

PASTORING LGBT PERSONS

AUGUST 2014

POSITION PAPER

Vineyard USA Position Papers serve a dual purpose. The first and primary purpose is to provide necessary teaching, guidance, support, and clarity to our local churches on challenging issues of the day. The secondary purpose is to serve the wider Body of Christ in understanding our Vineyard USA stance on these same issues.

The logo for vineyardusa, featuring the word "vineyard" in a bold, lowercase sans-serif font, followed by "usa" in a smaller, lowercase sans-serif font. A thin horizontal line is positioned below the text, and a thin vertical line is positioned to the left of the text, intersecting at the start of the horizontal line.

vineyardusa

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From The Vineyard USA Executive Team, on behalf of Vineyard USA

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Note: When a particular biblical passage reference is footnoted, occasionally one verse will be highlighted in that footnote, or other verses will be included to provide context. Additionally, various versions of the NIV translate some verses differently. This should be noted when cross-referencing passages.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

When writing a paper like this, it is essential to consider the audience. This paper is intended primarily for Vineyard pastors and, secondarily, for a larger group of Christians who pastor and lead churches, as well as for the Christian community in general. We realize that this paper will likely end up in the hands of those for whom it is not intended. If we were speaking directly to the LGBT community, we would address different questions and would prioritize the conversation about what it means to know and follow Jesus as a member of the LGBT community. This paper addresses the hermeneutics used to interpret important biblical texts and also considers the pastoral implications of those texts. If you are not actively following Jesus, or are from the LGBT community, it will be easy for you to misunderstand the thrust of our arguments as they are intended for a different audience.

This paper is by no means comprehensive in its coaching of Vineyard pastors concerning how we relate to the LGBT community within our own churches or cities. There is much to consider as we engage people in our cities, especially the LGBT community. There has been much hurt and harm done to the LGBT community in the name of Jesus. The Vineyard wants to love and serve the cities we are in with no strings attached. We also never want to place moral obstacles in the path of people who are coming towards Jesus. This includes, of course, those in the LGBT community! Our moral convictions are secondary to our communication of the glorious Gospel of grace that we find in Jesus. The leading edge of our conversation with those who are outside the church always ought to point to Jesus and the life he freely gives. This paper is intended to assist our pastors as they lead our churches, and to speak to Christian believers and Christian leaders about this very sensitive subject. We hope and pray for all of us to grow in our ability to engage the LGBT community with the love and grace of Jesus.

Some have asked why Vineyard USA would produce a position paper on pastoring LGBT persons, particularly in light of the massive issues facing our global community: issues of justice and race, issues of war and peace, issues of environmental degradation and poverty. Why a paper on this issue?

William Shakespeare in his play, *Twelfth Night*, said this: *Be not afraid of greatness: some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them.* This quote not only applies to men and women, but also to issues of faith. Some issues of faith such as the Trinity, the Incarnation of Christ, and the way of salvation are *born great!* We will be discussing these things for all eternity. Other issues have *achieved greatness* because of historical circumstances – the nature of the Communion meal springs to mind, in this regard. Finally, some issues have *greatness thrust upon them.* The need to write a position paper about pastoring LGBT persons has been thrust upon the Vineyard (as well as virtually every other Christian denomination and religious movement in our world).

The paper is a product of dozens of conversations with Vineyard leaders and friends of the Vineyard, both in the USA and in our larger church family, as well as many conversations with LGBT persons in our congregations.

It arises out of a specific context, which has two components.

First, there has been a large shift in the public morality of Western democracies, particularly the USA, including changes in legislation. This shift has been mirrored by significant debate and discussion within many Christian denominations.

Second, a Vineyard pastor, Ken Wilson, who previously served on the Executive Team of Vineyard USA, has published a book fully affirming LGBT church members for ordained ministry and welcoming the blessing of their marriages.¹

The Public Context

Regarding few issues of public policy has the consensus of opinion shifted as rapidly as Americans' attitudes towards same-sex marriage.² The rapid pace of change can be seen by considering several facts. First, up until 2008 Massachusetts was the only American state to legalize gay marriage. Opposition to gay marriage was so strong in 2004 that many believe this "wedge issue" was a significant reason for the reelection of President George W. Bush. By the time of this writing – May 21, 2014 – gay marriage has been legalized in 19 states, 8 by court decision,³ 8 by state legislative action,⁴ and 3 by popular vote.⁵ Eight more states have had their gay marriage bans declared unconstitutional by federal courts that have stayed their rulings pending appeal.⁶ Groups in every other state are planning legal challenges to their state's same-sex marriage ban in the next year.

Second, in terms of percentage shift, support for same-sex marriage jumped 21 points in the decade from 2003 to 2013, according to The Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI).⁷ That same survey reported the following findings:

- Currently, a majority (53%) of Americans favor allowing gay and lesbian couples to legally marry, compared to 41% who oppose. In 2003 less than a third (32%) of Americans supported allowing gay and lesbian people to legally marry, compared to nearly 6 in 10 (59%) who opposed.⁸

¹ Ken Wilson, *A Letter*; 2014. This is in addition to the similar position adopted by a Canadian Vineyard pastor, Peter Fitch, *Toward Love*.

² The reasons for the rapid shifts of public opinion, from a social science perspective, are beyond the scope of this paper. Social scientists attribute some of the change to "the contact theory," as more people have relationships with a gay neighbor, or friend, or family member, as attitudes about the legitimacy of these relationships often change. Certainly, social connections with gay and lesbian people have significantly increased in recent years, according to the Public Religion Research Institute. 77% of people reported no social connection to gay or lesbian people in 1993. Only 22% reported some connection. These numbers were almost entirely reversed by 2013. See Jones, Cox, and Navarro-Rivera, "A Shifting Landscape" (2013, 2). But the social contact explanation for the rapid shift of public opinion regarding gay marriage is only part of the answer. Social scientists admit that they can't completely explain the shift. Other factors seem to be at work including changes in opinions at elite institutions, shifts in pop culture, shifts in media portrayal, religious shifts, and political shifts by the President and Vice President of the U.S.

³ States that have legalized same-sex marriage by court decision include California, Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, and Pennsylvania.

⁴ States that have legalized same-sex marriage by state legislative action include Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

⁵ Maine, Maryland, and Washington.

⁶ States that have had their gay marriage bans overturned by federal courts who have stayed their rulings pending appeal include Utah, Oklahoma, Kentucky, Virginia, Texas, Michigan, Arkansas, and Idaho.

⁷ Jones, Cox, and Navarro-Rivera, "A Shifting Landscape," (2013, 1).

⁸ *Ibid.*

- Today, majorities of Americans in the Northeast (60%), West (58%), and Midwest (51%) favor allowing gay and lesbian couples to legally marry, while Southerners are evenly divided (48% favor, 48% opposed).⁹
- There are massive generational differences in the support for same-sex marriage. Nearly 7 in 10 (69%) of Millennials (ages 18-33) support same-sex marriage, compared to 37% of Americans who are part of the “Silent Generation” (ages 68 and older).¹⁰ White evangelical Protestant Millennials are more than twice as likely to favor same-sex marriage as the oldest generation of white evangelical Protestants (43% vs. 19%).¹¹

Concerning evangelicals and other members of faith communities, it is important to immediately distinguish between someone’s support for the legalization of same-sex marriage and whether that same person would support their church marrying a same-sex couple, or, more tangentially, whether they would support the ordination of someone in a same-sex relationship. Some evangelicals support the legalization of same-sex marriage, but would oppose having their church marry or ordain individuals in same-sex relationships.¹² These evangelicals sharply distinguish between *civil rights* in a pluralistic society and *church rites*, which adhere to a completely different set of authorities.¹³

Third, only the change of opinion regarding premarital sex rivals the rapid pace of the change in public opinion regarding same-sex marriage.¹⁴ Changes in opinion regarding other issues of sexual morality such as abortion and extra-marital sex have come much more slowly.¹⁵

Suffice it to say, the rapid shift in public opinion regarding support for same-sex marriage, and, indeed, the morality of same-sex sexual relationships have created a shockwave to which virtually all religious institutions in America have been compelled to respond.

The Vineyard Context

Ken Wilson’s publication references and largely reflects a well-known theological position best described as “open and affirming” or “welcoming and affirming.”¹⁶ As Don Bromley, his previous executive pastor, has pointed out, although Ken seeks to position himself in a “third

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 2.

¹² Arguments for and against legalization of same-sex marriage can be found, for example, at <http://www.ProCon.org>.

¹³ See “Otis Moss, III Challenges Fellow Black Clergy On Marriage Equality for Gays and Lesbians,” *Huffington Post*, June 1, 2012, accessed May 23, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/28/otis-moss-iii-challenges-on-marriage-equality_n_1550449.html.

¹⁴ Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, 92-93.

¹⁵ Ibid., 118.

¹⁶ The term associated with the work of Grenz, named *Welcoming But Not Affirming*.

way,” if one examines his conclusions, his position is actually indistinguishable from “open and affirming.”¹⁷ The alternative position is described as “welcoming but not affirming.”¹⁸

In reflecting on Ken’s work, one has to reflect on the entire field of biblical scholarship and ethical debate. He cites some of the wider literature. Ken’s position is in broad agreement with a publication by Peter Fitch, a Canadian Vineyard pastor and Dean of Ministry Studies at St. Stephen’s University in New Brunswick.¹⁹ Both these leaders are respected and loved leaders in their various contexts. Nothing that follows should be taken as a lack of respect for them as individuals. However, they have published views that are contrary to the stated position generally held by the Vineyard.

Ken’s publication reflects a position that runs counter to a brief but clear statement released by the executive leadership of Vineyard USA, which is “welcoming but not affirming.”²⁰ For the sake of brevity, these two positions will be referred to as simply “affirming” or “not-affirming,” assuming the reader is aware that “not-affirming” means “welcoming but not affirming.” Ken Wilson repeatedly uses the language of “love the sinner and hate the sin” to characterize the alternative to the affirming position, which is associated with exclusion, another term he uses repeatedly.²¹ Here again, Bromley has pointed out that this characterization does not fairly describe our Vineyard position. One cannot describe our “welcoming” position by the continual use of the words “hate” and “exclusion.”²² We acknowledge that being welcoming must be more than words. The burden of proof is on us as Vineyard churches to prove by our actions that we are indeed welcoming to LGBT persons.

It is Vineyard USA’s view that Ken Wilson has given contemporary views of sexuality more influence in his writing than what the authors of Scripture intended to teach on the subject. In place of the authority of Scripture, Ken has reconstructed Christian sexual ethics to accommodate contemporary sensibilities.

¹⁷ “If you are convinced that the scriptures do not prohibit monogamous, committed same-sex activity, and you are open to ordaining a non-celibate gay pastor, and officiating a same-sex union ceremony, then sooner or later our church will be known as ‘open and affirming,’ regardless of what label you may want for it,” Don Bromley, “Response”, 4-5. In a piece published on July 28, 2014 for the Huffington post, Ken Wilson explains the difference between his “third way” position and the “open and affirming” position, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ken-wilson/al-mohler-is-right-about-b_5582693.html. Towards the end he explains that he has distinguished between his position and the latter mostly for rhetorical reasons, and admits that such a distinction may not prove durable. For the purpose of this Position Paper, this article confirms that, *in terms of the ethical position*, the two are really the same.

¹⁸ Grenz, *Welcoming*, 1998.

¹⁹ Peter Fitch, *Toward Love*, 2013.

²⁰ See Appendix 1.

²¹ It is worth noting this phrase comes originally from Gandhi, in his 1929 autobiography, and is not found in Scripture.

²² Bromley, “Response,” 1. “Ken Wilson repeatedly uses the word ‘exclusion’ to refer to very different things. In one context it might refer to excluding gay people (celibate or not) from church services, which most people would find wrong. But he also uses the same word ‘exclusion’ to refer to churches that would not ordain a non-celibate gay person to become a pastor (which I think most Christians would agree with). He confuses the issue by using the same word ‘exclusionary’ for both scenarios. This appears to be a rhetorical device, since no Vineyard church would ever wish to be exclusionary.” “I believe Ken has misrepresented the way Vineyard Church of Ann Arbor related to gay people for the years I served there, 1997-2011. We enthusiastically welcomed gay people. Until about 2004 or so we expressed that they should not become members if they were currently engaged in a same-sex relationship. But that was the absolute extent of our ‘exclusion.’ Gay people could be baptized, took communion, participated in ministries and small groups, had kids dedicated, and even had semi-leadership position within ministries.”

Historically, when the Vineyard has been challenged on issues of orthodoxy and/or orthopraxy, it has developed Position Papers. The first five are Position Papers of Vineyard USA.²³ It is therefore appropriate and the opportune time for a Position Paper to be published on the subject of pastoring LGBT persons so as to clarify the policy of the leadership of the Vineyard in the USA.

General Methodology

Before describing our methodology, it will be helpful to explain the way the text is set out, so as to accommodate two different kinds of reader. This document has a main text, but with considerable extra material reflected in footnotes and appendices. The preparation of this paper has involved considerable dialogue with a number of Vineyard leaders, both in the USA and elsewhere. Those that have been involved in this dialogue have generally read quite widely on the subject. As readers, they will therefore appreciate the footnotes and appendices included in this text. However, many other readers will not want to be drawn into such details, so they can read the main text and skip the footnotes and appendices. In this way we hope to be able to accommodate two kinds of readers.

Our approach is to deal with the subject in the following logical progression:

1. First, to address this subject, one has to *frame it as a theological and ethical task* in the contemporary context.
2. Second, there is the *exegetical task*, namely to determine which biblical texts speak directly or indirectly to the subject, and what these texts affirm.
3. Third, there is the question of *theological ethics*. Where do the moral boundaries get drawn, based on the biblical teaching? Closely associated with ethics is the question of local church *pastoral practice*. How does the pastoral leadership of a local church reflect both biblical exegesis and biblical ethics in a manner that is true to the Gospel and compassionate to those they care for?

In considering these three steps, a number of other layers come into play. The literature on this subject reveals that one cannot simply cite the biblical texts at face value. In many ways the subject at hand is really about how one reads and interprets the Bible, or hermeneutics, in fact two quite different approaches to hermeneutics. If one delves a little further into the hermeneutical arguments, it emerges that one has to place this subject in the larger context of the shift from modernism to postmodernism, as various approaches either adopt a modernist or postmodernist position.²⁴ Then, intersecting with these hermeneutical issues there is the ever-present question of biblical authority, which can be affirmed or undermined from both a modernist and a postmodernist perspective. In considering the issue of biblical authority and hermeneutics, one has to place this in the wider context of orthodox faith versus non-orthodox faith, or heterodoxy.

²³ In historical order they are: John Wimber, *Why I Respond to Criticism* (answering anti-charismatic criticism from cessationist evangelicals); Jack Deere, *The Vineyard's Response To 'The Briefing'* (a similar subject); Wayne Grudem, *The Vineyard's Response To 'The Standard'*; Wayne Grudem, *Power And Truth: A Response To 'Power Religion'*; and Rich Nathan, *A Response To 'Charismatic Chaos'* (as the previous ones, but the particular book by John MacArthur). These are Position Papers of Vineyard USA. Also used in various places are two Position Papers of AVC South Africa, Morphew, *Renewal Apologetics* (a response to criticism of the "Toronto Blessing"), now an Amazon Kindle Publication; *Phenomena*; and Morphew, *Different But Equal*, dealing with the question of women in church leadership.

²⁴ Those who adopt an affirming theology will sometimes argue from a modernist perspective, while others who adopt the same position will argue from a postmodernist perspective. Arguments in favor of a not-affirming position can make use of the postmodernist critique of modernism. Such a critique requires recognition of being "situated" in a worldview and community of faith by adopting any position.

Affirmations of an orthodox position take place within the “great tradition”²⁵ of ecumenical biblical interpretation through the history of the church.

Our treatment of this subject will therefore include:

1. Framing The Subject
2. Hermeneutics
3. Biblical Exegesis
4. Modernism And Postmodernism (largely in the appendix)
5. Biblical Authority And Orthodoxy
6. Biblical Ethics And Pastoral Practice

Because the subject of modernism and postmodernism is complex, this section is found in the appendices. However, it constitutes a key element of the argument, particularly in regard to Romans 1 as relevant or irrelevant for today. Readers who skip this section should be aware of the fact that certain conclusions depend upon this appendix.

There is also a disclaimer that needs to be made. While we use the term “LGBT,” this paper does not in fact address the issue of bisexual and transgender relationships. This would have made this document too long.²⁶

Framing The Subject

Roger Olson, Professor of Theology at George W. Truett Theological Seminary at Baylor University, defined modern theology as “theology that seeks to contextualize Christian belief to the culture of modernity – sometimes by rejecting much of it.”²⁷ So, modern theology is an attempt to grapple with modernity by either accommodating Christian belief to modernity, or by rejecting such accommodation. All modern theology takes modernity seriously as a force. Some theologians and pastors have chosen to reconstruct Christian theology and doctrine in such a radical way that, as one cynic commented, “Modern theologians became so afraid of being kicked in the ditch by modernity, that they jumped there to avoid the pain of being kicked.”²⁸ Other theologians and pastors have attempted to defend traditional Christianity by criticizing modernity’s tendency to overreach its own competence.²⁹

The Vineyard has long-defined itself as a diverse, capacious movement that holds in tension a radical welcome of all people into the *infinite love* of Jesus and a radical obedience to Christ’s moral demands that flow from the *infinite holiness* of Jesus. Vineyard authors have variously described this as a “Quest for the Radical Middle,”³⁰ and as a faith that is “Both-And.”³¹ Though not part of the Vineyard movement, Gary Tyra, a theology professor at Vanguard University in southern California, helpfully labeled the tension that the Vineyard movement seeks to live in as

²⁵ A term used by Roger Olson, *Mosaic*, 2002.

