

Is Jesus Okay With Homosexuality? (6 of 6)

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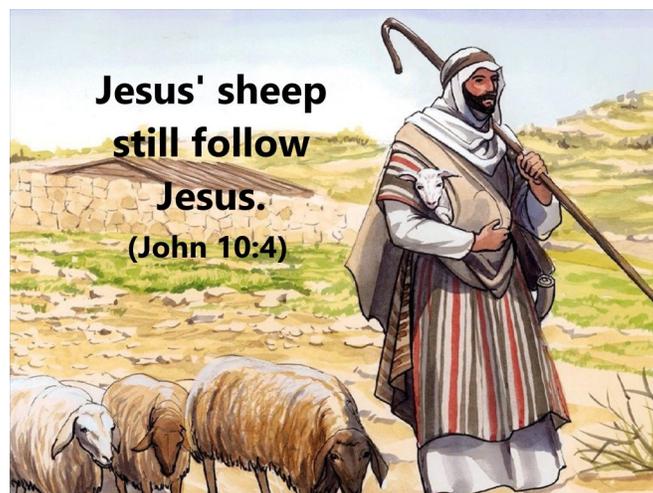
Do Christians today need to agree with the historical Jesus on the question of homosexual activity? In my last post I presented this conclusion: *the total available historical evidence fits only with the hypothesis that Jesus—the historical Jesus of Nazareth—did not approve of homosexual behavior.* Nearly all Christians everywhere have always believed this. But should Christians today feel bound to affirm the sexual teachings of rabbi Jesus who lived nearly 2000 years ago in ancient Judea?

Could Jesus have been mistaken about homosexuality? Hiding his true beliefs? Awaiting a time when further revelation would be possible?

William Witt offers an informative article about various “attempts to reconcile the endorsing of same-sex practices with the authority of Scripture.”¹ Witt identifies three ways people try to do this:

- The first approach (“selectivist”) argues that the Bible is mistaken on some matters that reflect ancient social values, and that the more “positive” themes in the Bible call us to embrace liberation and love.
- A second approach (“revisionist”) argues that “Scripture does not condemn loving committed same-sex relations, and loving committed relationships are the only kind of sexual relationships the modern advocate is interested in endorsing.”²
- A third approach (“ecclesial dispensation”) argues that “although the Scriptures prohibit same-sex activity, nonetheless, the Church is free not to be bound by these proscriptions in the same way that it has recognized that it is not bound by other prohibitions in the Bible.”³

Though I won’t follow Witt’s three categories, I will explore some of these ideas in this post.



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Is Jesus Okay With Homosexual Activity?

What if Jesus was indeed okay with homosexual behavior, but could not say so because he lived in a homophobic society? Or, to suggest a similar possibility, what if Jesus knew that homosexual activity was not acceptable yet, under the Law of Moses, but would be after the new covenant was inaugurated by his death and resurrection?

Jesus did indeed remain secretive about some beliefs that he knew would be explosive for his Jewish hearers. A famous example that scholars talk about is his “Messianic secret”—how the Synoptic Gospels show that Jesus avoided publicly saying that he was the Messiah. This parallel falls flat, however, for several reasons. First, Jesus clearly told his inner circle that he was the Messiah (Matt. 16:16-17). Second, even in public he used “code language” that was later understood to mean much the same thing (“Son of Man”; cf. Dan. 7:13). Neither is true, however, of any supposed secret belief of Jesus that homosexual behavior was okay.

On ethical matters, in fact, we often see Jesus openly challenging the assumptions and practices of the Jewish religious leaders. On some points he indicated they were too strict (washings before meals, Matt. 15:1-20; Sabbath laws, Matt. 12:1-8). At other times he called for greater strictness (divorce, Matt. 19:1-9; use of the temple, Matt. 21:12-17). If Jesus had thought the Jewish leaders were too legalistic (cf. Matt 23:23-24), too oppressive (cf. Matt. 23:4), or too hypocritical (cf. John 8:7) regarding their stance against homosexual activity, he could have said so.

The same evidence weighs, too, against the idea that homosexual activity is now acceptable under Jesus’ new covenant—as if Jesus “is” okay with homosexual behavior now though he “was” not then. Though Jesus apparently lived faithfully under the Law of Moses (cf. Rom. 15:8), he left hints that its era was almost over. He challenged the Jewish animosity toward Gentiles (Luke 4:24-28) and foretold their full inclusion (John 10:16; Matt. 28:19). His teachings laid the groundwork for eliminating at least two of the primary boundary markers of ancient Jews—food laws and the Sabbath⁴—and his apostles soon understood that the third—circumcision—was also lifted, at least for Gentile converts.⁵ When it comes to sexual ethics, however, Jesus left no hints that they would loosen under his new covenant, and his apostles came to no such conclusions.

When we examine Scripture as a whole, there is no trajectory from rigidity toward laxity regarding sexual ethics. True, there is at least one OT sexual restriction that may not be in force under the new covenant—the prohibition on sex during a woman’s menstrual period (Lev. 20:18), which may have hinged on ceremonial blood taboos. And the maximum temporal penalty for sexual sin changed. Christians no longer inflict the death penalty but rather, in fulfillment of the death penalty, “hand over to Satan” those within the church who persist in unrepentant sin (1 Cor. 5:5; cf. esp. 1 Cor. 5:13 with Deut. 22:21-24).

