reading Romans in Context* (ed. John K. Goodrich & Jason Maston Ben C. Blackwell; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 44.

³⁰ Gushee, *Changing*, 86. He also puts forward an alternative, although equally abusive context of the passage, suggesting that it could refer to the well-known deprivation of the Roman Imperial court, particularly under Caligula who was known for his perverse, violent and oppressive sexual behaviour (88) and who was murdered during which his genitals were stabbed, which could make sense of the statement, “they have suffered the due penalty they deserve” (Rom 1:27).

³¹ Vines, *Gay Christian*, 31,32.

³² Ruden, *Paul*, 69.

³³ This would be like seeing the rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13) as an argument against heterosexual sex.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:10.

I have chosen to deal with these two passages together as they are very similar and raise the same questions:

“Don’t fool yourselves. Those who ... are *malakoi*, or *arsenokoitai*, ... will inherit the Kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:9,10).³⁴

“The law is for people who are ... *arsenokoitai*... or who do anything else that contradicts the wholesome teaching” (1 Timothy 1:10).

According to Gushee, the translation of *malakoi* into English, “range[s] wildly,” but, “the word literally means ‘soft’ and is used elsewhere in the New Testament *only* to describe the soft or fine clothing worn by those who are rich.”³⁵ Hart states that “a man who is *malakos* [is] ‘soft’ – in any number of opprobrious senses: self-indulgent, dainty, cowardly, luxuriant, morally or physically weak [and that to] take it to mean the passive partner in male homoerotic acts ... is an unwarranted position.” He translates the word as “feckless sensualists,”³⁶ and, in a very similar vein, Dale Martin translates the word as “self-indulgent, sexually undisciplined, luxurious living.”³⁷ Given that the passive partner was essentially raped, and would lose all standing (even possibly inheritance) and was normally a minor, the idea that Paul would be addressing them is almost absurd, as it would be rebuking the victim.

Goddard states that, “there is strong evidence Paul coins his original term *arsenokoitai* from the Levitical prohibition about ‘lying with a man’ and so intends it to be comprehensive.”³⁸ Gushee agrees that “Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 contain the terms *arsenos and koiten*,” and states that, “many scholars find the linguistic parallel or connection conclusive evidence as to Paul’s source and meaning, even though there is *no evidence that it has ever been done before* [emphasis mine].”³⁹ This is something that Hart echoes and then cites “one known occurrence in the sixth

³⁴ As Gushee points out (*Changing*, 77) it is interesting that the list in 1 Corinthians 6, includes greedy people, cheats and drunkards and yet the only one that seems to be focussed on today is the *homosexual* part, even to the extent that the 80% of evangelical Christians in the US vehemently support a president who *boasts* about his greed, how he has cheated the IRS and his sexual immorality, while vehemently opposing homosexuality.

³⁵ Gushee, *Changing*, 75.

³⁶ Hart, *New Testament*, 327.

³⁷ Dale Martin, *Sex and the Single Saviour: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 37-50, cited in Gushee, *Changing*, 75.

³⁸ Goddard, *Homosexuality*, 12.

³⁹ Gushee, *Changing*, 76.

century AD of penance being described for a man who committed *arsenokoiteia* upon his wife (sodomy, presumably),” but adds that this still does not help us grasp Paul’s meaning. He notes the Clementine Vulgate translates it as “users of male concubines,” and “Luther’s German Bible as, paedophiles.”⁴⁰ Once again, given the context and the culture, it is hard to see that Paul is addressing anything other than the injustice of the abuse of young boys.

Overall, the three passages in the New Testament seem to mean something very specific, that is not at all what we understand today as homosexuality, but rather something far more exploitative and sinister. This is utterly contrary to the good news of Jesus, and Ruden notes, “Christ, the only son of God, gave his body to save mankind. What greater contrast could there be to the tradition of using a weaker body for selfish pleasure or power a trip.”⁴¹

Creation and Science

If I have achieved anything thus far, it is to argue the case that the Bible does not, in fact, talk about what we understand as homosexuality, and that it requires, what I would consider, an unjustifiable leap to make these passages mean what the “traditionalists” claim. However, this is all irrelevant if the creation account can be shown to unequivocally state that heterosexual marriage is the only permissible coupling, which, on the face of it, is exactly what it does say. However, I want to explore this more carefully, in the context of recent scientific findings and, while I absolutely agree with Goddard’s assertion that, “scientific findings alone cannot determine Christian moral teaching,”⁴² I also think that science *can* explain things that the Bible does not and thus cause us to question some assumptions. For example, very few Christians would argue that the earth is flat and is supported by pillars to stop us from falling into the waters, or that the sky is a hammered dome with doors to let rain through, and yet this is *precisely* what Genesis 1 describes.