²⁶ A helpful text that deals with this is the Anglican document for the “House of Bishops,” *Some Issues*. Other helpful resources are Oliver O’Donovan *Begotten or Made?*, Peter Sanlon, *Plastic People*, and Andrew Goddard and Don Horrocks, *Evangelical Alliance Resources*.

²⁷ Roger E. Olson, *The Journey*, 23.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Bill Jackson, *Quest*.

³¹ Rich Nathan and Insoo Kim, *Both-And*.

“Missional Orthodoxy.”³² According to Gary Tyra, what is needed in our post-Christian culture is to discover a way to do theology and ministry that is *“faithful to both the biblical text and the missional task.”*³³ Or to put it in biblical terms, for nearly 2000 years the Christian church has been called to live in the tension of faithfulness to biblical orthodoxy described in Jude 3, and missional relevance suggested by 1 Corinthians 9:20-22. These texts deserve to be quoted at length. The passage in Jude reads:

Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, *I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people* (Jude 3, emphasis added).

In 1 Corinthians 9:20-22 Paul explains his ministry method this way:

To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. *I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some* (emphasis added).

Gary Tyra thus defines Missional Orthodoxy as attempting to do justice to both Jude 3 and 1 Corinthians 9:20-22.³⁴ This “tension” is where Vineyard wishes to find ourselves as we do theology and ministry.

The Vineyard has always used Jesus as our model for ministry. We often find ourselves reflecting not only upon Jesus’ *practices*, but also upon Jesus’ *person* for our ministry models. In the Incarnation we find in Jesus Christ someone who is both fully human (missionally relevant) and fully divine (eternally unchanging). As Gary Tyra helpfully points out in his book, there is an analogy between theological responses to culture (including, we might add, responses to the shift in public opinion regarding same-sex relationships) and heterodox alternatives to the Incarnation. For example, just as some early church heresies, such as Adoptionism and Nestorianism over-emphasized Jesus’ humanity, so certain approaches to culture (and sexual ethics) radically reconstruct Christian faith (and sexual ethics) to make it acceptable and palatable to Christianity’s contemporary cultural despisers.³⁵ Capitulation to the moral, religious and spiritual sensibilities of the culture has always been a grave temptation for the church.³⁶

On the other hand, some Christians are not tempted to be overly accommodating at all. Their temptation lies in the opposite direction. They rigidly adhere to a traditional form of theology and ministry without any sensitivity to the cultural moment they find themselves in. Their insensitivity to culture is reminiscent of the heterodox Christians who over-emphasized Jesus’ deity and failed to do justice to his full humanity, via such alternatives as Docetism and Apollinarianism. In the same way, Christian Fundamentalists today refuse to adequately contextualize the Gospel message in the face of cultural change. Fundamentalists dare people to either “get with the program, or get lost.” What we need, according to Gary Tyra, is an approach to our theology and ministry that is faithful to the Incarnation. We need a Spirit-led, pastorally sensitive response to shifts in culture that is at once missionally relevant and biblically faithful.

³² Gary Tyra, *Missional Orthodoxy*.

³³ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

³⁶ The analogy does not suggest that these ancient heterodox views were an accommodation to culture.

From Biblical To Pastoral Theology

As noted above, logically one moves from the exegesis of biblical texts to ethics and pastoral practice. However, there is a certain reciprocity between the two. Because the exegesis of the texts is so contentious, it will be helpful if the reader is aware, in advance, of our general pastoral approach, before the contentious issues are addressed.

Pastoral theology is not just a method; it is also *a tone*. When dealing with real human beings with all their complexities and ambiguities, pastoral theology speaks with a tone of humility and much less than 100% certainty concerning all things. Often, it is not what we pastors or leaders say that is so off-putting. It is our tone which is sometimes haughty, absolutist and severe.

Consider the example of Pope Francis. He has not changed the *content* of Roman Catholic teaching, but he has changed the *tone*. What makes Pope Francis such a transformational leader is his incredible humility. And this humble tone (and pastoral theology) is not just found in what Pope Francis says, but in what he *does*. One of the first acts of his papacy was to wash the feet of a young Muslim female prisoner, and then he spontaneously kissed the head of a severely disfigured man. His humility was further shown as he shunned all of the traditional trappings of papal power – paying for his own hotel room, moving out of the papal apartment, picking up his own dry-cleaning and even driving a Ford Focus. These things are not just a matter of style. Pope Francis' acts have changed the conversation about the relationship and relevance of Roman Catholicism in particular, and Christianity in general, to 21st century secular society.

A humble tone, which acknowledges ambiguity, as well as the reality of profoundly difficult pastoral situations, and looks to the Holy Spirit for wisdom and direction goes to the heart of the Vineyard's approach to pastoring people. Another way to put it is that pastoring LGBT people always involves a communication of our common humanity with those whom we are pastoring.

Tim Keller, the pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, put it this way:

It is normal for human beings (whose hearts are always seeking to justify themselves and who are always trying to make the case that they are one of the “good guys”) to divide the world into the good and the bad. If, however, everyone is naturally alienated from God and therefore “evil,” then that goes for everyone from murderers to ministers.

The biblical teaching on sin shows us the complete pervasiveness of sin and the ultimate impossibility of dividing the world neatly into sinful people and good people. It eliminates our attitude of superiority toward others and our practices of shunning or excluding those with whom we differ.³⁷

So pastoral care does not mean that we never call sin in others “sin,” but it does mean that we never simply see sin as dividing others from us. Rather, the line of sin runs right through the center of our own hearts.

In communicating to our culture about sex, we must remember that a Christian understanding of sex and the morality of certain sexual practices is deeply embedded in a comprehensive understanding of a Christian understanding of God, God's good creation (including the creation of sex), humanity's sin, and redemption in Christ. In other words, a Christian view of sex cannot be outside of an appreciation of a Christian worldview.

Perhaps an illustration would help. Imagine an old Gothic cathedral with stained glass windows. Outside the cathedral, the windows look gray and cloudy. The picture in the window is incomprehensible. But when one steps inside the cathedral, the picture in the window comes to life. One says, “Ah, there is Jesus teaching from a boat in the Sea of Galilee, or there is a portrait of the Risen Christ.” Only inside of a Christian worldview do statements by Christians about sex and sexual morality make sense. Thus, it is wise for a Christian to never offer “sound bites” about

³⁷ Timothy Keller, *Understanding Sin*.

same-sex relationships. They are almost certainly going to be misunderstood outside the cathedral. Unless the questioner is willing to engage in a wide-ranging conversation about God, marriage, sin and its effects, and salvation, Christians should simply decline to offer a few sentences about sex or homosexuality, in particular, to the media, on the web, or even in a sermon. The audience will not understand it.

Further, when sex outside of heterosexual marriage is condemned without a broader conversation, regarding the Gospel and how Jesus is good news for all, and without a tone of deep humility and deep apprehension of our own sin, people reasonably hear several things:

First, they hear that a person who does have sex outside of heterosexual marriage is a disgusting person, who deserves to be shunned by God and the church. Second, they hear that the speakers believe themselves to be one of the good people, who is welcomed by God because of their goodness and can self-righteously look down on others.

Pastoral theology is theology applied to people, not just issues. When we are talking about pastoring LGBT people, we're often talking about how a Vineyard church is going to pastor someone's son or daughter, someone's closest friend, someone's neighbor, and someone's co-worker. So we're not just concerned about being right about an issue, or to use Martin Buber's language, we're not engaged in an I-it relationship, we're engaged in an I-thou relationship. This conversation must be personal because the conversation affects people we love. When we personalize this and consider not only *what* we say to people within and without our congregations, but also *how* and *when* we say it, we quickly realize that there is much confusion about a Christian approach to homosexuality.

Confusion Regarding A Christian Approach To Homosexuality³⁸

Dennis Hollinger, President and Distinguished Professor of Christian Ethics at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, helpfully distinguishes between three things that Christians often stir together: Christian ethics, Christian pastoral care, and a Christian approach to public policy.³⁹ When we are talking about Christian ethics, we're talking about God's ideal, God's will, and God's intention for (in this case) our sexuality. If we're talking about Christian pastoral care, we're talking about how we relate to people who fall short of God's ideal. But even if we agree on what God's ideal is regarding our sexuality, and we also agree on a pastoral approach regarding how we're going to care for people who fall short of God's ideal, when it comes to public policy, we still have to choose our approach in a pluralistic society that doesn't necessarily agree with a Christian view of sexuality. As Christians relate to politics, we can't simply say, "Well, this is what it says in the Bible." We can't demand that every one – Christian and non-Christian alike, people who know Jesus and people who don't – follow the Bible. Public policy gets into practical concerns about what is enforceable, what is possible, what will harm the spread of the Gospel, what is just and what is wise.

For the purposes of this paper, we'll focus on the first two of these concerns, Christian ethics and Christian pastoral care.

There is also much confusion regarding what we mean by "homosexuality." Are we talking about someone's *identity*, in other words a person in our congregation checks a box: gay, heterosexual or bisexual? Are we talking about *sexual orientation* in which a person is attracted to or has sexual feelings for someone of the same sex? Or are we talking about *sexual behavior* in which someone decides to act on their desires by being physical intimate with someone of the same-sex? How we self-identify and how we behave are clearly choices. But we may, in fact, have very little choice regarding our feelings of attraction.

³⁸ This section is borrowed with permission from Rich Nathan and Insoo Kim, *Both-And*, 146.

³⁹ Dr. Hollinger's three-fold distinction between Christian ethics, Christian pastoral care, and Christian public policy is found in Dennis Hollinger, *Choosing The Good*, 20-23.

Wesley Hill, in his very personal and transparent book, *Washed And Waiting: Reflections On Christian Faithfulness And Homosexuality*, put it this way:

By the time I started high school, two things became clear to me. One was that I was a Christian. My parents had raised me to be a believer in Jesus, and as I moved towards independence from my family, I knew that I wanted to remain one – that I wanted to trust, love, and obey Christ, who had been crucified and raised from the dead “for us and for our salvation,” as the Creed puts it. The second was that I was gay. For as long as I could remember, I had been drawn, even as a child, to other males in some vaguely confusing way, and after puberty, I had come to realize that I had a steady, strong, unremitting, exclusive sexual attraction to persons of the same sex.⁴⁰

Hill notes, “There was nothing, it felt, chosen or intentional about my being gay. It seemed more like noticing the blueness of my eyes than deciding I would take up skiing. It was never an option – ‘Do you want to be gay?’ ‘Yes, I do, please.’ It was a gradual coming to terms, not a conscious resolution.”⁴¹

We in the Vineyard recognize that the desire for intimacy with a same-sex partner feels completely natural for many people. In other words, people such as Wesley Hill and many of our congregants have persistent patterns of romantic or sexual attraction to someone of their own sex.

Finally, the most recent surveys of the literature concerning the determination of sexual orientation suggest that the resolution of the “nature vs. nurture” debate remains elusive.⁴² One survey article summarized the current state of science and homosexuality saying that “There are associations/correlations [with one’s biology], but no study indicates causation.”⁴³

The search for causation is highly controverted. On the one hand there is the common idea that if homosexuality is found to be biologically mediated, there will be greater support for gay rights. On the other hand, there is a concern that if the “cause” of homosexuality is discovered, there will be a corresponding attempt to identify a “cure.” In any case, currently the studies on the “causes” of homosexuality are inconclusive or contradictory.⁴⁴ There appears to be some evidence that biological factors play some role in the development of sexual orientation, but at the present time it is not clear to what extent, and what other factors including psycho-social and post-natal environment may also play a role.⁴⁵

Thus, it is wise for Vineyard pastors, Vineyard leaders and other people who are not specialists in genetic research or social science research regarding the determination of sexual orientation to take a position of “humble agnosticism” about causation. Otherwise, good-hearted Christians often injure the cause of Christ by speaking about areas of science or the social sciences in which we are simply out of our depth. It is best to say about many matters (especially issues as complex as sexual orientation), “I don’t know!”

⁴⁰ Wesley Hill, *Washed And Waiting*, 13.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁴² Kenneth B. Ashley MD, “A Review.”

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 180-181.

Chapter 2: Biblical Exegesis

To be biblically faithful, it is necessary to consider all the arguments on the relevant biblical texts, from both viewpoints. What follows is clearly written from a not-affirming position, but in continual dialogue with the affirming position.

A reading of the literature will show that which texts should come into play, or should not come into play, is a key part of the argument.

The Dispute Over Biblical Texts

Basically affirming writers argue for a short list of seven texts,⁴⁶ while not-affirming writers argue for a wider field of texts, which they deem to be essential to determine how Scripture speaks on this subject.⁴⁷ To begin with then, we need a kind of textual road map. This section has the limited goal of simply providing the road map. The actual interpretation of these texts will follow thereafter.

There are seven biblical texts, which both sides view as speaking to the subject. Whether they are viewed as relevant to today will be explored later.

The Seven Texts

We are citing the NIV translation of the biblical text throughout the paper.

- Genesis 19:4-5⁴⁸
- Leviticus 18:22⁴⁹
- Leviticus 20:13⁵⁰

⁴⁶ For example, Rogers, *Homosexuality*, notes that the debate is focused on “at most,” eight texts, then adds, “None of these texts is about Jesus, nor do they include any of his words,” 66. He then dismissed the relevance of Genesis 1-2, 82-86, and argues for the positive use of the Gentile analogy in Acts 10-15, 86-87. Ken Wilson says “The Bible addresses same-sex activity a handful of times” and “A few other references do not provide any clear guidance,” *Letter*, 55-56. Peter Fitch asks, “What does Jesus have to say about homosexuality? I think that by now everyone knows: absolutely nothing,” *Toward Love*, 45. He adds, “But any treatment ought to begin by noting that seven references, and none from Jesus, ensures that this is a minor theme. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of verses that relate to economic oppression of the poor or greed and selfishness,” 51. The point about the strength of the justice tradition in Scripture is of course well made. But the logic here is problematic. There are also not that many texts on gender equality, compared to social justice, but that does not mean that we draw the conclusion that we do not know what the Bible teaches about this subject.

⁴⁷ Affirming writers do use many other texts to draw a conclusion that relativizes the texts on homosexuality, but as we will see, some are misused, and others seek to elevate certain themes in Scripture over other themes in Scripture, leading to an inner contradiction in the biblical witness. This paper will not deal with every text so used, or misused, for reasons of space.

⁴⁸ Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom – both young and old – surrounded the house. They called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.”

⁴⁹ Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.

⁵⁰ If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.

- Judges 19:20-23⁵¹
- Romans 1:24-32⁵²

At issue here is the background to Paul's statements. Affirming writers do not like to see him drawing largely on the creation narrative in Genesis 1-2, while not-affirming writers make this a key factor with the Romans text.

- 1 Corinthians 6:9-11⁵³
- 1 Timothy 1:8-11⁵⁴

In the case of both 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1, the key issue is the meaning of the Greek word *arsenokoitai*. The NIV of 1 Corinthians translates two terms, *malakoi* (soft) and *arsenokoitai* (male-sleep-with) by the phrase "men who have sex with men." In 1 Timothy *arsenokoitai* is translated as "those practicing homosexuality." Not-affirming writers are confident that *arsenokoitai* has been made up from *meta arsenos koitein* (with man lie with) in Leviticus 18:22. Affirming writers dispute or ignore this.

- Jude 5-7⁵⁵

Depending on the view taken on the phrase "going after strange flesh" (meaning angels, or males with males), Jude 5-7 is either in play, or not. If allowed, this would make 8 references.

⁵¹ "You are welcome at my house," the old man said. "Let me supply whatever you need. Only don't spend the night in the square." So he took him into his house and fed his donkeys. After they had washed their feet, they had something to eat and drink. While they were enjoying themselves, some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house. Pounding on the door, they shouted to the old man who owned the house, "Bring out the man who came to your house so we can have sex with him." The owner of the house went outside and said to them, "No, my friends, don't be so vile. Since this man is my guest, don't do this disgraceful thing.

⁵² Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen.

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural 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 indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

⁵³ Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men (*malakoi*, *arsenokoitai*) nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

⁵⁴ We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality (*arsenokoitai*), for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the Gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

⁵⁵ In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality (fornication) and perversion (going after strange flesh). They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire).

The following texts may speak to the subject, depending on one's position. Those who adopt an affirming position argue that Jesus is silent on the subject of homosexuality, and if anything is to be derived from Jesus it is his example. He accepted those previously marginalized by society (sinners, the poor, lepers, adulterers, Gentiles, women and children). Those who adopt a not-affirming position argue that Jesus' teaching on marriage and adultery effectively rules out all sexual intimacy outside of marriage between a man and a woman. Because Jesus quotes the creation narrative, Genesis 1-2 is thereby introduced as well.

Other Texts

Jesus On Marriage

- Mark 10:11-12⁵⁶
- Luke 16:18⁵⁷
- Matthew 5:32⁵⁸
- Matthew 19:9⁵⁹

A key point at issue here is the exception clause found in Matthew but not in Mark and Luke. Does this have any significance?

Jesus On Porneia

When Jesus speaks against marital unfaithfulness in the two passages in Matthew above, the Greek word is *porneia*. As one line of argument goes, the meaning of this term by the time of the New Testament era incorporated all the prohibitions of illicit sexual activity in the Levitical Holiness Code, which included incest (Leviticus 18:6-18), adultery (18:20), homosexuality (18:22) and bestiality (18:23). Therefore whenever Jesus refers to this term, he is prohibiting all of these activities.

- Mark 7:20-22⁶⁰
- Matthew 15:19⁶¹

The Jerusalem Council, Acts 15

This text is used to argue for opposite conclusions.

Affirming writers draw the comparison between the socially excluded Gentiles, who were accepted into the community of the kingdom through the leading of the Holy Spirit, and the

⁵⁶ He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."