Being handed over to Satan is arguably more serious than being put to death, however, and the general pattern of the NT is that sexual sin is taken even more seriously than in the OT. Jesus ratcheted up sexual standards regarding lust (Matt. 5:27-30) and returned the question of divorce to its creation pattern (Matt. 19:1-9). The OT pattern of God largely overlooking polygamy is challenged in the NT, so that being a “one-woman man” is now the standard for a godly man (1 Tim. 3:2).⁶

Jesus’ apostles repeatedly warned against all sorts of sexual activity outside of male-female monogamous marriage. DeYoung makes this point clearly:

It cannot be overstated how seriously the Bible treats the sin of sexual immorality.

Sexual sin is never considered *adiaphora*, a matter of indifference, an agree-to-disagree issue like food laws or holy days (Rom. 14:1–15:7). To the contrary, sexual immorality is precisely the sort of sin that characterizes those who will not enter the kingdom of heaven. There are at least eight vice lists in the New Testament (Mark 7:21–22; Rom. 1:24–31; 13:13; 1Cor. 6:9–10; Gal. 5:19–21; Col. 3:5–9; 1Tim. 1:9–10; Rev. 21:8), and sexual immorality is included in every one of these. In fact, in seven of the eight lists there are multiple references to sexual immorality (e.g., impurity, sensuality, orgies, men who practice homosexuality), and in most of the passages some kind of sexual immorality heads the lists. ⁷

The pattern regarding homosexual activity in particular is similar. William Webb, in his influential book *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals*, suggests eighteen criteria for determining whether a given teaching of Scripture should be applied at “face value” or whether it needs to be reinterpreted through a “redemptive-movement framework” before we can apply it correctly in our own culture. He argues that, when it comes to slavery, there is a trajectory within the Bible toward greater redemption—a trajectory that should make “the abolition of slavery and its many related injustices... a passionate value of modern Christians.”⁸ Similarly, he argues that the biblical witness regarding women nudges us away from the “hard” forms of patriarchy seen at places in the OT toward a “complementary egalitarian” approach.⁹

Regarding homosexual activity, however, Webb sees no such trajectory. This is what he does see:

Biblical tradition moved the cultural norms on homosexuality from a significant amount of tolerance and acceptance to non-tolerance and non-acceptance within the covenant community... Scripture thus sets a clear direction... on the homosexual issue... **When one comes to the New Testament, there is no softening of the Scripture’s negative assessment of homosexuality found in the Old Testament...** ¹⁰

The women texts, like the slavery texts, are generally “less restrictive” or “softening” relative to the broader culture, while the homosexuality texts are “more restrictive” or “hardening” relative to the surrounding environment... ¹¹

We have no biblical texts that suggest that “there is neither homosexual nor heterosexual in Christ.” **Nor do we find any biblical text that suggests that homosexuality might be acceptable in some form or another...** ¹²

Virtually all of the criteria applicable to the issue suggest to varying degrees that the biblical prohibitions regarding homosexuality, even within a covenant form, should be maintained today. There is no significant dissonance within the biblical data. ¹³

Webb’s explanation of *why* the biblical writers opposed homosexual behavior is also worth noting. Their basic reason does not permit any ethical change or development:

The issue that the biblical writers have with homosexuality is not really about covenant or the lack of it; it is not really about the equality or lack of equality between the two individuals. The deepest issue for the biblical authors was the breaking of sexual boundaries between male and female. **Until God redesigns the physical/sexual construction of male and female, this distinction or boundary continues to influence our contemporary world.** ¹⁴

Some claim that “sexual orientation is a new concept, one the Christian tradition hasn’t addressed,” and that Paul “doesn’t have long-term, loving same-sex relationships in view.”¹⁵ Therefore, it is argued, the Bible does not speak directly to our modern homosexual experience. But “Paul witnessed around him *both* abusive relationships of power or money *and* examples of ‘genuine love’ between males.”¹⁶ He also, like other ancient writers of the time, was familiar with what we today call homosexual orientation. Ancient explanations for the causes of sexual orientation were varied and debated, underscoring that the concept itself was well known.

Forston and Grams present abundant historical evidence for the following claim:

Scholars who contended several decades ago that only in modern times did people discover the concept of orientation have been proven wrong, as the evidence has accumulated over time... There are clear examples of adult males and females involved in homosexual relationships in antiquity. These people did not just perform homosexual acts. Their passionate love of one another, their long-term same-sex desire, and even, on occasion, their marriage or cohabitation with one another are discussed in the sources we have. There is, in short, nothing distinct about contemporary conversations concerning homosexual orientation.¹⁷

And again, even if sexual orientation were a new idea, the basic issue the biblical writers had with homosexual behavior (“the breaking of sexual boundaries between male and female”) does not allow for any such loopholes or future ethical development.

The pattern of biblical evidence is consistent and strong: *Neither Jesus nor any biblical author imagined that any form of homosexual behavior is ever ethical. Nor did they leave any clues hinting that they imagined it would ever become acceptable in some future context. In short, it is contrary to the biblical witness to propose that Jesus is okay with homosexual behavior today.*

Must We Agree With Jesus?

This, then, is the crucial question: Must Christians agree with Jesus about homosexual behavior? Amazingly, an increasing number of professing Christians are answering *no*.