⁴⁰ Hart, *New Testament*, 327, 328. He notes, as I have stated before, that “it would not mean ‘homosexual’ in the modern sense... [because] the ancient world possessed no such concept.” He translates *arsenokoitai* as “catamite,” as he says that, “the most common and readily available form of sexual activity was a master’s or patron’s exploitation of young male slaves.

⁴¹ Ruden, *Paul*, 71.

⁴² Goddard, *Homosexuality*, 17. I would like to suggest here that the current “traditionalist” view was entirely shaped by science. It was psychology that shaped the understanding of people having a sexual orientation in the mid-19th century and thus changed the entire ethical debate (see footnote 6).

Scientific discoveries have shown us that the Ancient Near East view of the cosmos is not correct. Does this in any way diminish Genesis 1? Not at all, because the *purpose* is to show the place of YHWH in all of this and the place of humanity in the order of things, and the writer has done so using the contemporary description of how the world was understood.

If science brings into question the ANE worldview *assumptions* of Genesis 2, then this does not nullify or reduce the power of the scriptures or the point that they make. The writer is ascribing divine meaning to what he sees around him - the role of humanity and the fact that the nature of YHWH is reflected in both male and female. However, advances in science mean that genetic studies have revealed that this is not as straightforward as it seems and that “1-2% of people do not fit into this dichotomy” and that “a certain % of children are born with ambiguous genitalia,”⁴³ as a result of “genetic variation or chance development.”⁴⁴

In response, Goddard makes the assertion that “there are two sexes... to say otherwise has no basis in Scripture or Christian tradition,”⁴⁵ but I would respond by saying that there is no Scriptural basis for the earth being spherical, but it is still true. It does not in any way diminish the point of Genesis 2 (or 1). We are *all* created in the image of God who loves us and who is reflected in humanity *as a whole*. Male and female are not meant to survive in isolation from one another, but at the same time, we cannot limit ourselves to the western view of the nuclear family with 2.4 children, when throughout history and throughout the *world* family is a broad collection of generations living in community together, male and female and communally reflecting God.

We cannot dogmatically claim that the ANE view of humanity that we see framing the Bible is correct and modern science is wrong. We have to see science

⁴³ Nadia Nongzai, “Scientifically how many sexes/genders are there?,” *Quora*, 20 Sept 2016, <<https://www.quora.com/Scientifically-how-many-sexes-genders-are-there>> (5 June 2018).

⁴⁴ Claire Ainsworth, “Sex Redefined,” *Nature*, 18 Feb 2015, <<https://www.nature.com/news/sex-redefined-1.16943>> (5 June 2018).

⁴⁵ Goddard, *Homosexuality*, 21. but I would respond by saying that there is no Scriptural basis for the earth being spherical, but it is still true. It does not in any way diminish the point of Genesis 2 (or 1). We are *all* created in the image of God who loves us and who is reflected in humanity *as a whole*. Male and female are not meant to survive in isolation from one another, but at the same time, we cannot limit ourselves to the western view of the nuclear family with 2.4 children, when throughout history and throughout the *world* family is a broad collection of generations living in community together, male and female and communally reflecting God.

as shining a light onto the cultural context of the scriptures and readjust our assumptions accordingly and, as such, we also cannot ignore that science is increasingly identifying the genetic influences on sexuality,⁴⁶ and the, “evidence that sexual orientation is not a ‘lifestyle choice.’”⁴⁷ While many (in what I consider a misguided attempt to ‘defend’ the Bible) are tempted to claim that, “gene finding efforts have issues,” the reality is that, “these are technical and not catastrophic.”⁴⁸ Is the real issue that we, as Christians are fearful of readjusting our understanding of scripture because we are discovering that some of what we had assumed was divine was, in fact, cultural assumptions?⁴⁹ This is, of course, precisely what happened with Christians’ perspective on slavery and the treatment of the Jews.

The last thing that is healthy, is for us to declare open season on the Bible but we must recognise that, while science should not inform moral teaching, it *can* and *must* help us to recognise cultural influences in the writing of the scriptures and thus better inform exegesis. In the light of all of this, can we still view Genesis 2 as the last word on the subject? We certainly must view it through the filter that not all humans are created in neat categories and therefore we can see that, while it describes the *norm* for humanity, it is not necessarily the *only* way.⁵⁰ Again, I cannot see any conflict with the meaning of the scripture as it changes nothing of our value or relationship with God, which I argue is the thrust of the passage.