⁵⁷ Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

⁵⁸ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness (*porneias*), causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.

⁵⁹ Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness (*porneiai*), and marries another woman commits adultery."

⁶⁰ What comes out of a man is what makes him "unclean." For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality (*porneiai*), theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man "unclean."

⁶¹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality (*porneiai*), theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man "unclean;" but eating with unwashed hands does not make him "unclean."

inclusion of the LGBT community today. The leading of the Spirit was evident both in the case of Peter’s experience with the household of Cornelius, and the deliberations of the Council itself, where they introduced their letter to the churches saying: “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (15:28). So it is argued, wise leaders are being led by the Spirit today to include the previously excluded LGBT community.

The exact opposite conclusion is reached by not-affirming writers who point out that the Gentiles were welcomed on the basis of “come as you are but don’t stay as you are.” This conclusion is drawn from this statement:

It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality (*porneias*). You will do well to avoid these things (15:28-29).

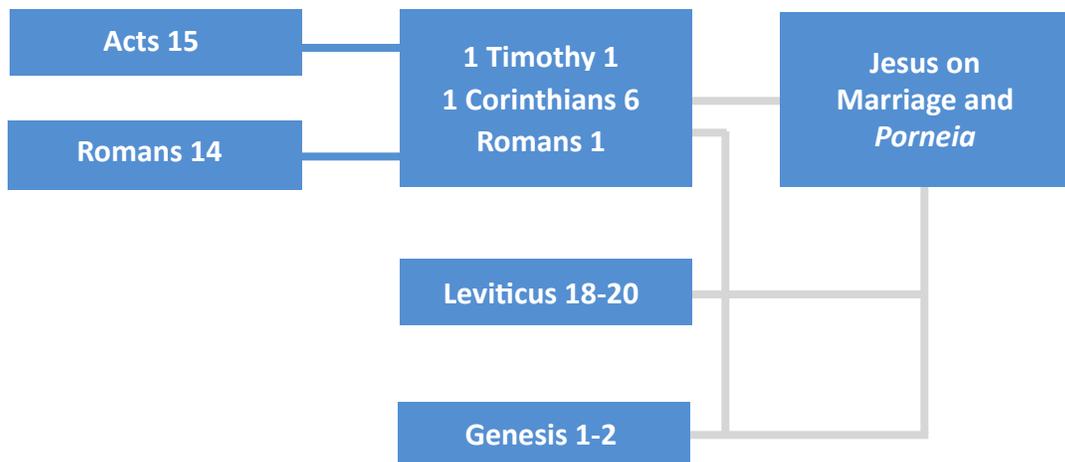
Paul On Disputable Matters, Romans 14:1-15:7

The use of this passage is particular to Ken Wilson. Paul gives pastoral advice to the Roman church where the members disagreed with one another about permissible foods to eat (14:2), holy days (14:5) and drinking wine (14:21). He exhorts them to agree to disagree, “without passing judgment on disputable matters” (14:1). Ken’s view is that since there is no agreement among biblical scholars on the interpretation of Romans 1 and 1 Corinthians 6, the LGBT issue has effectively become a “disputable matter.” Just as there was room for those who had differences of conscience in the early church, so we should follow a “third way,” where we allow for both an affirming and a not-affirming position in our churches today.

The Two Positions

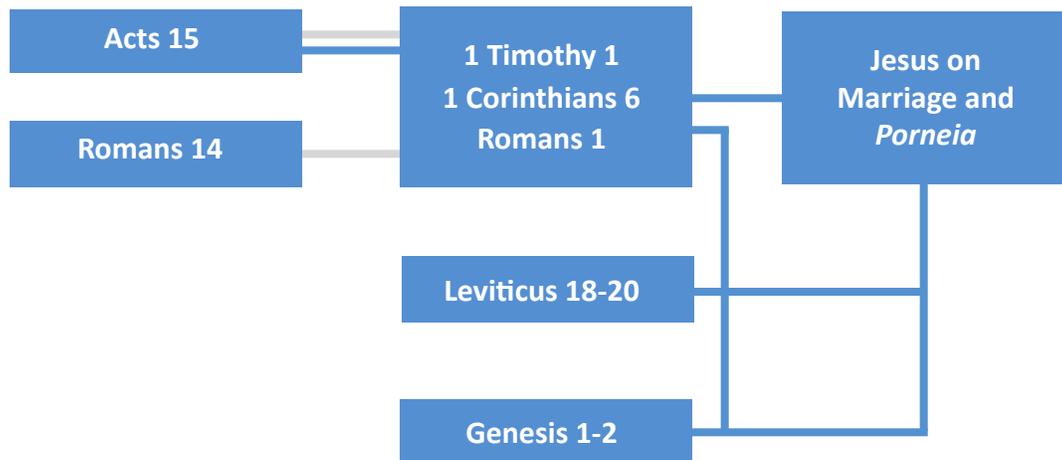
There are other texts that will become part of our consideration later, but these are the crucial ones. The following diagrams describe the way the two sides want them to be either in play, or not in play. This will be further clarified as each text is discussed later.

The Affirming Position



Notice that the links to the Jerusalem Council and Romans 14 are shown, whereas the links to Jesus on Marriage, and from Jesus and Paul to Leviticus and Genesis 1-2 are denied, in other words this position does not want to make crucial intertextual links.

The Not-Affirming Position



Notice how many more texts are linked together in the not-affirming hermeneutic, for example, direct statements about homosexuality are linked to Jesus' statements on marriage, and Jesus and Paul are linked to Leviticus and Genesis. Only the validity of linking Romans 14 to a discussion about sexuality is denied. Further, the use of the Jerusalem Council's decision is denied at one level (the analogy between Gentiles and the LGBT community is denied) but affirmed at another level (the Gentiles were told to adhere to the Levitical teaching for strangers/aliens).

These diagrams are there to help illustrate the next point.

The Affirming Hermeneutic

This debate is almost as much about hermeneutics as the texts themselves. When two different groups read the same texts in a totally different way, one can get lost in the forest of details by engaging right away with each text. It is important therefore, before one delves into such details, to look at the overall trends.

If one reads the affirming literature, it becomes evident that there are five basic hermeneutical principles that apply:

1. Irrelevance
2. Textual Isolation
3. Contextual Distance
4. Ethical Consistency/Inconsistency, and
5. Textual Inversion

Irrelevance

One by one, the seven key texts are found to be irrelevant to the ethics of LGBT sexuality today.

1. The two narrative passages, namely Genesis (Sodom) and Judges 19 describe a context of inhospitality and rape. Further, later citations of the Sodom story in the prophets and by Jesus show that the essential sin of Sodom, as a city, was one of wealth and injustice. Therefore these texts are not really about homosexuality, and are irrelevant to the subject of consenting adult homosexual relationships today.
2. The proscriptions of the Levitical Holiness Code are found in the context of purity laws. For instance, having intercourse during a woman's menstruation is forbidden because of

her “uncleanness” (18:19). The term “abomination” (18:26-27, 29-30) refers to Israel’s purity legislation in the light of Ancient Near Eastern (hereafter ANE) prostitution in the fertility cults. The “condemnation of homosexual activity as ‘abomination’ is based solely upon Israel’s cultic/ritual concerns and not upon universally applicable moral/ethical considerations.”⁶² Then further, if one considers the New Testament review of the Mosaic Law, it is clear that Christians today do not believe that such purity laws still apply. We do not obey the injunction about a woman’s menstruation and we do not apply the food laws, since Jesus declared all foods clean, thereby abrogating the Mosaic purity laws. Therefore the Holiness Code is not relevant to the issue of consenting adult homosexuality today.

3. When one places Paul’s prohibitions in the historical and social context, his statements are also rendered irrelevant. Homosexual activity in the Greco-Roman world was performed by heterosexual males on younger boys (pederasty), who were often slaves, within a worldview where heterosexual sex was between the superior male and the inferior female (patriarchy/misogyny) and between the adult citizen and the lower status boy or slave. It was always therefore an exploitive act. Further, there is no evidence that the ancients understood sexual orientation like we do today. The Greco-Roman literature shows no knowledge of ongoing homosexual or lesbian love between consenting adults. Paul would not have been able to conceive of such a relationship.
4. The Greek terms Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1 are not at all clear as to their meaning. The term *malakoi* (soft) could refer to the passive partner in a homosexual relationship, but it could be used in a broader way to refer to “soft” males who were heterosexual. The term *arsenokoitai* is not found in any literature before Paul, so we can only determine its meaning from later use. The result is that while it can refer to the active partner in a homosexual relationship, it also referred to some kind of abuse, perhaps where a person was forced to play this role for money. Therefore these texts are not relevant today.

Textual Isolation

One of the fundamental principles of biblical hermeneutics is that biblical texts should be interpreted in the light of other biblical texts, especially when they do, or seem to refer to one another.⁶³ The term we will use for this is intertextuality (instead of writing each time: “interpreting biblical texts in the light of other biblical texts”).⁶⁴ While certain affirming scholars

⁶² Davidson, *Flame*, 2007, 151.

⁶³ Morpew, *Interpretation 101*, 2011, 42-65.

⁶⁴ The term “intertextuality” has a range of meanings in academic literature.

may discuss these links, in general, the literature undermines this principle.⁶⁵ This is what the diagrams above illustrate.

Contextual Distance

This has close links with the hermeneutic of irrelevance. The primary case is Romans 1. Any understanding of the social and sexual practices of ancient Greco-Roman society will show that there is a significant difference between that society and modern Western liberal societies. This is what is meant by contextual distance. The issue is: how large is this distance? A balanced view on the subject will use the language of continuity and discontinuity. There are both similarities and differences. The affirmative position only describes the discontinuity.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ The key instances are:

1. The teaching of Jesus on marriage and *porneia* is not considered to be relevant. Jesus was “silent” on the matter of homosexual practice. Jesus’ statements on sexual ethics are not linked back to the Mosaic Law.
2. The background to Paul’s statements in Romans 1 is primarily that of Greco-Roman culture, philosophers and “scientists,” rather than the Genesis creation narrative.
3. Paul’s “fall of civilization” rhetoric in Romans 1 is separate from his idea of the fall of humanity.
4. Since Paul is not viewed as referring to the Genesis creation narrative, there is no link made between Jesus’ use of Genesis and Paul’s use of Genesis, therefore enabling the irrelevance of Jesus’ references to Genesis to same-sex relations.
5. The term *arsenokoitai* is not a reference back to the Holiness Code.
6. The thought behind the sexual prohibitions in the Holiness Code is the particular historical context in ANE societies, not the Genesis creation narrative.
7. There is no link made between the decision of the Jerusalem Council and the Holiness Code.
8. Ken Wilson’s treatment of Romans 14 isolates it from 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1, an earlier and more extensive passage where Paul deals with very similar issues.

⁶⁶ A number of points arise here:

1. There is the technical issue of the so-called ignorance of Paul, and Greco-Roman literature, of long-term adult homoerotic love. Despite confident statements about this ignorance, the evidence, while not at all widespread, or similar to our worldview, does exist.
2. There is the preference for the Greco-Roman context of philosophers and “scientists” to determine Paul’s thinking over and against the background of Hellenistic and Palestinian Second Temple Judaism. The question is: Does it make sense to assume that Paul was parroting the prevalent pagan worldview, or does it make more sense to assume that Paul would have been shaped in his thinking by his Jewish and Christian heritage? The comparison between Greco-Roman conceptions and contemporary Western society may not therefore be that relevant. Rather, the comparison should be between Jewish monotheistic creationist conceptions and contemporary ones. Particularly relevant is the evidence from Hellenistic Judaism, since the Septuagint was the bible of the early Hellenistic Christian community.
3. There is the question of the conscious or perhaps unconscious modernist assumption, which contrasts the ignorance and legendary thinking of the ancients versus the enlightened, scientific and rational thinking of modernity. To what extent is the idea of higher knowledge (*gnosis*) in the “discoveries” about sexuality in the last forty years a repeat of the values of 19th century post-Enlightenment culture? Confident statements about what Paul could never have conceived of have a familiar 19th century ring to them.
4. The affirmative literature does not reflect on the growing continuity between the worldview of Ancient Gnosticism and the neo-Gnosticism of New Age thinking today. There are particular connections, for instance, between the Gnostic view of the divine being and the resulting conceptions of sexuality, away from heterosexuality towards androgyny and bisexuality.

Ethical Consistency/Inconsistency

It is always valid to expose hypocrisy. It is certainly inconsistent to apply one standard to homosexual practice and another to divorce and remarriage, or heterosexual premarital and extramarital sex. This is probably one of the most valid arguments of affirmative writers. However, it would be inconsistent if biblical texts were interpreted towards strict conformity on homosexuality, and towards liberty on slavery, marriage and gender equality, *if there was no difference in the way Scripture speaks to these issues*.⁶⁷ The affirmative argument sounds like it is making a valid point here, and at some moments valid points have been made. However, the way the charge of inconsistency is used is a different matter.⁶⁸

Textual Inversion

This applies to the use of Romans 14. Since this is particular to Ken Wilson, the subject relates to the treatment of his publication in particular, which will be addressed further below.

Preliminary Conclusions

There are some fairly obvious conclusions that arise from the overall picture. These can best be served by asking a number of pertinent questions.

1. How should one view a hermeneutic that makes text after text irrelevant? As we shall see, the so-called irrelevance of most of these texts evaporates on closer examination. But one has to ask, is this not a case of an “inconvenient” set of biblical texts, which have to be circumvented somehow? Is this not a hermeneutic of convenience?
2. Many affirmative writers are highly qualified scholars, well capable of connecting biblical text with biblical text, and of using both the principle of socio-historical context and the principle of intertextuality. It is true that those who are wedded to an historical critical form of interpretation tend to isolate texts and to see all sorts of inner contradictions between different biblical texts and traditions, while those who are drawn to the more recent trend towards biblical theology and narrative theology tend to connect the threads in the biblical story. But this does not explain the way certain very obvious intertextual connections are ignored by affirmative scholars. Is this not also an evasion tactic to avoid the biblical position?
3. Why are confident statements of the so-called ignorance of the ancients, including Paul, made despite isolated, but nevertheless clear evidence to the contrary? Why is the

⁶⁷ A point given detailed attention by Webb, *Slaves*.

⁶⁸ Here are the major points.

1. It is assumed that Matthew’s exception clauses reveal a move away from the original teaching of Jesus in Mark and Luke. Therefore, the argument goes, one step towards accommodating divorce is already apparent in the various layers of the Gospel tradition.
2. Then Paul is understood to have made a further accommodation for the unbelieving spouse.
3. Then, in a staged manner, more and more compromises have been made for divorce and remarriage over centuries, with the result that no pastor can be ethically consistent by affirming divorced couples but not affirming homoerotic marriage. The logic is one of compromise upon compromise, or perhaps, we have compromised in one area already, so why should we not compromise in another area?
4. Another assumption is that since the biblical tradition on slaves and women has been transcended and effectively abrogated by historical progress, the same should apply to the biblical teaching on homoerotic relationships, particularly between adult consenting married couples (as above, addressed by Webb, *Slaves*).

Every one of these points needs to be seriously qualified.

contextual distance between “then” and “now” elevated to such an extent?⁶⁹ Is this also not about finding ways to evade the biblical witness?

4. The argument about ethical consistency is the only one that has some merit, but here the devil is in the detail. This issue is far more nuanced than it is made out to be.
5. The inversion of Paul’s teaching in Romans 14 will be examined a little later, but once again, one has to raise the question of motivation. Is this not really about a sincere attempt to find a compromise in our contemporary context, rather than a serious attempt to interpret a biblical passage?

Overall therefore, a preliminary conclusion is that affirmative theology is broadly subversive to the biblical witness, for very obvious reasons, namely the fact that the biblical teaching is simply most inconvenient in a contemporary Western liberal context. It would be better, if one really has to adopt an affirmative position, to follow the more discerning affirming scholars, who simply admit that the biblical witness (including Jesus) is consistently against all forms of homoerotic sex.⁷⁰ This position will use the argument of some form of higher *gnosis*, which enables one to elevate certain biblical themes, like love and mercy, over other biblical themes, like creation and covenant law. In doing so, one would need to admit that the contemporary worldview has been privileged over the biblical teaching, so that it becomes the basis of this “higher” hermeneutic.

Intertextual Biblical Interpretation

Rather than provide detailed rebuttals to all of the affirming arguments, it is better to state the positive biblical story on sexual ethics. This story comes to light when biblical text is linked appropriately to biblical text. Further, what this shows is that the Bible is not to be read as a book of rules, through a legalistic lens. Rather, one examines this subject in the context of the biblical metanarrative and the overall worldview of the biblical writers.

Note: The following two sections,

- Creation And Tabernacle/Temple, and
- King-Vassal Relationship

⁶⁹ Why would one not see the significant difference between the disputable matters of the early church, newly emerging out of Judaism (Romans 14), and our context today, while not being able to see the notable convergence between ancient Gnosticism and neo-Gnosticism today (Romans 1)?

⁷⁰ Notably Via, in Via and Gagnon, *Two Views*, 38-39, Johnson and Loader. Luke Timothy Johnson, “At the exegetical level, the passage contains little ambiguity. As a Jew, Paul shared his peoples’ ancestral detestation of homosexuality in any form (see Lev. 18:22-23), regarding it as a ‘perversion’ (Lev. 18:23),” *Romans* 35, yet his view is that Paul’s position cannot determine ethics today in “Two Views.”

Loader is committed to giving Paul his due and granting what he actually thought, but does not believe that we should be bound by Paul’s view in our formulation of ethics today: “His views are to be assessed in the light of all relevant available information, as a result of which we should feel free to reach different conclusions from Paul if the evidence suggests that this is appropriate. My current assessment is that, without disputing that such perversion exists, I cannot consider all such relations as reflecting perverted minds and actions, and so I engage Paul’s contribution accordingly,” *Sexuality*, 321.