A variety of explanations are offered. Many, such as Roman Catholic NT professor Luke Timothy Johnson, note that Christians have never followed Jesus perfectly in other matters—so why make such a fuss about not following what he said about homosexual behavior?

Christianity as actually practiced has never lived in precise accord with the Scriptures. War stands in tension with Jesus’ command of nonviolence, while divorce, even under another name (annulment), defies Jesus’ clear prohibition.¹⁸

Such an argument is embarrassingly fatalistic. Why not try to obey *all* of Jesus' teachings ([Matt. 28:20](#)) instead?

Some argue that Jesus was just plain wrong—that he was “a product of his time and his culture” who was “conditioned to believe that Gentiles were dogs” ([Matt. 15:22-26](#)).¹⁹ The Gospels do indeed contain hints that there were limits on the earthly Jesus' knowledge, such as Jesus' statement that he didn't know the time of his own coming ([Matt. 24:36](#)). But there are no hints that anyone—Jesus, his apostles, or the Gospel writers—believed that Jesus' ethical teaching was fallible. On the contrary, the risen Jesus insisted that his apostles must teach “all nations... all that I have commanded”—and this because he possessed “all authority” ([Matt. 28:18-20](#)).

Once Jesus is seen as fallible on matters of ethics, then other authorities are given the deciding vote. Many appeal to experience—whether human experience or what they consider to be their experience of God's Spirit speaking a new word. L.T. Johnson again:

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...

If the letter of Scripture cannot find room for the activity of the living God in the transformation of human lives, then trust and obedience must be paid to the living God rather than to the words of Scripture.²⁰

Such an approach pits “the living God” against Jesus. It is hard to square with the author of Hebrew's foundational claim that “in these last days he [God] has spoken to us by his Son” ([Heb. 1:2](#)). Worse, it runs aground on Jesus' own claim:

The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; **the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.** For I have not spoken on my own authority, but **the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak.** And I know that his commandment is eternal life. ([John 12:48-50](#))

It is Jesus' own word (including his word on adultery, *πορνεία*, and *ἀσέλγεια*) that will judge us on the last day—the word he spoke by command of the eternal Father—not some subsequent word that someone professes hearing from the Spirit.

Richard Hays, in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, draws “implications for Christian ethics” from on the life and teachings of the historical Jesus:

If God really did raise Jesus from the dead, everything that Jesus taught and exemplified is vindicated by a God more powerful than death. **He must therefore be seen as the bearer of the truth and the definitive paradigm for obedience to God.**²¹

At this point I cannot help slipping briefly into preacher mode:

Know that if you reject the historical, biblical Jesus to create a Jesus of your own imagination, then you have also forfeited

the historical, biblical salvation and must create one on your own.

But how can you be sure you have the real Jesus if you have adapted his portrait in the Gospels to suit the winds of the twenty-first century? And how can you be confident of real salvation unless you have submitted to the real Jesus?

Do not attempt to fashion your own Jesus unless you are confident you can also fashion your own salvation. Do not reject the terms for eternal life that the biblical Jesus laid out unless you are ready to forfeit the eternal life he offered. Do not imagine you can claim the love the historical Jesus offered unless you are willing to enter through the narrow gate he described. Do not imagine you can change his paradigms of love and truth and still enter his kingdom.

History matters. Who Jesus really was and what he really taught, as preserved the very best historical accounts we possess—the documents of the New Testament—is eternally crucial. On the last day, you will not stand before a Jesus of your own imagination. You will stand before the same Jesus who walked Judea and Galilee in the first century, and you will be judged by the word that he spoke then, not by some revision of that word that you now prefer.

If you think you are wiser than the ancient, historic, narrow-minded Jewish Jesus of the Gospels, then he will be too wise accept you into his kingdom. If you reject the ethics of the Jesus who rose from the dead, then don't imagine he will grant you the privilege of sharing in his resurrection.

If you come to the historical, biblical Jesus only to deny who he really was before the world around you, then the historical, biblical Jesus will deny you before his Father on the last day.

But if you come to the real Jesus on his terms, submitting to his historical portrait in the Gospels, then you will find the real Jesus immeasurably meek and gentle of heart, with a welcome warmer than you could ever hope for, a love greater than any of us deserve.

Yes, we must agree with Jesus. If our Christianity is not rooted in history, then it has no future, either.

What, Then, Is the Loving Thing To Do?

It is clear to me that history and theology agree: we are building with straw if we argue that Christians today can rightly affirm homosexual activity. Historical evidence shows that Jesus did not affirm homosexual behavior and that the pattern of Scripture consistently contradicts it. And from a theological perspective, the words of Jesus (preserved in historical accounts) do not allow us to affirm what he denied. Jesus' own theological understanding of his own authority forces any honest follower of his to stay true to the ethics he taught.

What, then, should a faithful follower of Jesus do? I suggest two responses.