Jesus

Surely, what really matters is what Jesus says on homosexuality, but he is conspicuously silent on the whole subject. However, for me, what has become the key, is what he says when asked about the greatest commandment:

⁴⁶ Gary W. Beecham et al Alan R. Sanders, “Genome-Wide Association Study of Male Sexual Orientation,” *Nature*, 7 Dec 2017, <<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-017-15736-4>> (5 June 2018).

⁴⁷ Andy Coghlan, “What do the new “gay genes” tell us about sexual orientation?,” *New Scientist*, 7 dec 2017, <<https://www.newscientist.com/article/2155810-what-do-the-new-gay-genes-tell-us-about-sexual-orientation/>> (5 June 2018), quoting Dean Hamer at the US National Institute for Health.

⁴⁸ Qazi Rahman, “‘Gay Genes’: Science is on the right track, we’re born this way. Let’s deal with it.,” *The Guardian*, 24 July 2015, <<https://www.theguardian.com/science/blog/2015/jul/24/gay-genes-science-is-on-the-right-track-were-born-this-way-lets-deal-with-it>> (5 June 2018).

⁵⁰ Dr Brad Jersak, in an email to me (15th November 2017), suggests that, “minority variants express God’s/creation’s love for variety... That is, in creation, a variant is not de facto deviant or a perversion of God’s good created order / design.”

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:41)

If the entire moral teaching of the Bible hangs on these two statements, then it stands to reason that any sin will be in violation of one or both. If the scriptures that I have examined, mean what I have argued, then it is very clear to see how they contravene what Jesus says here. If, however, they are about a loving, same-sex, covenantal relationship, then it is very hard to see how they in *any* way infringe on this, which further pushes the question, whether they *can* mean that.

Conclusion

As I attempt to pull all this together,⁵¹ I want to go back to what I said at the start, that I think the onus is on good exegesis rather than arguing against the status quo. What I have tried to do is to show that, when this is done, the scriptures used by ‘traditionalists’ to argue against homosexuality, are actually addressing injustice and idolatry and in my view, should not be used this way. In addition, I think that we must reassess our black and white categories, because science is becoming less and less easy for us to ignore and evidence suggests that God did not just create us *all* male and female and heterosexual. We must respond to this reality in a sensible way.

What I have tried to show here is that the Bible is *silent* on same-sex marriage, which is not, of course, an argument *for* it. However, it is an argument that there is nothing to say it is *wrong*. Some may respond by saying that just because the Bible is silent on something does not make it okay, but the problem with this view is that we should not drive cars or use computers⁵² on that basis!

What has changed my opinion, from what it has been for my entire Christian life, is when I put it all through the lens of Jesus - particularly Matt 22:41, as discussed above. Love must be the final word on this. I absolutely recognise that there are many who are genuinely loving towards the LGBT community while holding

⁵¹ I am painfully aware that, because of word restrictions, I have not addressed the issue as it relates to the Age to Come. I have been willing to leave this out because Jesus teaches that there will be *no* marriage at the resurrection (Matt 22:23-33) and so, arguably, this does not really inform the debate.

⁵² And this essay would have taken a *whole* lot longer to write.

the opposite view to me, even arguing that the loving thing to do is to lead LGBT people away from this behaviour. Sadly, there is still angry, bigoted fear-mongering in the church, where we hear, “just because you live in a ‘red state’ does not mean that this will not affect you,” or “don’t panic,” from pastors and theologians.⁵³ For me, as a pastor, I would rather be wrong by *trying* to love, than right because of blind principles.⁵⁴ Would I want to be treated as though I am inherently ‘defective’ in my make-up, that nothing can be done,⁵⁵ and I should just live with it, always knowing that I am ‘broken’? Clearly not. And therefore, I should not inflict that on others (Matt 7:12).

I do not suppose that many (or any) will be swayed by my arguments and there are many far better scholars, who are far better men and women than I, who have strong arguments against my view, but after three years of wrestling with this I finally feel comfortable with this position.

I will end with this one bold statement; If same-sex marriage is wrong, then, as far as I can tell, it is the *only* sin in the whole of scripture that has *no* victim.

⁵³ (Dr Russell Moore, “#7 Homosexuality and Same Sex Marriage,” *TVC Resources*, 6 Mar 2015, <<https://www.tvcresources.net/resource-library/podcasts/7-homosexuality-and-same-sex-marriage>> (4 June 2018)).

⁵⁴ 1 Corinthians 13:1-13.

⁵⁵ “The Total failure of the ‘ex-gay’ movement, as evidenced by Exodus International’s closure and apology... in 2013 and its leader Alan Chambers’ statement the year before that ‘99.9%’ of the people they had tried to help had not experienced a change in their sexual orientation- has destroyed the plausibility of such efforts.” (Gushee, *Changing*, 27.)

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