When discussing Gagnon’s view that “An alternative pattern of sexuality requires an alternative creation myth” he comments, “It is, of course, no surprise that we have needed and live by a new or at least massively, revised creation myth, which Gagnon apparently ignores, at least since Darwin,” *Sexuality*, 337, note 200. In his conclusion he writes: “I am also convinced that Paul’s anthropology in relation to sexual orientation needs supplementing with the reality that not all who engage in sexual intimacy with those of their own kind are engaging in perversion. Those who are not should not then stand under the same judgment, but like all, be challenged to exercise the expression of their humanity in a way which is conformed to and informed by the generosity and goodness of God who confronts our reality and challenges us to authentic fulfillment,” *Sexuality*, 499-500.

explain why intertextual interpretation is important and how it works. They speak to the problem of textual isolation in the affirming hermeneutic. Some readers might find these sections distracting and can proceed directly to

- Exegesis Of The Main Texts.

Creation And Tabernacle/Temple

There is now a considerable scholarly consensus that links the creation narrative of Genesis 1-2 with the structure and design of the tabernacle/temple, so that the creation story takes place in a cosmic temple, and the design of the tabernacle reflects the same cosmic temple.⁷¹

Understood in its historical context, these narratives are a strong monotheistic statement with a polemic against the prevailing polytheistic beliefs of the surrounding nations. Yahweh had become Israel's king through the exodus event, where he showed that he was not only Lord of history, but also Lord over nature (the plagues) and Lord over the Egyptian pantheon of gods.⁷²

The view of the deity had direct implications for views on sexuality. In the ANE, the sexual activities of the gods were the cause of creation and the basis of the ongoing fertility of nature. Sex was therefore sacralized and divinized. For instance, the male-female pairing of the gods in Sumerian mythology was ritualized in the New Year festival when the king, transformed into the deity, and a priestess, engaged in intercourse.⁷³ In this worldview, the female deity was always linked to nature, having given birth to it, leading to the worship of the mother earth deity. By way of contrast, Yahweh spoke creation into existence by his word. While the Old Testament employed feminine language for God in a metaphorical sense, Yahweh was described as Father or husband to Israel to ensure that no such convergence of nature and the divine was made. Properly understood, Yahweh was above sexuality, distinct from and above creation.⁷⁴

The total contrast between creation-based monotheism and the fertility cults was the basis of the standard Old Testament language that equated Israel's idolatry with harlotry. By engaging in the

⁷¹ "There is abundant intertextual evidence that, canonically, the pre-fall garden of Eden is presented as the original sanctuary on earth in parallel to the later Mosaic sanctuary and Solomon's temple," Davidson, *Flame*, 2007, 47. Particularly helpful in this regard are Beale, *The Temple*, 2004, 48, 75, Alexander, *From Eden*, 2009, and Walton, *Lost World*, 2009. For a fuller list, Davidson, *Flame*, note 133, 47-48. This means that whatever theory one follows on the author or authors of the creation narrative or narratives, and granting that the text of Genesis 1-2 may reflect earlier patriarchal traditions about creation, the text as we have it was written through the lens of the exodus event and the formulation of the covenant. Equally, the text of Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy were written with the creation narrative in mind. The theology of creation in the Pentateuch is already interpreted through the theology of redemption.

⁷² For a narrative reading of the exodus event and Sinai covenant, see Morpheus, *Breakthrough*.

⁷³ Davidson, *Flame*, 87.

⁷⁴ There is a debate in contemporary scholarship on whether there were cult prostitutes in the ANE fertility cults. A previous consensus affirming this has been reviewed in recent times, mainly by feminist scholars (Phyllis Bird, "The Bible," 2000, 142-176, particularly 173-176), but this review has then been further reviewed (Davidson, *Flame*, 88-90). While scholars may debate that sex for hire (prostitution) took place at the Canaanite high places (this is still the more probable conclusion), what is generally accepted is that a kind of sympathetic magic was enacted so that the sexual activity of Baal and Asherah was emulated in the shrine. Certainly if the language used by the Old Testament, in its view of the Canaanite high places is a criterion, then cult prostitution did occur, including male cult prostitutes for males (1 Kings 14:23-24; 2 Kings 17:10; Jeremiah 2:20; 3:2-6, 23; Isaiah 57:5-7; Amos 2:7-8).

Some have disputed their presence due to the fact that male-male sex makes no sense in a male-female fertility cult (Bird, "The Bible," 160). But since they were normally castrated, they would not have been any use for heterosexual intercourse. The idea that their presence in the cult was purely for symbolic purposes (like dancing) is not at all convincing.

Israel was continually tempted to engage in these cults. This is the probable significance of the golden calf episode (Exodus 32). Israel's vulnerability was repeated in the story of Kadesh Barnea and the women of Moab (Numbers 25:1-13).

fertility cult, Israel was literally engaging in illicit sex, but was also worshipping foreign gods. Idolatry was harlotry and harlotry was idolatry. It was a total clash between two different conceptions of deity, leading to two different views of sexual ethics. Placed in this larger framework, the theory that Old Testament prohibitions against illicit sex were purely of a ritual and cultic nature misses the point. The issue was: which god would Israel worship? Depending on which god one worshipped, one's sexual ethics would radically differ.

The other key theme in the biblical metanarrative about sexuality is the King-vassal relationship.

King-Vassal Relationship Through The Rule Of Law

In the symbolism of the cosmic temple, the Ark of the Covenant was regarded as Yahweh's throne (1 Chronicles 28:2; Psalm 99:5; 132:7-8; Isaiah 66:1). Under the mercy seat were the tablets of the law. This symbolized the fact that Yahweh ruled Israel *through* the Law, or Torah, given at Sinai.

There is considerable scholarly support for the view that the form of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel was structured on the suzerainty-vassal treaty structure common at the time.⁷⁵ This places the Law in the context of grace. It is not the case that the Old Testament is all about law, and the New Testament about grace.⁷⁶ Yahweh intervened in the exodus event, not because Israel was a great or worthy nation, but because of his faithfulness to the promise made to the Patriarchs, and because he set his love on Israel. Having redeemed Israel from bondage by an act of grace, he entered into a new, covenant relationship with Israel as Lord to vassal. The kingdom event (exodus) led to the covenant relationship, which was expressed in the Torah, or wise way of living, that expressed the covenant relationship.

In ANE suzerainty treaties, there was a section for general (Deuteronomy 5-11) and specific stipulations (12-26) where the latter explained the former in more detail. Particularly, the Decalogue in Deuteronomy 5 is a condensed version of the detailed stipulations of the whole. In this structure the seventh commandment against adultery is reflected in the detailed stipulations of 22:13-23:18. This section addresses both adultery and shrine prostitutes (22:17-18). Because the prohibition on shrine prostitutes is "an expansion of the seventh commandment in the moral law (the Decalogue) [this] also gives evidence that cultic prostitution was objectionable not only because it was part of the pagan cult but because it was morally wrong in itself."⁷⁷ Following this logic, later Jewish interpreters regarded all the laws on sexuality as detailed stipulations that expounded the seventh commandment.⁷⁸ To put it plainly, the detailed prohibitions against illicit sexuality, including homosexuality, are all set in the context of God's grace and his loving choice of Israel as his covenant people.

For all these reasons, it is simply not credible to read the stipulations in Leviticus 17-18 without reference to the creation narrative, the clash of two different views of deity and the rule of

⁷⁵ Kitchen, *Ancient Orient*, 1965, Kline, *Treaty*, 1963, Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 1976. Davidson follows A Kaufman, who shows how the structure is deftly reflected in Deuteronomy, *Flame*, 104-105.

⁷⁶ Peter Fitch does not argue for an Old Testament – New Testament dichotomy, but he does repeat his "no legalism" line quite often. For instance, it did not occur to him that he could not remarry, because he had not been raised in a "religiously legalistic" way, 24, the tragedy of people who are "not embraced by legalistic groups that insist that they know the mind of God," 25, "kindness and beauty and love are better goals than a legalistic sense of morality," 43, "A legalistic approach is a failure to walk into the wisdom of God. It is a form of clinging to the Bible without being changed by the Bible," 49, and the Bible as a "rule book," 50.

⁷⁷ Davidson, *Flame*, 105.

⁷⁸ Evangelical scholars do not always follow the theories of multiple sources in the Pentateuch (so for instance, Kitchen, *Ancient Orient*, R. K. Harrison, *Introduction*), but if there is any credibility in these theories, the Holiness Code, regarded as part of the Priestly tradition, is linked to Genesis 1, also considered a priestly text. In the context of the Pentateuch as a whole, the Holiness Code constitutes detailed stipulations that expound the specific stipulations summarized in the Decalogue and referred back to in the creation narrative.

Yahweh in the covenant relationship. All of these are inextricably connected through obvious intertextual links. The clash of these two worldviews continues in the contrast between the New Testament writers and the Greco-Roman world, and continues today in the clash between the church's traditional perspective regarding homosexuality and the entirely new affirming position taken by, among others, Ken Wilson and Peter Fitch. In all these contexts, as Paul states in Romans 1, there is a direct link between the view of the deity, the view of humanity, and sexual ethics. To reduce the Pentateuchal prohibitions of various illicit sexual practices to the reflection of a long-gone ritual arrangement is to miss the big picture. In fact, the Pentateuch is highly relevant to the current debate on sexuality.

Exegesis Of The Key Texts

To say that there are seven and only seven texts in the entire Bible that speak about homosexuality is highly misleading. It is akin to saying that there are only a few texts that speak to us about women in the church, or in the family. There are only a few restrictive texts; but all of the texts about people in the church apply to women as well as men. The not-affirming position is based on a method of interpretation that employs intertextuality. In such an approach, the Genesis creation narrative plays a crucial role.

Genesis 1-2

To properly discuss sexuality and gender, we ought to do what Jesus did when he was questioned about divorce (Matthew 19:3). Jesus went back to God's original purpose for marriage in Genesis 1 and 2. Thus we read:

“Haven't you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate” (Matthew 19:4–6).

This is where we must start any discussion about sexuality, whether heterosexuality or homosexuality.

Genesis 1

The “original wedding” staged in Genesis 2 assumes the nature of man as male and female in Genesis 1. The structure of the narrative is not difficult to follow.

1. Each stage of creation is initiated by the words: “God said” and “God called” (3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26). Interspersed with his “saying” is that he “made” or “created” (7, 16, 21, 25, 26, 27). Clearly his manner of creation is by his spoken word. This immediately sets the biblical view apart from ANE conceptions, where nature is begotten by the gods, so that the female deity is “earth mother.” Here God is sovereign over creation and therefore not identified with it. This is the difference between monotheism and polytheistic or monist conceptions.
2. This fundamental differentiation (between God and nature) is then followed by a series of differentiations clearly emphasized by the text: the separation of light and darkness (4), the separation of heaven and earth (6-7), the separation of land and sea (9-10), the distinction between the various kinds of plants “according to their kinds” (11-12), the separation of day from night (14-19), the distinction between the various kinds of living creatures “according to their kinds” (20-22).
3. As these creative acts in their differentiation are narrated, again and again the result is: “God saw that it was good” (10, 12, 17, 25). Clearly differentiation within creation is a good thing, not a bad thing. Here again, this is the very opposite of various monist ideas, as would later emerge in Gnosticism, that the original oneness of the “all” is virtuous, while the “fall” into differentiation is a disaster.

4. As the climax of all these acts of creative differentiation by the creator God who is sovereign over nature, he makes man in his image, “male and female,” the climax of creation. Now the result is “very good” (31). Placed in this context, at the climactic end of these series of differentiations the force of the “male and female” is unmistakable. This is a “good” differentiation.

As will be discussed later, monotheism is consistent with heterosexuality, and monism is consistent with androgyny – two totally different worldviews.

Genesis 2

As Dennis Hollinger put it: “If there is a God who created the world with meaning and purpose, and sexuality and sex is part of that created world, then it follows that there is meaning and purpose to this dimension of human existence.”⁷⁹ Just as Jesus went back to God’s original design for marriage, so we must consider God’s original design for sex and place homosexuality (or, indeed, any discussion of sex) into the context of God’s original design.

The basic issue that the Western world is currently struggling with comes down to this: *do we human beings create the meaning and purpose of sex, or do we discover the meaning and purpose of sex?* Does sex have a meaning totally apart from what you and I think about it and our job is to discover that meaning? Or does sex simply mean whatever we want it to mean? Is there a design for sex given to us by God, or do we just make it up as we go? Here’s the divide.

Recently there was a letter sent to an advice columnist in a local newspaper. A husband wrote and asked,

Dear Carolyn,

While “happily married” to me, my wife fell in love with another man.

Their affair lasted several years. She stayed with me, but was devastated when he dumped her. I was devastated when she confessed. The damage done to our marriage has taken years to heal, and it seems unlikely that we’ll ever reestablish the level of honesty and intimacy we previously shared. Based on ours and others’ experience, I concluded that our cultural obsession with monogamy is a destructive fairytale. We can all experience love for more than one person at a time and we’ll probably do so over the course of our increasingly long lives. The more honest among us promote open marriage, which is difficult to maintain particularly in the face of religious prohibition and community disapproval. What are your thoughts?⁸⁰

One can hear the pain in this man’s letter. Indeed, many of us can identify with it in one way or another. Sex has not always been the good thing we believe it to be (and on that point, both our reading of Scripture and our broader culture agree: sex should be *good*). How did the expert, Carolyn, respond? Did she say: “The fact that you and your wife were devastated by her affair points to a deeper truth about sex; that God has a design for sex. When we step outside of that design, we get hurt and we hurt others?” Did Carolyn say: “You know, there is a grain that runs through the moral universe and when you rub your hand against the grain, you pick up splinters?”

No. Here is what Carolyn actually said:

⁷⁹ Dennis Hollinger, *The Meaning of Sex*, 70.

⁸⁰ Carolyn Hax, “Tell Me About It: Relationships Fail When Communication Breaks Down,” *Columbus Dispatch*, February 2, 2014, accessed May 29, 2014, http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/life_and_entertainment/2014/02/02/relationships-fail-when-communication-breaks-down.html.

There is no one answer that suits every couple. The people who say that vows are paramount are right, that more than one love is possible are right, that monogamy is an antique concept being tested by modern life are right. The people are also right who say arrangements between a couple are not the business of those outside it. The answer is whatever you agree upon.⁸¹

This answer can at first seem empowering, but ultimately leaves us profoundly *alone*. Pastorally, we can and must do better. If there is a God who created the world with purpose and design, then God created sex with purpose and design. We don't invent the purpose of sex; we discover it.

What Is The Purpose Of Sex?

Sex is designed by God for *commitment*. We read in Genesis 2:24-25:

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame (Genesis 2:24-25).

We see in this text, first, a change of *status*:

That is why a man leaves his father and mother... (Genesis 2:24).

The verse is not saying that men in the ancient world, or in our world, are literally called to move out from their father's home and move into their wife's family home (although they may do that). What is being indicated here is that there is a change of status, a change of relationship, recognized by the families involved, and recognized by the larger community. Before marriage, especially in traditional societies, a man's first priority is to his parents; after marriage, his first priority is to his wife.

But there is a second thing here – *commitment*.

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is *united to his wife*, and they become one flesh (emphasis added, Genesis 2:24).

A better translation might be “and sticks to his wife.” The nation of Israel was frequently called to stick to the Lord.

Fear the LORD your God and serve him. *Hold fast to him* and take your oaths in his name (emphasis added, Deuteronomy 10:20).

This commitment of sticking to your spouse, or sticking to the Lord, was later described as a covenant, a binding promise of the heart. And this commitment of sticking to one's spouse, this covenant, is demonstrated by sex, by a physical union.

A woman named Joanna Hyatt has a ministry in Los Angeles called Reality Check, which provides sexual and relational health education to singles, marrieds, and teens. She wrote about God's design for sex, which causes us to “stick together” this way:

When people have sex, the hormone oxytocin is released in the brain. Oxytocin functions as a bonding agent. It's released in the brain during intimate moments – and in especially high levels during sexual intercourse. Both men and women release oxytocin. In the right context, this chemical is going to help create a strong bond between two people to cause them to want each other more than anyone else. If you are married, that is definitely a good thing. But this chemical

⁸¹ Ibid.

doesn't distinguish if the sex is within marriage, or a one-night stand, so if you are having sex outside of marriage, you are still forming that bond.⁸²

Here is the problem. Studies have shown that if you have multiple physical relationships, and then you break up, you damage your ability to form a long-term commitment. You train your brain to do only short-term. Those who are having sex outside of marriage, outside of covenant, outside of commitment are just making it harder for themselves later on to have a solid, successful, safe, secure marriage when and if they finally do get married. They are going to find it harder to "stick together." Like scotch tape that is used and pulled up again and again, they will find God's design for sex to be more and more difficult. Sex is designed by God for commitment.

Sex is also designed by God to *unite naked bodies with naked hearts*.

Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame (Genesis 2:25).

To be naked is a picture of complete disclosure, complete honesty, complete trust, and complete commitment. To be naked with one's spouse is to be able to say, "I am going to share with you not only my body, but I'm going to share with you my heart. I'm going to share my secrets with you." That's scary. Total exposure is something we fear. We need the safety of the complete commitment of marriage to reveal a naked heart with another human being. We need total commitment to enjoy God's design for sex.

One author, Mike Mason, in his wonderful book titled *The Mystery of Marriage* put it this way: "The sex act in marriage is a kind of confessional. We come to another person and we disclose; we uncover our bodies and our hearts."⁸³ Sex is designed by God to unite naked bodies with naked hearts.