First, we should hold fast to what followers of Jesus have always believed about homosexual behavior. Here the book *Unchanging Witness* by Fortson and Grams is incredibly helpful. They devote 137 pages to discussing what the church from start to present has taught about homosexuality. Nearly half those pages consist of lengthy quotes from primary sources. (To read excerpts from those quotes, **[see the appendix at the end of this post.](#)**)

Given the evidence from church history, Fortson and Grams are well able to make the following claims:

Both the teaching of the Bible and the teaching of Christian tradition have uniformly taught the same thing: homosexual practice is sinful. We agree with Saint Vincent of Lerins (AD 434) in his approach to determining heresy in the church. Heresy is that which is neither biblical nor universally taught... We believe the evidence is clear: **both Scripture and the church universal (“everywhere, always, by all”) have taught that homosexual practice is sin. Those who teach otherwise are teaching heresy....**

The issue is not, after all, whether the Bible addresses homosexual practice: it does. It is not whether diverse interpretations on this issue have existed in the history of the church: they have not.... Both Scripture and the church have clearly and consistently said the same thing. **The issue comes down to this: the authority of Scripture and the relevance of the church’s teaching....** That is the point at which some in the church in the West are dividing from the rest of the church universal, from the teaching of the church in other centuries, and from what must indeed be considered the teaching of all Christians.²²

“The teaching of all Christians?” From within the echo chamber of our own generation such a statement can sound jarring and unbelievable. Isolated individual congregations and church leaders have occasionally publicly affirmed homosexuality for over a century. Now non-denominational pro-gay organizations are multiplying within Western churches, even within evangelical ones. A growing list of self-professed or former evangelicals have come out in support of homosexual relationships as well—people such as Matthew Vines, Justin Lee, Mark Achtemeier, Jim Wallis, David Gushee, Brian McLaren, Rob Bell, Danny Cortez, Jen Hatmaker, Rachel Held Evans, Joshua Harris, and more.

Yet the fact remains that only a tiny minority of today’s professing Christians belong to denominations that affirm homosexual behavior. According to the best evidence I can find, not until about the past fifty years did *any* denomination *ever* affirm homosexual behavior. The Metropolitan Community Church began in 1968 specifically around the cause of affirming homosexuality and “is comprised mostly of former Protestants and Catholics who could not find affirmation of their gay lifestyle in traditional Christian churches.”²³

In the early 1970s, a growing number of leaders in many mainline Protestant denominations began bucking the official positions of their denominations by blessing gay ordination or same-sex unions. Not until 1978, however, did the United Presbyterian Church in the USA (today part of PCUSA) officially welcome practicing gays and lesbians into church membership, while still restricting them from ordination.²⁴ Not until 1985 did the General Synod of the United Church of Christ adopt an “Open and Affirming” resolution on homosexuality.²⁵ As recently as 1991 the General Convention of the Episcopal Church in the United States of America “reaffirmed its historic position on gay ordination,” and not until 2005 was the denomination suspended from the larger Anglican Church because they persisted in including “sexually active homosexuals in all ministries of the church.”²⁶ Only in 2007 did the Evangelical Lutheran Church in American “finally” encourage its leaders not to discipline ministers who were in a “mutual, chaste, and faithful committed same-gender relationship.”²⁷ The United Methodist Church is currently badly torn over the issue of homosexual relationships, but still today their official denominational position is that “the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.”²⁸

German theologian Wolfgang Pannenburg warned in 1996 that **any church that would cease “to treat homosexual activity as a departure from the biblical norm... would stand no longer on biblical grounds but against the unequivocal witness of Scripture.”** It **“would cease to be the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.”**²⁹

Panneburg's claim is, on a quantitative level, simply true, whether measured by the church of the past or the present. The vast majority of Christians alive today, especially in places where Christianity is growing fastest, strongly affirm the Church's historic position on homosexual behavior.

Will this consensus hold? I do not know. But even if it doesn't, we will always have the witness of nearly 2000 years of church history. Rightly or wrongly, the Church has argued for centuries over questions such as the authority of the Pope, infant baptism, whether Christians can use the sword, gender roles in the church, interpretations of biblical prophecy, and even the humanity and divinity of Jesus. But almost none of these same Christians ever had a moment's difficulty understanding God's will regarding homosexual behavior.

The historic rejection by Christians of homosexual activity has been consistent and uncompromising. The historic responses of professing Christians to homosexual behavior, however, have varied. They range from the utterly tragic—castration or even at times death—to the exemplary—such as some pastoral advice found in modern Roman Catholic and Orthodox sources.

As an example of the latter, consider these words from Orthodox theologian Thomas Hopko:

The homosexual Christian is called to a particularly rigorous battle. His or her struggle is an especially ferocious one. It is not made any easier by the mindless, truly demonic hatred of those who despise and ridicule those who carry this painful and burdensome cross; nor by the mindless, equally demonic affirmation of homosexual activity by its misguided advocates and enablers.³⁰

Hopko's words lead naturally to my second suggested response for those who want to follow Jesus.

Second, we should offer "truth in love" (Eph. 4:15) about homosexuality to our neighbor. Here is Webb again:

So the real question is, what is the loving thing to do? If a particular behavior incites God's anger to the point where habitual participants are susceptible to banishment from his kingdom, then what is the loving thing to do? In this case, it should be obvious. The loving thing to do would be to rescue the individual from destruction (negatively) and to invite them into the glorious kingdom of Christ (positively). The continued practice of bestiality and adultery, as with sustained homosexual activity, places one's participation in the kingdom at risk... If some action... has the potential for kingdom banishment, let alone divine displeasure, then loving my neighbor becomes a painful and tension-charged action. Silence is not love. A "live and let live" distancing is not love. **Loving one's neighbor in this instance means caring for their entire well being—temporal and beyond—even if such an act of interactive love has an extremely painful and straining side.**³¹

In that vein, I want to end with a handful of pastoral comments followed by a list of additional resources.