But sex is distorted when we *separate* naked bodies from naked hearts. We turn the whole picture of sex into a lie when sex is just two bodies coming together. We should never give our bodies to someone unless we also give our hearts. The two go together. A naked body without a naked heart is a contradiction. God's design for sex is to find one person within the bounds of marriage with whom we're safe, where we can share our bodies *and* our hearts – and where we can receive their whole self. Only in the safety of a lifelong committed relationship can we safely share all of our secrets and know they will not be used against us. Sex is not just a physical act; it's the giving of our whole person to another and the receiving of another's whole person. How many broken hearts have resulted from the giving of one's naked body and one's naked heart to another only to merely receive a naked body in return?

Rick Warren put it this way in one of his messages: "The notion of safe sex outside of marriage is an impossibility because no one has invented a condom for the heart."

Leviticus 18:22; 20:13 And Deuteronomy 23:18-19

It is evident that the prohibition of homosexuality in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 and the prohibition of male prostitution in Deuteronomy 23:18-19 have *both* the order of creation, where humanity is male and female, and the contrast between Israel and the surrounding pagan nations in view.

This is best stated in a number of points:

1. In other ANE laws, while homosexuality was generally prohibited, "there were accommodations depending on active role, consent, age or social status of the passive

⁸² Quoted in Tyler Charles, "(Almost) Everyone's Doing It," *Relevant Magazine*, September/October 2011, 1.

⁸³ Mike Mason, *The Mystery of Marriage: Meditations On the Miracle*, 20th ed., Sisters, Or.: Multnomah Books, 2005, 129.

- partner (alien, slave, foreigner) and/or cultic association.”⁸⁴ Unlike these laws, in Leviticus both parties were penalized, implying prohibition of consensual male-male intercourse, and no exceptions were made.
2. The term “abomination” is only used in these two texts in Leviticus, showing that homosexual intercourse was regarded as particularly serious. While the association of this practice with the pagan fertility cults may have been part of the reason for this term, the wide ranging use of “abomination” in the Torah and elsewhere reveals that its meaning goes beyond ritual-cultic contexts.⁸⁵
 3. The fact that these prohibitions represent universal moral law, and not just Israelite ritual law is revealed by the fact that the same requirements are placed on the alien (resident alien) and the native Israelite (18:26). In addition, the prohibition against homosexuality was not simply a matter of Israel’s purity laws because the Canaanite inhabitants were expelled from the land (“vomited out”) because of these practices. The Israelites are warned that the same fate will await them if they transgress like the Canaanites (18:25-28). “If God’s prohibitions against homosexuality were restricted to the children of Israel He would not have judged the surrounding nations for such sinfulness.”⁸⁶
 4. These practices are described as abominations because they violate the divine order set forth in Genesis. The language of Leviticus: “Lies with a man as with a woman” is linked intertextually with Genesis 1:27 and 2:24.⁸⁷ “Once the argument from the order of creation and natural law is abandoned and heterosexuality within the marital bond as a norm is dismissed, then how can adultery, pedophilia, incest or bestiality be rejected?”⁸⁸
 5. This prohibition against homosexuality is placed in the context of other sex acts, namely incest, adultery and bestiality, indicating that they transcend the culture and setting. William Webb has provided a careful exposition of hermeneutical principles that enable one to distinguish between culturally determined commands and ones that are transcultural. This is a case in point. “A text or something within a text may be transcultural to the degree that other aspects in a specialized context, such as a list or grouping, are transcultural.”⁸⁹
 6. Homosexual intercourse is a “first-tier” offense, grouped together with other offenses that carry the death sentence.⁹⁰ As will be noted below, the penalty for this offense would later be changed by Paul. Paul would also make it explicit that Christians were not to judge those outside of the church regarding their sexual ethics (1 Corinthians 5:12).
 7. One cannot, as affirming writers attempt to do, neatly separate purity and moral laws in Leviticus, just because Leviticus incorporates ethics under the category of purity.⁹¹

⁸⁴ Davidson, *Flame*, 149.

⁸⁵ Gagnon provides a helpful list of how this term is used, to include: worship of other gods, sacrificing one’s children to pagan gods, sorcery, divination, adultery, incest, intercourse during menstruation, cross-dressing, murder, swearing falsely, lying, oppressing the poor/aliens, a false balance to cheat the poor, robbery, extortion, treating parents with contempt, profaning the Sabbath, *Practice*, 118-119.

⁸⁶ White and Neill, *Same Sex Controversy*, 68, cited by Davidson, *Flame*, 154-155.

⁸⁷ Gagnon, *Practice*, 2002, 135-136.

⁸⁸ Dresner, “Order of Creation,” 1991, 320.

⁸⁹ Webb, *Slaves*, 192, 196.

⁹⁰ Gagnon, in Via and Gagnon, *Two View*, 64.

⁹¹ For points 6-9, Gagnon, *Practice*, 62-68.

8. Last, and most crucial of all, is the fact that the New Testament appropriates these ethical requirements. Here again Webb's logic applies. There is no movement, or trajectory in Scripture towards affirming homosexuality, as there is with slavery and gender relationships.⁹²

Sodom (Genesis 19:4-5) and Gibeah (Judges 19:20-23)

Arguments for the irrelevance of these texts, when more closely examined, are not totally convincing, yet at the same time, these are not the best texts to use for the Old Testament prohibition of homosexuality.⁹³ The logic of the intertextual links between the creation narrative, the Tabernacle/Temple, Israel's monotheism, the prohibitions in the Torah, and the New Testament appropriation of those prohibitions, does not need to depend on either the Sodom or the Gibeah texts.⁹⁴

So far we have examined intertextual links in the Old Testament. Before we look at specific links in the New Testament, it will be helpful to briefly discuss two big picture issues:

- The way Jesus interpreted the Old Testament, and
- The relationship between the Old and New Testaments.

Jesus And The Old Testament

Key to the relationship between the two Testaments is what Jesus taught. Here, key to what Jesus taught is the way we see Jesus, or which "Jesus" we are describing. As one reads the affirming theology literature it becomes apparent that the two viewpoints (affirming and not-affirming) usually assume a "different Jesus." This leads to the subject of the historical Jesus.

The Historical Jesus

Many Vineyard pastors today are fond of reading N.T. Wright (academic works) or Tom Wright (popular works by the same author). Wright is a leading figure in what is known as the "Third Quest for the Historical Jesus." This falls in what is now usually described as "Jesus Research."⁹⁵

Whatever the advantages and disadvantages of Jesus Research, the results have been very influential and informative. Wright and other writers would not be so widely read if it were not so. In this research, the picture of Jesus that emerges is one who is more Jewish and prophetic,

⁹² This is the point Webb makes in his entire treatment of homosexuality, *Slaves*.

⁹³ For detailed arguments against irrelevance, Davidson, *Flame*, 145-149, 161-162. For arguments that moot this position, Loader, *Sexuality*, 28-30.

⁹⁴ The sections on the Creation and Tabernacle/Temple and King-Vassal Relationship explain these intertextual links.

⁹⁵ The fate of the first two quests, and the relative success of the third quest, relates to the availability, in the last fifty years or so, of the literature of the era of Jesus, known as Second Temple Judaism. The most significant feature of the third quest is to place Jesus in the historical context of Second Temple Judaism (see Morpheu, *Jesus Research*). A similar development has taken place with the study of Paul (the "new perspective" on Paul).

Another feature of the third quest is the reassessment of the historical method as applied to the Gospels, so that the shift from modernism (post-Enlightenment thinking) towards postmodernism is used to redefine the historical method as applied to the Gospels. Here the third quest differs from the so-called "Jesus Seminar," which tends to continue with a modernist approach to the Gospels.

A feature of all such study is to investigate the various layers of earlier and later sources in the Gospels. A generally accepted consensus is that Mark was written first, that Matthew and Luke incorporated much of Mark, and that a large amount of material common to Matthew and Luke reflects another earlier source, perhaps as early or earlier than Mark (called Q). All historical reconstructions of the historical Jesus have the problem of being speculative. An alternative approach is the canonical study of the Gospels, which takes them "as is." This normally goes along with a high view of the inspiration of Scripture.

more apocalyptic and eschatological (end of the world) and more disturbing to the Jewish authorities at the time, than previously realized. A further feature is the realization that Jesus was a consummate interpreter of Torah.⁹⁶ Therefore, while earlier scholars tended to emphasize the creativity of the early church, and Paul in particular, it is now more widely recognized that Jesus was the formative thinker behind the way the New Testament interprets the Old Testament. Within that recognition is that Jesus stood very much within Judaism. He accepted the authority of the Mosaic Law, regarded it as the word of God, and did not see himself as abrogating it, but rather giving its true interpretation.⁹⁷

Of what relevance is this to the LGBT debate?

Simply this: the Jesus of the third quest is a figure who upholds the Torah, including its strict moral requirements. He relaxed or superseded/fulfilled some requirements, particularly those that are ritualistic or cultic, (Sabbath law, sacrifice, purity requirements, food laws). He intensified other requirements (sexual ethics, love of neighbor, forgiveness, giving to the poor, truth telling).⁹⁸ He was also a figure who regularly spoke words of judgment on his generation, on the Jewish leaders of the day, on the city of Jerusalem, and on the Temple.⁹⁹ He did indeed offer the grace of the kingdom, offered table fellowship to those the Pharisees would not dine with, and related in new, inclusive ways to sinners, tax-collectors, the poor, Gentiles, women and children.¹⁰⁰ But, he did so on the basis that the kingdom brought radical transformation, leading to a lifestyle of heightened righteousness. This view of Jesus is at odds with the possibility that Jesus might have accommodated homosexuality.

A thread that runs through affirmative theology is a portrayal of Jesus that is reminiscent of the romantic figure of 19th century liberal Protestantism. This “Jesus” never judged anyone, accepted everyone, and did not demand moral obedience to the law. He would have accepted homosexuals in the same way as he accepted the poor, Gentiles, women and children, had there been a significant LGBT community in Israel at the time. Perhaps his teaching on eunuchs is a veiled signal to affirm bisexual or transgender practices. Perhaps his relationship with John the disciple is a veiled description of a homoerotic relationship.

⁹⁶ The particular focus of Paul Meier, *Law*, for a more readable approach, R. T. France, *Jesus*.

⁹⁷ This development has led to a different way of reading the New Testament. The traditional Protestant evangelical approach has been to begin with Paul and then read the Gospels. Now we tend to start with the Gospels and then read Paul. Kingdom theology, which has been so pivotal in the history of the Vineyard, was born out of the early stages of this trend in Jesus Research.

The first quest, born out of the Enlightenment, led to what is known as the Liberal Protestant Jesus, the result of many “Lives of Jesus” books written by European scholars during the 19th century. The picture of Jesus that has emerged out of the Jesus Seminar is reminiscent of this 19th century portrayal.

⁹⁸ Gagnon, *Practice*, 220-222.

⁹⁹ Morphew, *Matthew*, 76-80.

¹⁰⁰ One can trace the emphasis on the inclusion of previously excluded groups in Luke-Acts, Morphew, *Mission*, 32-94.

Old Testament And New Testament – Continuity And Discontinuity

As we move to the New Testament, a crucial question is the relationship between the two Testaments. It is not the case that the New Testament has simply dispensed with the Old Testament law. Rather, there is a carefully crafted relationship of continuity and discontinuity.¹⁰¹

It is true that we are “not under law,” as the affirming writers state, but they interpret “under law” quite differently from Paul’s meaning. The whole idea that the Levitical requirements regarding

¹⁰¹ The following points are pertinent to our subject:

1. As the book of Hebrews argues so forthrightly, the entire *cultus* of sacrifices, priests and temple has been superseded by the supreme sacrifice of Jesus. In the Synoptic Gospels Jesus’ words about the temple amounted to the claim that allegiance to him had replaced allegiance to the temple. John’s Gospel shows Jesus as the new temple. John also shows how the Jewish calendar of feasts was fulfilled in Jesus.
2. Paul’s position, in conflict with the Pharisaical party in early Christianity, was that the system of Sabbaths and holy days had been superseded (Galatians 4:10-11).
3. The situation about food laws took some time to clarify. The first step was the word of Jesus, declaring all foods clean (Mark 7:19). However, the Jerusalem Council demanded that the Gentile converts abide by the Levitical laws for aliens, including “food polluted by idols, from meat of strangled animals and from blood (Acts 15:20).” Did this mean the Gentile converts should continue to abide by kosher laws? In the new context of his predominantly Gentile churches, Paul had to nuance this issue with greater clarity, which he did in 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1 and Romans 14:1-15:8. Here he carefully distinguishes between meat bought from a pagan butchery, but eaten at home, from eating the same meat in the restaurants that were part of the pagan cults. Yes, all foods are clean, but it depends on where and how you eat them, whether in the environment of pagan worship, or not. For Paul’s treatment of these issues in Romans 14-15 and 1 Corinthians 8-10, Morphew, *Law and Grace*, Part Two.
4. The issue of the application of the moral law is more complex and more profound. It forms part of significant debates between the various Reformers and continues to be a major issue in theological formulation. (For a recent treatment of the complexities of Paul on the law, see Rosner, *The Law*.) On the one hand, as noted above, it is clear from the Gospels, and underlined by recent Jesus research, that Jesus was not only a consummate teacher and interpreter of the Torah, but did not see himself as abrogating the law. In fact, on the question of marriage, he set a higher standard than other Rabbinical teachers. Further, in the way Jesus interpreted the moral commandments, internal attitudes of the heart were more important than outward conformity. A significant aspect of his emphasis on the heart is the meaning of the word *porneia* (explored below). This higher standard applied within the context of the immanence of the kingdom. The same context informs his views and example on celibacy. Here Paul follows Jesus (1 Corinthians 7). The issue was not whether the law applied, but how obedience or disobedience, performance or lack of performance looked in the new context of the kingdom as inaugurated eschatology (the already and not yet).
5. One of Paul’s greatest achievements was to work out the implications of the coming of the kingdom in Jesus, given the entirely new situation of the crucified and risen Christ. What Paul means when he says we are not “under law” (Romans 6:14) can be easily misconstrued. Clearly for Paul obedience to the law, as performance, cannot justify a person before God. Rather, the atoning work of Christ’s death and resurrection is the sole basis of justification and reconciliation with God (Romans 3:21-5:11). But Paul is appalled at the idea that his proclamation of the free grace of God would lead to the idea of moral license (Romans 6:1-14). If one follows N.T. Wright’s narrative reading of Romans, chapter 6 corresponds to the baptism of Israel in the Sea, and chapter 7 corresponds to the giving of the law at Sinai (Wright, *Romans for Everyone*). Chapter 7 therefore answers the question: What then is the role of the law, now that the kingdom has come? Here Paul shows that it is not within the capability of human nature, without the power of the coming kingdom, to fulfill the requirements of the law. The first role of the law is to convict us of our inability to fulfill it (Romans 7:7-12; Galatians 3:19-25). However, he then goes on to expound on the power of the new life in the Spirit, leading to the pivotal statement that: “The righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:4). What Israel received as the giving of the law, the church experienced as Pentecost (the feast associated with the giving of the law). To use kingdom language, the ability to fulfill the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount is only conceivable for those who experience the powers of the age to come breaking into their lives.
6. This new way of fulfilling the requirements of the law is shown in the structure of Paul’s writings. The heading of Romans is the revelation of the righteousness of God (1:16-17), another way of describing the presence of the rule of God through Christ. This righteousness is revealed in the way God condemns sinful humanity (1:18-3:20), in the way God justifies sinful humanity by grace (3:21-5:11), in the way those reconciled to God can now live in the power of the new creation and the life of the Spirit (5:12-8:39), in the righteous way God has dealt with the world nations and with Israel as his elect people (9-11), and finally in the corporate life of the Christian community (12:1-15:22). *All* are revelations of the righteous rule of God. The last section is introduced by Paul’s pivotal “therefore” (12:1), similar to his “therefore” (or “then”) in Ephesians 4:1 or his “since then” in Colossians 3:1. In all of these Pauline texts, the indicative is followed by the imperative. The indicative section declares what has been accomplished on our behalf by the work of Christ (Romans 3:21-8:38; Ephesians 1:3-3:21; Colossians 1:3-2:23). All is utterly by grace, through faith. The imperative section is filled with the language of command and obedience (Romans 12:1-15:22; Ephesians 4:1-6:20; Colossians 3:1-4:6). These sections are full of moral requirements. Obedience, in the power of the Spirit, is to be expected!

sexuality are irrelevant because of the coming of Jesus misunderstands the way Jesus “fulfilled the law.” For the affirming writers, the relationship between the Old and New Testament becomes entirely one of discontinuity rather than one of continuity and discontinuity.

When the requirements of the moral law are viewed as a form of legalism, the God of the Old Testament is contrasted with the God revealed in Jesus Christ, God’s righteousness is opposed to his mercy and love, and God’s love is used as a hermeneutic to evade the biblical teaching on sexual morality, then this carefully crafted relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament has been misconstrued.¹⁰²

Jesus On Marriage

Ken Wilson centers much of his affirming argument on Jesus’ teaching about divorce and remarriage. He describes a process of accommodation after accommodation away from the original teaching of Jesus, which goes through the following steps:

1. The teaching of no divorce under any circumstances in Mark 10:2-12, Luke 16:18 and Romans 7:2-3.¹⁰³
2. The exception provided by Matthew 19:9, if there is unfaithfulness (*porneia*).
3. The inference made that, if the divorce was thereby legitimate, remarriage is legitimate.¹⁰⁴
4. The further exception made by Paul regarding the unbelieving spouse.¹⁰⁵

This process within the scriptures is then followed by a process in history.

1. The initial strict rule against divorce held by the Roman Catholic church.
2. The accommodation made by the Reformers, allowing for the exception of the wronged partner in a divorce (for unfaithfulness) being able to remarry, and the exception when an unbelieving spouse deserts.
3. Then in recent times, further exceptions have been added, like spousal abuse, a “narcissistic personality disorder” or alcoholism.¹⁰⁶

This leads to the statement: “In my own denomination, remarriage is rarely regarded as a reason to categorically disqualify someone from membership or any form of leadership.”¹⁰⁷ The conclusion is, since we have gone to such lengths to accommodate divorced and remarried people, we should be consistent and do the same for gay and lesbian individuals and marriages.

The point about consistency is well made. However, the reconstruction itself is problematic, for a number of reasons.

Earlier And Later Sources

Those who analyze the history of Gospel traditions generally assume that Matthew 19:3-9 has edited Mark 10:2-12. The latter has no exception allowed, the former does. However, while

¹⁰² The contrast between the two Testaments, which is found in some affirming writers, unfortunately echoes the ancient Marcionite heresy, which dispensed with the Old Testament altogether.

¹⁰³ Wilson, *Letter*, 31, 139, 142.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 145-146.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 145.

Matthew may have followed Mark here, he shares Matthew 5:32 with Luke 16:18, both of which probably go back to Q.¹⁰⁸ Matthew 5:32 does have the exception clause. Q is an earlier source, just as Mark is an earlier source. It therefore cannot be inferred from earlier and later sources alone that the exception clause does not come from Jesus.¹⁰⁹

The Penalty For Illicit Sex

The exception clause shows Jesus presenting a view that is stricter than the grounds for divorce found in Deuteronomy 24:1 (“because he finds something indecent in her.”). Adultery (*porneia*) meant that the person had to be “cut off” from God’s people (Leviticus 18:29), or killed. “Jesus says that whereas Moses allowed for divorce for indecent exposure without illicit sexual relations, He permits divorce only if illicit sexual relations take place,” that is, in circumstances where the death penalty would apply.¹¹⁰

The Exception Clause In The Historical Context

A likely historical context for the exception clause is the abrogating of the law regarding the death penalty for adultery in AD 30.¹¹¹

Therefore, if one understands the Second Temple Jewish context, “The addition of the exception clause both in 5.32 and 19.1 does not ... reflect a softening, but rather a spelling out of what belonged together with the original presupposition: that sexual intercourse created a permanent union and severed all prior unions.”¹¹²

The “Any Cause” Clause In The Historical Context

Another helpful insight in Jesus’ teaching will be found in the works of David Instone-Brewer, Senior Research Fellow in Rabbinics and the New Testament at Tyndale House, Cambridge, who has specialized in this subject. He interprets the words of Jesus and Paul through the eyes of first century readers who knew about the “Any Cause” divorce, which Jesus was asked about (“Is it lawful to divorce for ‘Any Cause’” – Matthew 19:3). Christians in following generations forgot about the “Any Cause” divorce and misunderstood Jesus. The “Any Cause” divorce was invented by some Pharisees who divided up the phrase “a cause of indecency” (Deuteronomy 24:1) into two grounds for divorce: “indecency” (*porneia*, which they interpreted as “adultery”) and “a cause” (i.e. “Any Cause”). Jesus said the phrase could not be split up and that it meant “nothing

¹⁰⁸ This is not the place to debate the plausibility of the Q theory. Suffice it to say that most New Testament scholars believe both Matthew and Luke used a common source, probably textual, but possible oral in parts, which therefore predates both of them, and which is probably one of the earliest historical sources.

¹⁰⁹ Loader, *Sexuality*, 259-264.

¹¹⁰ Davidson, *Flame*, 654-655, citing Roy Gane.

¹¹¹ This context has been understood for some time, as the date of this comment by R. H. Charles shows: “Now, it was impossible to misinterpret the plain words of Christ, as stated in Mark, at the time they were uttered, and so long as the law relating to the infliction of death on the adulteress and her paramour was not abrogated. But, as we know, this was abrogated a few years later. The natural result was that to our Lord’s words, which had one meaning before the abrogation of the law, a different meaning was in many quarters attached after its abrogation, and they came to be regarded as forbidding divorce under all circumstances, though really and originally they referred only to divorces procured on inadequate grounds – that is, grounds not involving adultery. Now it was just to correct such a grave misconception ... by the insertion of these clauses Matthew preserves the meaning of our Lord’s statements on this subject for all subsequent generations that had lost touch with the circumstances and limitations under which they were originally made. Matthew’s additions are therefore justifiable. Without them the reader is apt to misunderstand the passages on divorce,” Davidson, *Flame*, 655-656, note 89, citing R. H. Charles, in a 1921 publication.

¹¹² 270, stated again 286-287.

except *porneia*.” Although almost everyone was using this new type of divorce, Jesus told them that it was invalid, so remarriage was adulterous because they were still married.¹¹³

Paul Does Not Compromise Jesus’ Teaching

Paul is not adding a further compromise. Like Matthew, he is applying the teaching of Jesus to a new historical context, since Jesus did not address the social context of mixed marriages between believers and unbelievers in Greco-Roman society.

In the context of Second Temple Judaism, a certificate of divorce always implied the right to remarry. Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 7:15 “appear to reflect the wording of the divorce certificate and are best understood as a permission to remarry. In a Jewish context that is what a divorce certificate explicitly allowed.”¹¹⁴

The Reformers Did Not Add Further Compromises

It follows that the Reformers did not add further compromises, but were committed to the authority of the New Testament statements.

It is undoubtedly correct that the biblical teaching has been compromised in all sorts of ways in recent times. However, it does not follow that we should simply accept such compromises, and it is not the case that pastoral positions are open to every divorced and remarried person in the Vineyard. It all depends on the grounds for the divorce. The solution is to discover the meaning of Christ’s words in their original context and to be consistent in their application today.¹¹⁵

A fatal weakness to Ken’s argument is that we do not argue that divorce is a “gift” from God, or a positive ethical position. If there is toleration of divorce, it is never the same as construing it as something to be positively valued. It is always regarded as less than what God intended for us. But the affirming position argues for homosexual orientation as a “given” by creation and therefore an identity that positively determines a person’s essential humanity. Here the comparison with divorce breaks down completely.

Moreover, Ken’s attempt to analogize our treatment of divorced people with our treatment of those who engage in same-sex sexual relationships employs faulty logic. Ken’s argument is: “We’ve been willing to be unfaithful to biblical teaching regarding divorced people so why don’t we bend the rules on gays?” This is like saying: “The American church has had a racist past. The only logical response to our racism would be to add anti-Semitism to our catalogue of sins for consistency’s sake.” Would it not make more sense to repent of our unfaithfulness and allow God’s Word to have full authority over our treatment of both divorced people and those in same-sex relationships?

Missing from his discussion is the case of those who have not yet come to faith entering our churches today. Many of those who are divorced and remarried did so before they came to faith,

¹¹³ David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce And Remarriage In The Church*, and *Divorce And Remarriage In The Bible*. It is regrettable that Ken Wilson does not seem to be aware of the works of specialists in the field, like Loader and Instone-Brewer. The latter’s conclusions can be summarized as follows:

- The Bible’s message for those suffering within marriage is both realistic and loving,
- Marriage should be lifelong, but broken marriage vows can be grounds for divorce,
- Biblical grounds for divorce include adultery, abuse and abandonment,
- Jesus urged forgiveness but allowed divorce for repeated unrepentant breaking of marriage vows,
- Only the victim, not the perpetrator of such sins, should decide when or whether to divorce,
- Anyone who divorces on biblical grounds or who is divorced against their will can remarry.

¹¹⁴ Loader, *Sexuality*, 288.

¹¹⁵ Interpreted in the historical context of Second Temple Judaism, as cited above in the works of William Loader and David Instone-Brewer, both specialists in the field.

or while they were in a stance of nominal Christianity. Many also come to our churches who have divorced and remarried as believers. Ethically, these two cannot be viewed in the same light. Overall, our churches should be “welcoming but not affirming” to all. We must welcome divorced and remarried people in just the same way as we welcome those from the LGBT community, without affirming divorce or homosexuality as a virtue. When it comes to pastoral roles there should be a consistent application of biblical norms, for divorced/remarried and LGBT people.

Jesus On Porneia – Not Silent On Homosexuality

Jesus describes the evil desires from within, in contrast to the ritual purity from without (Matthew 15:19; Mark 7:21). In this saying, and the sayings about divorce, *porneia* is used. Much hinges here on the meaning of this term. This will be discussed under the Jerusalem Council below.

The Jerusalem Council

The two basic positions on the Jerusalem Council have already been stated. The use of the analogy between the acceptance of the Gentiles and the acceptance of LGBT people loses its viability if the Apostolic letter prohibited homosexual activity for the welcomed Gentiles. It is therefore not necessary to explore the details of why this analogy does not work. Various writers have done so.¹¹⁶

Key to the entire subject is the meaning of *porneia* (sexual immorality, NIV). If its meaning here is restricted to prostitution, then the Apostolic letter does not forbid homosexuality. If its meaning incorporates all the illicit sexual activities in the Pentateuch, particularly Leviticus 18, then it does incorporate homosexuality. There is consensus among many credible scholars that is clearly in favor of the view that, in this context, and in the sayings of Jesus, it does include homosexuality. Loader has this to say:

With *porneia* (“sexual wrongdoing”) ... we are dealing with ... a word originally connected with prostitution, but which has taken on a much broader meaning, which can also include adultery ... It is best understood in the expanded sense in Acts 15:20, 29:21:25.¹¹⁷

Porneia (“sexual wrongdoing”) would probably have been understood as including same-sex intercourse, as also in Acts 15:29.¹¹⁸

Davidson bases his view of its general usage in the New Testament upon the use in Acts 15:29. Because the four requirements of the Apostolic letter match, in content and order, the requirements for aliens in Leviticus 17-18, showing that the Council had this passage in mind, the meaning of *porneia* must include all the illicit sexual activities in Leviticus 18.

Jesus’ pronouncements against *porneia* (Matt 5:32; 15:19; 19:19; Mark 7:21), when viewed against the OT background, include same-sex intercourse as well as other illicit sexual practices ... Jesus’ denunciation of *porneia* includes all forms of homosexual practice.¹¹⁹

In an article that focused on the use of this term, where he surveys recent scholarship on the subject, Thomas Lyons notes,

¹¹⁶ Perhaps the most helpful is Gagnon in dialogue with Via, *Two Views*, 43-50. Also Kathryn Greene-McCreight, “Logic,” 253-260. The formative writer in favor of the analogy was Jeffrey Siker, “How to Decide.” He is followed by many affirmative writers, for instance Fitch, *Toward Love*.

¹¹⁷ Loader, *Sexuality*, 141-142.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 337-338.

¹¹⁹ Davidson, *Flame*, 634-635.

In later Second Temple and Hellenistic Judaism, *porneia* expanded in usage even farther to include virtually any prohibited sexual activity from Torah. Included in this expanded usage are extra-marital intercourse/harlotry, adultery, incest, unnatural vices, sodomy, unlawful marriages, bigamy, exogamy, and same sex activity

Given these observations, it should not be surprising then that one finds *porneia* as one of the four prohibited activities Gentiles were to refrain from in the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15:20,29; 21:25) and that the likely background for these prohibitions is found in Israel's Holiness Code.¹²⁰

The conclusion is that both Jesus and the Apostolic letter prohibited homosexuality.

Paul's Use Of arsenokoitai In 1 Corinthians 6:9 And 1 Timothy 1:10

The meaning of this word ("with man to lie") is really quite pivotal to the whole argument. It is not surprising therefore that it has received a lot of attention. Its use is first recorded in Paul. As a result, scholarly arguments divide into two exactly opposite directions. Either one examines subsequent uses of the word after Paul, to determine its meaning, or one examines the background to the term in Judaism and Christianity. The direction is either forward-looking, or backward-looking.

The Affirming Position

In earlier literature, the affirming argument was that *arsenokoitai* referred only to male prostitutes, an idea suggested by John Boswell.¹²¹ However, this idea has not been able to sustain itself in the light of subsequent research.¹²²

The affirmative position is now best defended by Dale Martin, among others. He examines its meaning subsequent to Paul.

His argument is as follows:

1. "The etymology of a word is its history, not its meaning. The only reliable way to define a word is to analyze its use in as many different contexts as possible."¹²³
2. The term appears in a vice list, and again in subsequent vice lists. In these lists, terms that have a similar focus appear closer together. "Analyzing the occurrence of *arsenokoites* in different vice lists, I noticed that it often occurs not where we would expect to find reference to homosexual intercourse – that is, along with adultery (*moicheia*) and prostitution or illicit sex (*porneia*) – but among vices related to economic injustice or exploitation."

¹²⁰ Thomas Lyons, "On the Road." Among those Lyons draws on, the most definitive source is the series of articles by D.F. Wright, "The Meaning of *arsenokoitai*", "Translating *arsenokoitai*", "Early Christian Attitudes."

Thiselton, in discussing 1 Corinthians 5:9-10 and 6:9, notes that Paul's comments "reflect the stance of Deuteronomy 23:1-9, 27, 30 and the Decalogue, as relating to the lifestyle expected of the people of God. The first term in 5:9 and 6:9, *porneia*, denotes going beyond the proper boundaries in sexual relations of any kind, without narrower definition. 'Adultery' is a subcategory within *porneia* which is used in the Decalogue (Exod. 20:13; Deut. 5:17)," "Can Hermeneutics," 165.

¹²¹ Boswell, *Tolerance*, 107. Grenz, "Boswell's thesis has failed to win widespread agreement," *Homosexuality*, 57.

¹²² David Wright, "Homosexuals Or Prostitutes."

¹²³ Martin, *Sex*, 39. He argues that working backwards to the words that Paul has combined into one is invalid. "It is highly precarious to try to ascertain the meaning of a word by taking it apart, getting the meanings of its component parts, and then assuming, with no supporting evidence, that the meaning of the longer word is a simple combination of its component parts," 39.

3. This leads him to conclude: “It seems to have referred to some kind of economic exploitation by means of sex, perhaps but not necessarily homosexual sex.”¹²⁴
4. His final conclusion is: “I am not claiming to know what *arsenokoites* meant. I am claiming that no one knows what it meant.”¹²⁵

Scholars at a more popular level tend to rely on Martin, for instance Rogers.¹²⁶

The Not-Affirming Position

What is obvious to a significant number of scholars is that the term Paul uses is simply made up of the phrase found in Leviticus prohibiting homosexuality. *Arsenokoitai* derives from “Do not lie with a man (*meta arsenos koitein*) as one lies with a woman” (Leviticus 18:22). As noted by Soards, this view seems to have been established by Scroggs.¹²⁷ Anthony Thiselton is one of the best in his treatment of this subject.¹²⁸

Loader notes the possibility that there was a previous development of a term from the Hebrew text of Leviticus, but opts for the “more direct and likely proposition that the word was formed in Greek on the basis of the Septuagint of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, where the same cognate words

¹²⁴ Martin, *Sex*, 40.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹²⁶ Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 70-71. He also follows the works of Nissinen and Furnish. Peter Fitch relies on Rogers (Fitch, *Toward Love*, 58). Here Ken Wilson appears to have misquoted Soards. He cites him to make the point that these terms are “notoriously difficult to translate.” Yet nothing in Soards would lead to this conclusion. In fact, his argument is just the reverse. Because of the “incisive work of Robin Scroggs” we can be rather certain that *arsenokoites* is a word that arose from the text of Leviticus 18:22 (Soards, *Homosexuality*, 19).

¹²⁷ Citing Leviticus 18:22, he says “Rabbinic scholars picked up part of that phrase, ‘lies with a male,’ made it virtually into a noun, and gave it nearly the status of a technical term. The term that thus emerged and that is used frequently in this literature is *mishkav zakur* (lying with a male) *mishkav bzakur* (lying with a male), *Homosexuality*, 83. “*Arsenokoites* can then be seen as a literal translation of the Hebrew phrase,” 108. Scroggs is followed for instance, by Hays, *Moral Vision*, 382, and Soards, *Homosexuality*, 19.

¹²⁸ Here are some of the points he makes:

1. His way of determining the meaning of the term relates to the wider context of Paul’s statements in 1 Corinthians, not simply to the term itself. “The four key factors include lexicography, textual context, the drift of an enormous weight of literature on these terms, and the specific relation of the terms to the situation at Corinth.” He therefore explores the term in its context in Paul’s letter, rather than in later use (often far later than Paul –Martin).
2. One conclusion that follows from this exploration of the context (incest in chapter 5, using prostitutes in 6:12-20) is that Paul is regularly alluding to the Pentateuch. His thinking is based on the “the two ways” theme in Deuteronomy 27 and 30, and is similar to “the two ways” in Qumran. As one scholar has noted, “The influence of the Decalogue on this passage (Exod. 20:1-17; Deut.5:6-21), especially in relation to Deuteronomy 27:15-26 and Ezekiel 18 and 22, ‘would be difficult to overstate’,” Thiselton “Can Hermeneutics,” 164.
3. This leads him to the confident statement: “No amount of lexicographical manipulation over *malakoi* can avoid the clear meaning of *arsenokoitai* as the activity of males (*arsen*) who have sexual relations with, sleep with (*koites*) other males ... The words more probably reflect ‘male with male’ in Leviticus 18:22 and Romans 1:27,” Thiselton “Can Hermeneutics,” 167.
4. Arguments that it only refers to pederasty or male prostitution for payment “cannot withstand the battery of detailed linguistic arguments brought against it by a number of historical and linguistic specialists.” Thiselton cites in particular the journal articles by David F. Wright and the major commentary on 1 Corinthians by Christian Wolff, where there is a special excursus on the background of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.

occur.”¹²⁹ Having noted Martin’s views, he believes it is “better to take the word as closely cohering with what Paul condemns in Romans 1 and reflecting the prohibitions in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 on which it appears to be built.”¹³⁰

Davidson is quite certain about this.