Pastoral comment #1: If you experience same-sex desires and perhaps have even been acting on them, know this: Jesus loves you! He, too, battled the weakness of his own human flesh (Matt. 26:41; Luke 22:44). He knows your longing for intimate relationship. You are not alone. You are not less-than. Jesus wants you to

experience his love. If this is a message you long to hear, please **listen to the conversation my friend Asher Witmer recently had with his new friend Ken Brubacher, titled “Does Jesus Love Homosexuals?”** Prepare to be encouraged as Ken tells his story of being transformed by Jesus’ love!

Pastoral comment #2: “Getting saved” from homosexuality is not the same as becoming heterosexual.

Heterosexuals need saving just as surely as homosexuals do. The creation standard for ethical sex is not merely heterosexual orientation, nor even loving heterosexual relationships, but monogamous, loving, till-death-do-us-part heterosexual marriage—and almost every post-puberty person alive has fallen short. Further, “getting saved” from homosexuality does not necessarily or merely mean achieving a heterosexual orientation. Rather, as with people of all sexual experiences, it means living in line with Paul’s bracing and comforting words: “The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body” (1 Cor. 6:13).

Pastoral comment #3: Each of us must settle this question in our minds: Who or what do I trust as my basis for determining truth?

If I live by the “truth” of my body, I will sacrifice the Lord. If I live by the truth of the Lord, I will present my body as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1). If I live by the “truth” of my body—that wondrous, insatiable, selfish, sickly sack of fickle, fading flesh—my actions will declare that I do not believe the Lord’s promise of eternally glorious resurrection bodies for his children. If I live by the truth of the Lord and his resurrection promise, I will plant my current dying body as a seed in the ground, confident it will spring up as a glorious, imperishable, powerful body when Jesus returns (1 Cor. 15:35-55). Which do you trust? Your body? Or the Lord? The wonderful Christian hope is that, if you trust the Lord, you will find that the Lord is indeed “for the body” (1 Cor. 6:13).

Pastoral comment #4: Church, if your evangelistic message is “God hates you,” then your message is not God’s message.

If your opening salvo to people with same-sex desires is “God hates fags,”³² then please don’t claim Jesus’ blessing when you are “hated by all” (Matt. 10:22). We read of Jesus that “sinners were all drawing near to hear him” (Luke 15:1)—this even as he called them to repentance (Luke 5:32). Eventually most sinners rejected Jesus, but not before many of them had been drawn by his loving invitation. Similarly Paul warned clearly of wrath to come, but emphasized that God’s present stance toward sinners is one of “kindness” (Rom. 2:4-5).³³ God’s children should be rich in kindness, too!

Finally, here are some additional resources on homosexuality that Christians (or those exploring Christianity) may find helpful. Some deal mostly with biblical exegesis, some more with pastoral issues, and some with both.

“The Great Exchange: Same-Sex Attraction,” an excellent overview sermon by Aubrey Spears (audio; manuscript with notes). This mixes exegetical and pastoral concerns well. See also “Male and Female He Created Them: Gender and Gender Dysphoria (audio; manuscript), both part of Spears’ series “[A Better Story: God, Sex, and Human Flourishing.](#)”

“The Bible and Homosexual Practice: An Overview of Some Issues,” an interview with Robert Gagnon, perhaps the foremost expert on homosexuality and the Bible. Gagnon has written [the standard scholarly book](#) on the topic, and [his website is full of helpful resources.](#) (Caveat: Though Gagnon’s scholarship is invaluable, I don’t always identify with his tone or his politics.)

[Unchanging Witness: The Consistent Christian Teaching on Homosexuality in Scripture and Tradition](#), a recent book by Donald S. Fortson III and Rollin G. Grams that I read as my primary preparation for this series. It is solid on biblical exegesis and ancient historical contexts but especially fills a gap by surveying the witness of the church throughout history.

[What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?](#) a more accessible but still solid book by Kevin DeYoung. Here is [a video of a sermon by DeYoung](#) on the same topic. (Note: Recently I was offered a free PDF of DeYoung’s book, I think from the publisher, Crossway, but I can’t find that offer now.)

"Thinking Biblically About Homosexual Practice," a concise talk by Dr. Elaine Phillips at Gordon College, MA. Easy to read. Compassionate. Both exegetical and pastoral.

"A Christian Perspective on Homosexuality," an article by William Lane Craig. This is a good addition to this list for two reasons: (a) it includes a philosophical discussion of finding the basis of right and wrong, and (b) it surveys recent medical evidence of the damaging effects of homosexual lifestyles.

"The Hermeneutics of Same-Sex Practice: A Summary and Evaluation," an article by William G. Witt. This is a bit dense, but is a helpful analysis of some ways that people try to deal with biblical evidence while affirming homosexual practice.

The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into Christian Faith, a book by Rosaria C. Butterfield. I found this autobiography (by a former lesbian) moving and insightful. Here is an interview with Butterfield ("Should Evangelicals Evolve on Homosexuality?") that is also helpful. Other autobiographies I have not yet read include Gay Girl, Good God by Jackie Hill Perry and Out of a Far Country: A Gay Son's Journey to God, A Broken Mother's Search for Hope, by Christopher Yuan (son) and Angela Yuan (mother).