Against those who see a Greco-Roman background behind Paul’s condemnation (and thus limit this term to something less than all same-sex intercourse), it cannot be overemphasized that this term never appears in the secular Greek of Paul’s day, but only in Jewish-Christian literature. It is virtually certain that this compound term was coined by the LXX translators in their rendering of Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 ... The undeniable intertextual link indicates that Paul primarily had in mind the OT Levitical background, which forbids all same-sex intercourse, not just issues of exploitation or orientation.¹³¹

Once the link between Paul’s use in these texts with Leviticus is made, a number of conclusions follow:

1. *Malakoi* (soft) comes immediately before *arsenokoitai* (man lie with). Since context is of primary importance to determine what words mean, *malakoi* refers to the passive partner of the *arsenokoitai*, as noted by the NIV footnote.
2. The meaning of the term in 1 Corinthians 6:9 almost certainly determines the meaning in 1 Timothy 1:10.
3. The order of terms in the vice list of 1 Timothy 1:10 follows the order of the moral commands in the Decalogue, showing that these activities could not have been regarded as purely ritualistic purity regulations.¹³²
4. The meaning of *arsenokoitai*, in context, establishes that Paul saw the Levitical statements as permanent moral prohibitions, having their foundation in the Decalogue. Of all the New Testament writers, it was Paul who was most aware of the fact that the Christian faith no longer saw itself bound to ritual elements of the Mosaic Law. We know this due to his extensive treatment of the subject in Romans 14-15 and 1 Corinthians 8-10. His reading of Leviticus therefore clearly discerns between ritual and morality and places this prohibition in the area of unchanging morality.

The natural order would be to deal with Romans 1 before Romans 14, but Romans 1 introduces some larger topics, so it will be dealt with at the end, to introduce those topics.

Paul On Disputable Matters

The use of this text (Romans 14:1-15:13) is particular to Ken Wilson. Depending on how much detail the reader wishes to examine, what follows here is first a summary of the major weaknesses in his argument, followed by further details that support these conclusions. Then, readers who have previously entertained the possible viability of this argument should read Appendix 2, which examines it further.

It has three major weaknesses:

¹²⁹ Loader, *Sexuality*, 329.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 331. He also cites D. F. Wright, “Homosexuals”, 124-153, Hays, *Moral Vision*, 382, Gagnon, *Practice*, 67, 83, among others.

¹³¹ Davidson, *Flame*, 638.

¹³² Martin, who is followed by Rogers (*Homosexuality*, 69), attempts to cluster the term for slave traders with *arsenokoitai*, because slave traders would abduct children to use as sex slaves. The problem with this is that the various terms in the vice list correspond to the order of the Decalogue, and in this context the linkage between the two terms does not work. *Pornoï* and *arsenokoitai* correspond to the seventh commandment (do not commit adultery), while “men-stealers” corresponds to the eighth commandment (do not steal), Via and Gagnon, *Two Views*, 87.

1. A number of scholars interacting with the larger Vineyard and ecumenical community have been involved in the preparation of this paper. None of us has been able to find a single commentator or writer on the subject that interprets Romans 14 in this way. However, at a popular level it has clearly occurred to others, since N.T. Wright finds it necessary to deal with the subject in his “Communion And Koinonia: Pauline Reflections On Tolerance and Boundaries.”¹³³
2. Paul’s whole approach is to discern *between* issues that *are not* of the essence of the kingdom (food and drink) and those *that are* of the essence of the kingdom (“fleeing”, or being transformed from idolatry and sexual immorality). His approach is to distinguish between issues of conscience and issues of sexual morality and obedience. This is particularly obvious because immediately before Romans 14 Paul says this in Romans 13:12-14:

The night is nearly over, the day is almost here – so let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light, let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, *not in sexual immorality and debauchery*, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

To argue that what Paul clearly places in the latter category of disputable matters of conscience, belongs in the former category of “sins to be put aside,” is not simply to misconstrue Paul’s teaching, but to invert it.¹³⁴

3. Ken Wilson’s actual position is indistinguishable from the often-articulated “open and affirming” position. Despite his claim of finding a “third way,” he does not actually deliver on his promise of articulating a “third way.”¹³⁵ His “third way” language is purely rhetorical.

Following these summary points, here are some further details.

It does not take much Bible study to know what Paul regarded as moral absolutes, or moral boundary markers. They are quite transparent in his various vice lists, found in Romans 1:24-32; 3:10-18; Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7; 1 Timothy 1:8-11; and 2 Timothy 3:1-5. Similar language is found in texts where Paul is contrasting the old life to the new life in Christ, and exhorting Christians to “put off” the old life and “put on” the new life (1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Ephesians 4:17-5:7; Colossians 3:5-11), including the key text of 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. Further, the list in 1 Timothy 1:8-11 follows the order of the Decalogue, so that *arsenokoitai* is placed under the 7th Commandment against adultery. Generally all sexual sins were grouped together by Jewish writers under this commandment.¹³⁶ The Ten Commandments were not about peripheral matters.

A major weakness of this argument is that it does not deal with the total witness of Paul on this subject. Paul deals with very similar issues at length in 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1, which was written before Romans. When one reads Romans 14 in the light of 1 Corinthians the total picture is rather different to the one obtained if one only reads the former. Tracing the thread of Paul’s thinking from 1 Corinthians to Romans is important in itself (see Appendix 2), but equally important is to place these passages in the wider context of the whole trajectory of the New Testament on ritual purity versus abiding morality. This development goes through a number of stages.

¹³³ N.T. Wright, “Communion and Koinonia.”

¹³⁴ Gagnon makes this point quite forcibly, *Practice*, 243-244.

¹³⁵ As noted already, his recent interviews and articles for “OnFaith,” “The Huffington Post” and other internet publications have demonstrated this.

¹³⁶ Via and Gagnon, *Two Views*, 87.

1. First, and most weighty is Jesus, who interprets the true intention of Torah on issues such as marriage and divorce, Sabbath-keeping, and food laws. Broadly, on sexual ethics he raised the bar, and on purity/food requirements he relativized the Torah. As Mark rightly concluded, “Jesus declared all foods clean” (Mark 7:19).
2. Jesus’ teaching was given in the context of Judaism. It was left to the early church to deal with the new context of Gentiles entering the covenant community. The Jerusalem Council made use of the Levitical requirements for aliens in their requirements for the incoming Gentiles (as noted above). The four requirements included a mixture of purity and moral requirements. Blood and strangled animals were kosher laws, while idolatry and *porneia* were moral laws. Paul had already made his convictions known and represented one side of the discussion at the Council. It therefore remained a question as to what Paul would actually do with this advice of the Council.
3. In his own apostolic sphere, Paul showed that he had truly grasped the transforming nature of Christ’s teaching. He consistently denied the ongoing validity of food laws and the Jewish festal calendar for Gentile Christians. He regarded adherence to “special days and months and seasons and years” as a return to bondage (Galatians 4:8-11). “Food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do” (1 Corinthians 8:8). “All food is clean” (Romans 14:20). As N.T. Wright has noted, the “new perspective” on Paul shows that what mattered to Paul was that the old boundary markers that divided Jews from Gentiles had been transcended in the Gospel.

“The works of the law” which Paul declares do not justify, are not general moral principles, a “law” in that sense, but “the works of the law” which marked out Jews from their pagan neighbours. They are, in other words, circumcision, the food laws, and the sabbaths – the three things which every Jew in the ancient world, and many pagans in the ancient world too, knew were the boundary-markers between Jews and pagans.¹³⁷

4. Just as Jesus had done, this relativizing of Old Testament purity regulations was matched by a resolute commitment to the Old Testament teaching on idolatry and sexual immorality. To eat meat that had been slaughtered at a pagan butchery/shrine was one thing, but to go to the pagan shrine to eat it was an entirely different matter. This would incur the same kind of divine judgment as fell upon the Israelites when their dead bodies were scattered all over the desert (1 Corinthians 10:1-11). They must “flee from idolatry” so as not to provoke the Lord’s jealousy (10:14-22). When it comes to the cases of incest, internal lawsuits and the use of prostitutes at Corinth, Paul applies the moral principles of the Torah (1 Corinthians 5:1-6:18). Just as they must flee idolatry, they must “flee from sexual immorality” (6:18).
5. While what was regarded as sexually illicit remained unchanged from the Old Testament, the nature of penalties changed. Where the Old Testament prescribed the death penalty, Paul demanded excommunication (1 Corinthians 5:1-12).¹³⁸
6. The relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament people of God, as determined by Jesus and Paul, requiring a careful discernment of continuity and discontinuity, constituted a unique and unrepeatable context. Once set, this would never have to be reviewed again, as there is one eschatological continuum from the coming of

¹³⁷ N.T. Wright, “Communion and Koinonia.”

¹³⁸ This point is relevant today, in the light of moves in some African countries to make homosexuality a capital offense, and that under the influence of the Christian church.

the kingdom in Jesus to the consummation of the kingdom in Jesus (inaugurated eschatology). Issues of law and grace were “set.” There is no “new thing” to come, no new eschatological era, no new gnosis with a higher revelation on these matters.¹³⁹

7. This is why Paul could be so clear that food and drink and special days are not what the kingdom of God is really about (Romans 14:17). It is also why Paul could be so clear that the kingdom of God was about personal and moral transformation, so that those who showed no signs of transformation would never enter it (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).¹⁴⁰

In light of this larger trajectory, and the whole thread of Paul’s treatment of the subject in 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1 and Romans 14, to suggest, as Ken Wilson does, that “first order moral concerns” are “in his disputable issues category” is to entirely invert what Paul is saying.

One cannot read Ken Wilson’s paper without hearing either intentional or unintentional echoes of liberal Protestantism’s method of beginning with human experience, rather than Scripture and tradition. His book starts with his experience of people in his church and then adjusts the meaning of Scripture from any consensus understanding to his own highly eccentric reading of Romans 14. It’s as if Ken has predetermined what Scripture *must say* to fit his limited experience, rather than allowing Scripture and the universal church’s historic interpretation of Scripture to determine his beliefs.

Romans 1

There are many issues of interpretation that arise with Romans 1, but probably the most significant is the suggested contextual distance. We will therefore focus on this, while viewing various approaches to the text.

There are at least seven affirmation arguments on Romans 1:

1. *The heterosexual orientation argument:* Paul describes people with heterosexual orientation who engage in homosexual acts, not people with inborn homosexual orientation.
2. *The impure versus sinful argument:* Paul describes same-sex activity as impure (24) or indecent (27). He does not view it as sinful in itself.

¹³⁹ A point made by Kathryn Greene-McCreight, “The Logic,” 249-254.

¹⁴⁰ Notice the same conclusion in N.T. Wright, “Communion and Koinonia:”

“The point is this: When Paul appeals for ‘tolerance’ in the church, the issues over which he is saying there should be no quarrels are precisely the issues where there were cultural boundary-markers, especially between Jewish and gentile Christians. He is not being arbitrary in selecting some apparently ‘ethical’ issues to go soft on, while remaining firm on others. The things about which Christians must be prepared to agree or disagree are the things which would otherwise divide the church along ethnic lines.”

Then, when commenting on Colossians, Wright has this to say:

“At this point there can be no dispute, no room for divergent opinions: no room, in other words, for someone to say ‘some Christians practice fornication, others think it’s wrong, so we should be tolerant of one another,’ or to say ‘some Christians lose their tempers, others think it’s wrong, so we should tolerate one another.’ There is no place for immorality, and no place for anger, slander and the like.”

Then again, when discussing 1 Corinthians 5 and 6, he says,

“Not for one minute does he contemplate saying, ‘some of us believe in maintaining traditional taboos on sexual relations within prescribed family limits, others think these are now irrelevant in Christ, so both sides must respect the other.’ He says, ‘throw him out.’”

3. *The not-lesbian argument*: Paul is not describing same-sex relations between women, but unnatural forms of heterosexual sex with women.
4. *The misogyny argument*: Paul's context assumed a hierarchical society where the passive partner was necessarily humiliated (made like a woman). This is part of a by-gone world of male dominance, so the text is not relevant today.
5. *The exploitation argument*: Paul is condemning pederasty, the abuse of slaves, etc., so the text is not relevant to consenting adults today.
6. *The orientation argument*: Paul had no concept of a permanent homosexual orientation, since this has only been "invented" in recent times, so this text is not relevant.
7. *The idolatry argument*: Paul is condemning homosexuality within the context of idol worship, so this text is not relevant to modern Western people who are not idol worshippers, and may, in fact, be committed Christians.

Apart from the first three, all the others in one way or another emphasize the distance between "then" and "now." Of the seven, the first four have tended to lapse over time, or have few supporters, while others continue to be supported more broadly. What follows will therefore deal with the last three. Readers who wish to read about the details of the first four arguments should make use of Appendix 4.

It is not necessary to repeat in detail what most writers take note of, namely the wider context of Paul's argument: the purpose of finding all of humanity guilty before God and the "sting" device he uses against Jewish readers. Further, there are frequent examinations of the structure of the text, which in summary has the following elements:

1. There is the repeated use of "God gave them over" in 24, 26 and 28. This shows that the exchange of sexual activity is the result, not the cause of God's wrath. Because of idolatry, their sexuality is "given over" to the exchange.
2. There is the repeated use of "exchanged" in 23, 25 and 26. The one kind of exchange (from the living God to idols) is the basis of the other exchange, from male-to-female to same-sex.
3. The language describes the totality of the human person: "hearts" (1:21), "desires of their hearts" (24), "lusts" (26, 27), "acts" (27), "mind" (28). Clearly the exchange of sexual relations takes place with the total person involved: thoughts, feelings and actions.

The Exploitation And Orientation Arguments

There is considerable overlap in these two arguments. If all homosexual activity in Greco-Roman society was exploitive (pederasty, use of slaves), then it would follow that Paul would have no knowledge of consenting adult same-sex relationships. Conversely, if Paul did know of such relationships, then it follows that not all same-sex activities were exploitive. Here, despite confident statements, the evidence is mounting, rather than diminishing, that the ancients were aware of consensual adult relationships of this kind.

The pederasty view is usually associated with Scroggs, who gave it impetus in subsequent literature.¹⁴¹ Scroggs depended on Dover, but Dover's work was revised, to argue that:

Greek homosexuality in both the classical and Hellenistic era consisted of more than pederasty, that it was not always seen as exploitive, and that same-sex sexual relations could include lifelong consensual adult partnerships.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Scroggs, *Homosexuality*.

¹⁴² Loader, *Sexuality*, 324.

Brooten is one of the more significant sources for this realization. She maintains that in Paul's time people did think in terms of permanent adult same-sex relationships and cites a number of sources to show this. Because affirmative writers so often dispute this, Appendix 5 cites the material in more detail.

Then there is the quite public case of Julius Caesar and his relationship with Nicodemus, the king of Bithynia, described by Soards. Having cited the account from Seutonius, he says, "I have quoted these reports at length to show that Romans knew and had a clear disdain for forms of homosexuality other than pederasty. Julius Caesar and King Nicodemus were, in modern parlance, two consenting adults, and their behavior was scandalous and roundly ridiculed."¹⁴³

While it is informative to examine the Greco-Roman context to probe what Paul was thinking, one needs to follow the thread of similar denunciations of same-sex activity in Judaism. Loader confirms that pederasty was typically what was deplored about the Gentiles, but notes that 2 Enoch "extends this to consenting adults: 'friend with friend in the anus' (34:1-2 MS P)."¹⁴⁴ Similarly, he comments that Philo "targets both pederasty and adult-adult consenting sexual relations, including between women."¹⁴⁵

One of the quite obvious problems for the pederasty argument is that the Greek word for pederasty was available to Paul, but he does not use it, either in Romans or 1 Corinthians.¹⁴⁶ What Paul does target is the same-sex element, since he applies this to both lesbian and male-to-male activity. Further, as many scholars have pointed out, Paul is following a standard critique of Gentile practices in Judaism, where all same-sex activity, irrespective of the positions of those involved in society, was regarded as "against nature" (Romans 1:26-27).¹⁴⁷ The Stoics had their own definition of what "against nature" meant, but Jewish writers merged these views with their reliance on the creation narrative (male and female complementarity). The "against nature" language in Romans does not therefore show that Paul was mirroring typical Greco-Roman views. He was following a well-known Jewish tradition that had already merged these views with Mosaic thinking (creation and Holiness Code), with the latter predominating over the former.

As a result, whether Greco-Roman homosexuality was predominantly exploitive or not is relatively beside the point. What is crucial is Paul's actual reference point. A large number of scholars contend that Romans 1:24-27 contains strong intertextual echoes with the Genesis creation accounts, in particular Genesis 1:26-30.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ Soards, *Homosexuality*, 50.

¹⁴⁴ Loader, *Sexuality*, 32.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁴⁶ Keener, *Romans*, 39.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁴⁸ Anderson, *Flame*, 637, also Loader, *Sexuality*, 314, notes 85-87, citing a number of scholars: Brooten, Hays, Nolland.

Authors at the popular level tend to depend on one kind of source, but fail to take notice of contrary evidence.¹⁴⁹

Modern ideas about orientation will be discussed again below in the context of modernism.

The Idolatry Argument

Of the various interpretive approaches of affirmative writers, this is where contextual distance is most apparent. Undoubtedly, the idols that were worshipped in ancient times, and the idols that are worshipped today, are significantly different. The question is this: is the difference of such a nature that Paul's argument is no longer relevant? Further, is Paul's argument solely based on the corrupting influence of idolatry, or is it based, more fundamentally, on the creation narrative and the fall of humanity?