"A Gospel for Failures," an article by Matt Moore, written after he left his gay lifestyle and just before he married John Piper's daughter last month. "Humility requires that I not seek to make myself look better than Jonathan Merritt described me in the Washington Post, because the truth is that the public doesn't know the half of how sinful I am....I will, however, defend the truth of the gospel. "

"The Powerful Witness of Same-Sex Attracted Christians," an article by Emily Hallock. "People with same-sex attraction who want to follow Jesus may be among the most important witnesses of our time. They are taking a brave, uncompromising stand for the gospel that requires great personal sacrifice.... The church needs to be there for people like my dad."

I'm sure I've skipped some of your favorite resources, but I wanted to keep this list short and mostly limited to resources I've personally used.

Conclusion

My main goal in writing these posts has been simple but crucial: to convince readers that agreeing with Jesus and affirming homosexual behavior are incompatible. I believe it is intellectually inconsistent and disastrous to the church of Jesus to try to combine the two.

I think you need to make a choice, and I hope with all my heart that you choose Jesus.

The burden that drove me to write this series has been delivered. Where my words have been imperfect, I ask for grace from you and from God. **If you have something to add, please share it in the comments below.**

May the grace of God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ be with each of you. *And may our churches become places where those with homosexual desires find a feast of love and truth!*

Appendix: Witnesses From the Historic Church

The following quotes are an extremely small representation of the evidence shared by Fortson and Grams in their book *Unchanging Witness*. They also provide counter-evidence to claims that medieval vows of spiritual friendship effectively sanctioned homosexual unions.³⁴

Neither fornicators nor male prostitutes nor homosexuals will inherit the kingdom of God.
(Polycarp, *Letter to the Philippians* 5, ca. 155, quoting Paul)

I should suppose the coupling of two males to be a very shameful thing. (Tertullian, *Against the Valentinians* 11, ca. 200)

Offenses which be contrary to nature are everywhere and at all times to be held in detestation and punished; such were those of the Sodomites.... Divine law... hath not so made men that they should in that way abuse one another. (Augustine, *Confessions* 3.8, 397)

If any ordained person has been defiled with the crime of sodomy... let him do penance for ten years, according to the ancient rule. (Pope Gregory III, *Penitential Regulation*, ca. 731-41)

If blasphemy is the worst [crime], I do not know in what way sodomy is better.... While the sons of Israel were led into captivity for blaspheming God and worshipping idols, the Sodomites perished in heavenly fire and sulphur. (Peter Damian, *Book of Gomorrah*, ca. 1048-54)

A man who sins with another man as if with a woman sins bitterly against God and against the union with which God united male and female... And a woman who takes up devilish ways and plays a male role in coupling with another woman is most vile in My sight, and so is she who subjects herself to such a one in this evil deed. (Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* 2.6, 1179)

They [Sodom and Gomorrah] departed from the natural passion and longing of the male for the female, which is implanted into nature by God, and desired what is altogether contrary to nature. Whence comes this perversity? Undoubtedly from Satan... (Martin Luther, "Lecture on Genesis," ca. 1535-45)

Thus it is written by Paul: ...Adulterers, whoremongers, perverts, effeminate... will not inherit the kingdom of God unless they repent. (Menno Simons, *The New Birth*, 1537)

He [Paul] brings as the first example, the dreadful crime of unnatural lust... they not only abandoned themselves to beastly lusts, but became degraded beyond the beast, since they reversed the whole order of nature.... Paul... calls those disgraceful passions, which... redound to the dishonouring of God. (John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, 1540)

Divine law... excludes from the kingdom of God not only unbelieving, but the faithful also (who are) fornicators, adulterers, effeminate, liars with mankind... and all others who commit deadly sins. (*Council of Trent*, 6th Session, XV, 1545-63)

The seventh commandment forbids: adultery, fornication, rape, incest, sodomy and all unnatural desires. (*Westminster Larger Catechism*, 1648)

In Sacred Scripture they [homosexual relations] are... presented as the sad consequence of rejecting God... This judgment of Scripture does not of course permit us to conclude that all those who suffer from this anomaly are personally responsible for it, but it does attest to the fact that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered and can in no case be approved. (*Persona Humana*, 1975, approved by Pope Paul VI)

The position of the Orthodox Church toward homosexuality has been expressed... beginning with the very first centuries of Orthodox ecclesiastical life... The Orthodox Church believes that homosexuality should be treated by society as an immoral and dangerous perversion and by religion as a sinful failure. (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, 1976)

The moral prohibitions against homosexual behavior in the Old Testament are pointedly repeated in the New Testament... We must hold no malice toward, nor fear of, homosexuals—such attitudes are not of Christ. At the same time we must not condone sexual behavior that God has defined as sinful. (Assemblies of God, 2001)

As black preachers, we are progressive in our social consciousness, and in our political ideology as an oppressed people we will often be against the status quo, but our first call is to hear the voice of God in our Scriptures, and where an issue clearly contradicts our understanding of Scripture, we have to apply that understanding. (Gregory G. Groover Sr., African Methodist Episcopal pastor in Boston, explaining why AME preachers had just voted at the AME national convention in 2004 to forbid ministers from performing marriage or civil union ceremonies for same-sex couples)

Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6, and other passages throughout the Bible specifically identify homosexual behavior as sinful... In this area of our lives [moral purity] as in all others, God call[s] us to be obedient to his revealed moral rules, in no small part because these moral laws are given for our own good. (National Association of Evangelicals, 2012, still current)

The sacrament of marriage consists in the union of a man and a woman... Acting upon any sexual attraction outside of sacramental marriage, whether the attraction is heterosexual or homosexual, alienates us from God. (Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United

States, 2013)

Homosexuality is not a “valid alternative lifestyle.” The Bible condemns it as sin. It is not, however, unforgivable sin. The same redemption available to all sinners is available to homosexuals. They, too, may become new creations in Christ. (Southern Baptist Convention, current undated)

1. William G. Witt, “The Hermeneutics of Same-Sex Practice: A Summary and Evaluation,” online article, Mar. 4, 2012, http://willgwitt.org/hermeneutics_of_same-sex_practice/, accessed Oct. 5, 2019. ↵
2. Witt, *ibid.* ↵
3. Witt, *ibid.* ↵
4. Jesus’ teaching about what does and does not defile a person effectively eliminated the Jewish category of unclean foods (Mark 7:19), and he proclaimed himself lord of the Sabbath, thus establishing a basis for understanding it as fulfilled in himself rather than in a weekly day of rest (Mark 2:27-28). ↵
5. A few people argue that Jesus himself made a subtle hint that circumcision was ending. Carson: “Jesus’ healing of the whole man... becomes a fulfilment of Old Testament circumcision” (D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991, 316). Glass argues this point more forcefully (and questionably): “John’s Gospel attacks circumcision in three ways. It contrasts Jesus’ healing, which makes a man every bit whole, with circumcision, which chops a bit off. It downgrades circumcision from a command of God to a practice of the ancestors. It does so in the Greek language and therefore in a cultural setting that saw circumcision as an obscene mutilation” (Michael Glass, “The New Testament and Circumcision,” Oct. 2001, Circumcision Information and Resources Page, <http://cirp.org/pages/cultural/glass1/>, accessed Oct. 5, 2019). What is clear is that Jesus’ apostles soon came to understand that mandating circumcision for Gentiles was contrary to Jesus’ new covenant (Acts 15; Gal. 5:2-12; 1Cor. 7:18; cf. Rom. 2:29; 4:11-12). ↵
6. I doubt this requirement was aimed in a limited way against polygamy, but it almost certainly was assumed to include it. ↵
7. Kevin DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway), 74, emphasis added. DeYoung’s book is an excellent popular-level book, readable and based on good scholarship. ↵
8. William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuality: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 247. ↵
9. *Ibid.*, 250. While I question some of Webb’s assessments and conclusions, especially regarding the “women” part of his topic, his book is a stimulating and valuable read. ↵
10. *Ibid.*, 82, emphasis added. Note: I wish Webb would have distinguished here between (a) people who experience homosexual desire and (b) homosexual activity in these statements. Elsewhere he clearly discusses how Christians must have “compassion for those who struggle with homosexual feelings and behavior” (*Ibid.*, 252). ↵
11. *Ibid.*, 83 ↵
12. *Ibid.*, 88, n. 36, emphasis added. ↵

13. *Ibid.*, 250, emphasis added. Webb says other things also worth noting: “While the garden” of Eden “presents sexuality (monogamous heterosexuality) as normative, no one would use this pattern to condemn sexual abstinence... But to argue for homosexuality from these abstinence cases (as some do) produces a considerable leap in logic. It is one thing to abstain from heterosexual relationships; it is quite another to find sexual fulfillment through means outside of heterosexual relationships. Abstinence cases break from creation pattern, but they do so by *limiting* one’s sexual fulfillment. Homosexual cases break from the creation pattern by *broadening* the scope of one’s sexual fulfillment (as bestiality would broaden one’s sexual fulfillment options beyond the creation pattern),” p. 132. “Alternative options” to monogamous heterosexual marriage “existed in the surrounding cultures, and a negative assessment of the practice” of homosexuality “by biblical authors sets up dissonance with the acceptance of the practice by many in other cultures. This increases the possibility that the author of Genesis understood the creation story as a statement about normative sexual patterns being heterosexual,” p. 133. “The concern with homosexuality was much broader than simply a violation of covenant or simply an issue of the participant’s passive/active status... With bestiality, as with homosexuality, one is breaking the ‘boundaries’ of biological design and sexual order. Reproduction of species does not take place between and animal and a human; nor does it take place between two humans of the same sex. With bestiality one crosses the boundary between human and animal; in the act of homosexuality one breaks the structural boundaries between male and female. It is also these boundary lines, not covenant, which were important in the incest laws,” pp. 177-78. “At most, homosexuality advocates have demonstrated that *some* features of biblical sexuality are cultural,” such as semen-emission and menstrual intercourse laws. “Their case would have been much stronger if they had demonstrated through ‘closely related issues’ that certain components of a biblical development of ‘homosexuality’ (not just ‘sexuality’) were cultural. Thus the one-category-removed approach makes the homosexual case extremely weak. Ultimately, it is not persuasive,” p. 171. “The continued survival of a species depends upon heterosexual activity. This is why homosexuality remains an anomaly within any species where survival is viewed as a good value,” p. 217. ” ↵
14. , *Ibid.*, 200, emphasis added. ↵
15. “A Brief Biblical Case for LGBTQ Inclusion,” online article, The Reformation Project, founded by Matthew Vines, <https://www.reformationproject.org/biblical-case>, accessed Oct. 6, 2019. ↵
16. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 452. Here is a fuller quote: “Many also argue that abusive pederasty was the standard form in which Paul encountered male intimacy. But Wolff shows that this is far from the case. Paul witnessed around him *both* abusive relationships of power or money *and* examples of ‘genuine love’ between males.” ↵
17. Fortson and Grams, *ibid.*, 304, 312, bold added. ↵
18. Luke Timothy Johnson, “Homosexuality & The Church: Scripture & Experience,” online article, *Commonweal Magazine*, June 11, 2007, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/homosexuality-church-0>, accessed Oct. 5, 2019. Johnson’s later comparison of homosexuality with slavery also falls flat given the observations of Webb summarized above; there is a trajectory in Scripture away from the heartless forms of slavery accepted in the cultures around God’s people toward an ethic that commands masters to treat slaves as they would want to be treated themselves, but there is no such trajectory in Scripture toward affirming homosexual activity in any form. ↵
19. Sarah Bessey, “Penny in the Air: My Story of Becoming Affirming,” blog post, June 5, 2019, <https://sarahbessey.com/penny-in-the-air-my-story-of-becoming-affirming/>, accessed Oct. 5, 2019. A much better explanation of this account in [Matthew 15](#) is offered by Derek DeMars: “As interpreters have long pointed out, Jesus’ words to the woman are tinged with irony. He was speaking (as wisdom-teachers of the time often did) with a challenge or riddle intended to draw wisdom out of the other person. That’s why his final response to the woman is, ‘Because you have answered this way...’ ([Mark 7:29](#)). He was testing her.” Derek DeMars, “Was Jesus a Bigot? A Response to Sarah Bessey on Affirming Homosexuality,” blog post, Aug. 13, 2019, <https://derekdemars.com/2019/08/13/was-jesus-a-bigot-prejudice-and-homosexuality/>, accessed Oct. 5, 2019. ↵

20. Luke Timothy Johnson, *ibid.* Bessey gives a similar role to experience in her narrative of how she came to affirm homosexuality. She tells of her relationship with a woman who prayed for her, comparing her own change of understanding to that of Peter with Cornelius: “Eventually I learned that in addition to being a powerful and mighty woman of God, in addition to being an anointed pastor, in addition to being a devoted follower of Jesus, in addition to being kind and bold, faithful and content, funny and compassionate and godly, she was also a lesbian. **And just like that, the penny dropped.** All the study, all the footnotes, all the scholars, went from being a jumble of intellectual opinions to a lived experience in one encounter with the Holy Spirit alongside a beloved sister in Christ” (Sarah Bessey, *ibid.*, emphasis in original). ↵
21. Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation; A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1996), Kindle Edition, location 4692. ↵
22. Fortson and Grams, *ibid.*, 3-5. Bold added. ↵
23. Fortson and Grams, *ibid.*, 11. ↵
24. *Ibid.*, 156. ↵
25. *Ibid.*, 144. ↵
26. *Ibid.*, 149-51. ↵
27. *Ibid.*, 154. ↵
28. “2016 Book of Discipline,” United Methodist Church, shared on the official denominational website, <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/what-is-the-denominations-position-on-homosexuality>, accessed Oct. 13, 2019. ↵
29. “What Wolfhart Pannenburg Says About This Debate in the Church,” *Christianity Today*, November 11, 1996, 37, emphasis added. Quoted by Fortson and Grams, *ibid.*, 162-63. ↵
30. Thomas Hopko, “The Homosexual Christian,” *Orthodox Church in America*, <https://www.oca.org/reflections/misc-authors/the-homosexual-christian>, accessed Oct. 7, 2019. Here is another helpful example, this time Roman Catholic, shared by Fortson and Grams: “While the church teaches that homosexual acts are immoral, she does distinguish between engaging in homosexual acts and having a homosexual inclination. While the former is always objectively sinful, the latter is not” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care*, 2006). ↵
31. Webb, *ibid.*, 183, bold added. ↵
32. This, of course, is the message that Westboro Baptist Church famously declares, and even the URL for their church website: <https://godhatesfags.com/>. A (former) insider’s view of this church is available through the recent book *Unfollow: A Memoir of Loving and Leaving the Westboro Baptist Church*, by Megan Phelps-Roper. You can [read an excerpt here](#). I have not read the whole book. ↵
33. It is true, properly understood, that God hates not only sin but also people who persist in sin (Ps. 5:4-6; 7:11-12; etc.). But nowhere in Scripture do we see this message proclaimed in evangelism. The evangelistic message of the early church was not that God hates sinners, but that God desires “to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness” (Acts 3:26). “The Lord... is patient... not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). ↵
34. All but two of the following quotes come from S. Donald Fortson III and Rollin G. Grams, *Unchanging Witness: The Consistent Christian Teaching on Homosexuality in Scripture and Tradition* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), 27-163. The exceptions are the AME quote (which Fortson and Grams summarize) and the SBC quote (not included in their three pages of SBC quotes). ↵