Martin seeks to trivialize Paul's argument by placing it in the context of "decline of civilization narratives" common in Judaism and Greco-Roman literature, which he distinguishes from any reference to the fall.¹⁵⁰ This, he thinks, is demonstrated by the fact that Paul's reference is placed in the "sting" aimed at Jewish readers who have followed his description of homosexuality as particular to Gentile pagan idolatry. For Paul then, homosexuality is situated within idolatry. Therefore, if we follow Paul's logic, in Martin's view, "once idolatry and polytheism were forsaken, homosexuality would cease to exist."¹⁵¹

Peter Fitch follows the "sting" context argument, which places homosexuality in the particular context of pagan idolatry, and then adds what he thinks is a logical conclusion: "There is nothing being said here that relates to loving and faithful unions among the minority of people around the world who are same-gender attracted."¹⁵²

Ken Wilson elevates the contextual distance by describing the crass pagan fertility cults, which appear "bizarre" for people today. Further, the sexual practice linked to such cults was temple prostitution, again something from a different world.¹⁵³ He then questions the application of Paul's logic for our contemporary context. Since Paul's argument is that homosexuality is the result of God "handing over" idol worshippers to shameful lusts, he asks: "Is God in the business, for example, of giving over children in Christian families to their shameful lusts as a punishment for gross idolatry"? Are such children "the innocent manifestation of a society that has been given over to shameful lusts as a punishment for gross and persistent idolatry? Are we willing to live with a reading of the text that results in viewing God in this way?"¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ Ken Wilson discusses the way N.T. Wright uses the case of Nero and Sporus, and believes he can dismiss this case. He then dismisses the idea that Plato's Symposium shows awareness of adult consenting homoeroticism, relying on Ruden (*Letter*, 63-68). He rather oddly believes Ruden is more of a classicist "than any other New Testament scholar," seemingly unaware that many biblical scholars are also classicists. For instance, Keener was a classicist before he became a New Testament scholar. His knowledge of the Greco-Roman literature and the literature of Second Temple Judaism is widely respected. He makes this balanced statement: "We do read of homosexual relations between fully mature men, but by far the predominant form of homosexual interest remained that of men toward prepubescent and adolescent males," *Romans*, 37. Ken Wilson does not seem to be aware of the wider list of sources cited by numerous scholars, see Appendix 5.

¹⁵⁰ "Romans 1 has to do with the invention of idolatry and its consequences, not the fall of Adam," Martin, *Sex*, 52.

¹⁵¹ Martin, *Sex*, 55.

¹⁵² Fitch, *Toward Love*, 66, following Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 73-74.

¹⁵³ Wilson, *Letter*, 63.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

The rebuttal of these arguments is at two levels: first, those that relate to the text of Romans 1 in the context of Romans as a whole, and second, those that relate to the far bigger issue of worldviews, idolatry and the distance between “then” and “now.”

If one reads Romans 1 in context it is not possible to disconnect the “fall of civilization” narrative from the fall of humanity. This is to set up an untenable either/or. Having used “fall of civilization” rhetoric in Romans 1, Paul then shows that all human sin goes back to the fall of Adam in 5:11-21. His point in Romans 5 is that all humanity is either “in Adam” or “in Christ.” All human sin has solidarity with the fall of Adam. Then in Romans 9-11 Paul pursues a grand salvation-history narrative, which views the total story of the “fall” of the nations, and elect Israel, from creation to the *eschaton*.¹⁵⁵ One cannot isolate Romans 1 from this metanarrative.¹⁵⁶

Further, the point of the “sting” argument is that Jews have fallen into the same sins as the Gentiles. The episode of the golden calf and the repeated allure that Baal worship had for Israel would not have been lost on Paul.¹⁵⁷ What Paul is saying is that if one compares societies, over centuries, the beliefs and worldviews of some societies result in widespread deviation from the creation mandate of human sexuality as male and female, while others do not. As Keener points out, in comparison with Gentile societies, “Jewish homosexual practice was nearly unknown. The obvious contrast with ancient Greek culture suggests the prominent role played by socialization in sexual formation.”¹⁵⁸ Inherent in such socialization are the roles played by belief systems and worldviews. This is the more profound nature of Paul’s argument, which in turn relates back to the question of contextual distance.

Before leaving these seven “affirming arguments” for the bigger picture, it is relevant to raise the same question that was raised with the series of irrelevance arguments. What type of arguments are these seven affirming arguments?

1. They are all very recent, having arisen for the first time in history within the last forty years, following centuries where the “great tradition” of orthodox Christianity had read Romans 1 as prohibitive of all same-sex activities, in all cultural contexts.¹⁵⁹
2. Seven have been described above, but one could add a few more. Clearly many different angles have been attempted, all with the aim of somehow circumventing the “plain meaning” of this text.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ The New Testament term for the end of the world.

¹⁵⁶ N.T. Wright, in “Communion and Koinonia,” similarly connects Romans 1 with the wider context of Paul’s argument in the whole of Romans, “Romans 1 is not a detached denunciation of wickedness in general. It is carefully integrated into the flow of thought of the letter.”

¹⁵⁷ N.T. Wright points out that Paul is drawing on Psalm 106:20 and Psalm 81:12 which describe Israel’s fall into idolatry, *Interpreters Commentary*, 433. Gagnon refutes Martin and the idolatry argument in *Practice*, 284-289.

¹⁵⁸ Keener, *Romans*, 38. N.T. Wright, in “Communion and Koinonia,” raises the possibility that homosexuality reached its greatest expression at the “high point” of both Athens and Rome as civilizations, and wonders if there is a comparison with the current stage of Western Civilization:

If one looks at the ancient world there is of course evidence of same-sex behaviour in many contexts and settings. But it is noticeable that the best-known evidence comes from the high imperial days of Athens on the one hand and the high imperial days of Rome on the other (think of Nero, and indeed Paul may have been thinking of Nero) . . . I just wonder if there is any mileage in cultural analysis of homosexual behaviour as a feature of cultures which themselves multiply and degenerate in the way that great empires multiply and degenerate, with money flowing in, arrogance and power flowing out, systemic violence on the borders and systematic luxury at the centre.”

¹⁵⁹ For a helpful summary of the history of Christian tradition, Soards, *Homosexuality*, 33-46.

¹⁶⁰ This phrase is not being used in a naïve modernist manner here. For a helpful description of “revisionist” readings versus the historic “plain meaning,” Kathryn Greene-McCreight, “Logic,” 242-260.

3. Despite the fact that each argument, when carefully examined, cannot be sustained, some of them are repeated again and again in the literature, with more popular authors relying on certain scholars without reference to their critics.

The obvious question arises: are the affirming arguments really derived from a careful exegesis of Romans 1, or are they merely an indication that Paul's statements are entirely at odds with current liberal sensibilities regarding sex? Again, for those who are committed to an affirming position, would it not be better to transparently disagree with Paul and admit that one has decided to elevate contemporary values over biblical norms, than to attempt a revisionist reading of Paul?

Chapter 3: Romans 1 – Deity, Humanity And Sexuality

Here Paul's logic in Romans 1 is the launch pad, as it were, to a larger subject.

The intertextual links between Romans 1 and Genesis 1-2 are widely acknowledged by biblical scholars. Apart from the obvious fact that Paul refers to the creation of the world (20), the men (*arsenes*) and women (*theleia*) of Romans 1:26-27 echo the "distinctive terms"¹⁶¹ for male and female (*arsen kai thely*) of Genesis 1:27. The sequence of words in Romans 1:23 (mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles) follows the sequence in Genesis 1:24-26 (human being, fish, birds, cattle and reptiles). Therefore Paul's reference point is the Genesis narrative.

There is similarly a widely held view that Romans 1 includes Paul's understanding of the fall of humanity.¹⁶²

Paul does not argue on a case-by-case basis that every single individual has first known and then rejected God; instead, thinking in mythico-historical categories, he casts forth a blanket condemnation of humankind. The whole passage is "Paul's real story of the universal fall."¹⁶³

Therefore the whole story of human sin, from the fall of Adam, is similarly Paul's reference point. As noted above, it is part of his salvation-history metanarrative. To raise the issue, as Ken Wilson does, of whether a particular Christian child is the object of God's wrath is to miss Paul's point in Romans 1. What is at issue is the shape of an entire civilization, in fact all civilizations that no longer acknowledge the creator, not any particular individual, Christian or non-Christian.¹⁶⁴

Paul uses a deliberate rhetorical connection between the view of the deity and the view of human sexuality. The exchange of the glory of God for idols is mirrored by the exchange of sexual preference for the same sex.

Once they had perverted God's image directly, they distorted it also in themselves.¹⁶⁵

God made man and woman for each other ... When human beings "exchange" these created roles for homosexual intercourse, they embody the spiritual condition of those who have "exchanged the truth about God for a lie."¹⁶⁶

What is the logic to this rhetorical link?

Is Paul merely following a conventional "fall of civilization" narrative without thought? While such ideas in Judaism may have had links with similar ideas in Greco-Roman literature, the logic behind the idea in Judaism is based on the fundamental difference between creationist monotheism and general pagan conceptions of deity in relation to nature. As noted earlier, the big picture was the clash of worldviews. Yahweh created through his word, and was sovereign over

¹⁶¹ Keener, *Romans*, 35.

¹⁶² "I would suggest ... that Paul's real story of the universal fall is narrated in Rom. 1:18-22 ... it seems to me that Paul is speaking of a universal fall, or deception, which includes Jews as well as Gentiles," Scroggs, *Homosexuality*, 110-111. "Paul's biblical allusions and polemic against idolatry infuse this narrative with the Jewish subtext of Genesis," Keener, *Romans*, 34, note 79.

¹⁶³ Hays, *Moral Vision*, 385.

¹⁶⁴ N.T. Wright, "He is not proposing a case-by-case analysis. Rather, his argument is that the existence of homosexual practice in a culture is a sign that that culture as a whole has been worshipping idols and that its God-given male-and-female order is being fractured as a result," *Interpreters Commentary*, 435.

¹⁶⁵ Keener, *Romans*, 35.

¹⁶⁶ Hays, *Moral Vision*, 388.

creation. In ANE conceptions, nature was begotten by the sexual intercourse of various deities and its fertility was sustained by such intercourse. Sex was sacralized and divinized. The view of the deity determined the view of nature, which determined the view of human sexuality.

One of the clearest illustrations of this connection comes from the history of Gnosticism. Various writers, from quite diverse backgrounds and disciplines attribute the recent, major change in Western thinking about sexuality to the resurgence of Gnosticism. What is common to them is the logical progression: from the view of deity, to the view of nature, to the way humans view themselves, to sexuality and sexual behavior.¹⁶⁷ Appendix 4 covers this subject in more detail. If the connection between Ancient Gnosticism and the resurgence of similar ideas today does explain the change in sexual ethics, then it follows that the textual distance between “then” and “now” has narrowed considerably. The argument that Romans 1 is irrelevant today because it speaks to a totally different context loses its force.

Further, it is not that a child born in a Christian home today, who develops homoerotic desires, has been personally judged by a wrathful God, but that human society, as an historic phenomenon, is shaped by its view of deity. When belief in a good and loving personal creator (theism) is replaced by other ‘gods,’ there are consequences for our sexual practices.

Therefore, the choice between an affirming or not-affirming position is not simply a small matter about a short list of seven biblical texts that have a disputed meaning, but about what God (or god) we worship. As we have already noted, it is also about which historical picture of Jesus we believe in.

Romans 1 Through Modernist Lenses

Also pertinent to the argument for a major contextual difference between Romans 1 and our contemporary context is the subject of modernism. This is a large subject, which is covered in more detail in Appendix 6. Put simply, modernist readings of ancient literature assume the vast superiority of scientific, advanced, modern humanity compared with the ignorance, superstition and limitations of the ancients. Despite evidence to the contrary, affirming writers repeat the argument that Paul could not have conceived of adult consensual homoerotic love. In contrast to what Paul could not have conceived of is the fresh light of recent scientific discoveries about sexual orientation. This idea is *typically modernist*. With many of the affirmative writers, it seems to reveal an unconscious or non-reflective assumption of the modernist worldview. However, if one grasps the full implications of the shift from modernism to postmodernism, such assumptions are no longer possible.

Placed in this context, Paul’s so-called ignorance appears to be a rather dubious case of modernist hubris. Authors who confidently state the contextual difference between “then” and “now” may be revealing more about their modernist assumptions than about Paul.

¹⁶⁷ For another similar analysis, Morphew, *Different But Equal*, 48-107.

Chapter 4: Biblical Authority And Orthodoxy

These two subjects are so interwoven that it will be preferable to consider them together.

It will be helpful to summarize how a number of different arguments offered so far come together. A key affirming argument is the contextual distance between Romans 1 and today. This view has been eroded by three arguments:

1. The historical evidence that the ancients did have an understanding of adult, consenting homoerotic love narrows the distance between Paul's context and today.
2. The distance between Paul's context and today is narrowed by the similarities between ancient conceptions of the deity, humanity and sexuality, and similar conceptions today. Paul would have defined both forms of Gnosticism as idolatry, ancient Gnosticism and its source ideas, and the resurgence of the Gnostic worldview today.
3. The confident affirmation of the contextual distance between Paul and modern Western society is a typically modernist argument, fraught with all the weaknesses of modernist naiveté. This point assumes Appendix 6.

These lines of argument then feed into a series of conclusions. Some of these depend upon the more detailed arguments in the appendices, and are presented as mere conclusions here:

1. The intertextual links between the exodus event/kingdom/covenant, the creation narrative and the Levitical legislation are framed in the context of two competing worldviews, two opposing ideas of the deity, and therefore different approaches to nature, humanity and sexuality.
2. The same opposition of worldviews (deity, nature, humanity and sexuality) is evident in the stark difference between Jewish and Christian ideas about homoerotic relationships and the prevailing Greco-Roman society.
3. Therefore, the short list of seven texts that speak directly to the subject is found within a far larger framework. One cannot isolate these texts from this larger framework. What is at stake is one's view of God, of creation, which "Jesus" one believes in, and how one views humanity.
4. The same worldview is reflected in the way these texts have been interpreted through the "great tradition" of Christian orthodoxy. In contrast, revisionist readings of these texts are very recent in history and are entirely "situated" in a particular time and culture that reflects the same antithesis of worldviews. This "situatedness" includes a modernist assumption about a new "eschatological moment" of enlightenment (N.T. Wright) that supersedes the ignorance of the biblical writers. Instead of reflecting a purely objective response to science, it shows all the signs of reflecting a resurgence of Gnosticism, a particularly enduring form of idolatry.
5. Showing due respect for postmodernism, the two competing worldviews and ways of reading the biblical texts (hermeneutical approaches) take place within two different paradigms, or interpretive communities. There are competent biblical scholars, theologians, and social scientists found within both interpretive communities. What is written here clearly reflects the paradigm of *one* of those communities. However, this paradigm can legitimately claim to be in communion with the worldview of the biblical writers and the great tradition of orthodoxy, while the alternative paradigm has to resort to a revisionist reading of the biblical texts.
6. This revisionist reading of the biblical texts has been shown to reflect a hermeneutic of irrelevance, isolation, and distance and at one point inversion, which is broadly subversive. The unsuitability of the biblical teaching to prevailing Western culture is

countered either by an attempt to revise what the texts mean, or to admit that they are universally prohibitive, but then to elevate certain biblical themes (love and acceptance, or a certain reading of Galatians 3:28)¹⁶⁸ over other biblical themes on the basis of a higher *gnosis* drawn from modernity.

7. The authority of Scripture is not shown by confessions of loyalty to biblical authority, but by the way biblical texts are actually handled. Some affirmative writers go to great lengths to describe what biblical authority and sound hermeneutics should look like.¹⁶⁹ However, if they then interpret texts through revisionist methods of irrelevance, isolation, modernist distance, and postmodernist relativism, the authority of Scripture has little meaning. Sometimes the way biblical texts are read is framed in the opposition between a literalist/legalistic reading and a more profound theological and symbolic reading. However, the reverse can be argued. It is the orthodox reading of these biblical texts that is more congruent with the total narrative of Scripture: its view of deity, nature, humanity and sexuality.

All these points that have emerged from our consideration of the literature face us with the question of orthodoxy. This has been highlighted, in particular, by Thomas Oden in *The Rebirth Of Orthodoxy* where he draws attention to the classical criteria formulated by Vincent of Lerins, namely that orthodox faith is that which has been believed “everywhere, always, and by all.”

To be trustworthy and in accordance with these criteria, any assertion of faith must

- Be the same faith that the church confesses the world over,
- Be the same faith confessed by the apostles, and
- Survive testing by cross-cultural generations of general lay consent through a trustworthy process of conciliar agreement.¹⁷⁰

These criteria have been stated in their negative counterpart by the church historian J. W .C. Wand, ¹⁷¹ where heterodoxy (non-orthodox belief) has been defined in terms of the following criteria:

1. A heresy must be a novel doctrine, that is, of recent rather than historic origin, which goes beyond merely contextualizing the historic faith into a new situation.
2. It must be a partial doctrine, that is, held to in certain places, rather than confessed by the ecumenical church.

¹⁶⁸ Reference is made here to the idea that this text, “male and female” united in Christ, and Matthew 22:29-30, “neither married nor given in marriage” can be used to support homosexuality. This paper will not address the subject of future eschatology and how it impinges on these questions. However, we can simply note that there are two problems with this argument. First, the point Paul is making in Galatians has to do with the social and religious barriers that created divisions within contemporary Judaism being transcended in the new era, not about a transcending of creation. Commentators do not generally read the saying of Jesus in this way either. Second, there is a problem with the logic. If the need for intercourse is transcended in the coming age, it is because procreation is no longer necessary where the dead are raised imperishable, not that a new kind of homosexual intercourse is now sanctioned, in contradiction to the whole created order. The relationship between the first creation and the new creation does not work like that.

¹⁶⁹ Few would want to disagree with the way Rogers formulates this, *Homosexuality*, 50-65. However what follows falls within the standard affirmative operating procedures of irrelevance, isolation and modernist distance.

¹⁷⁰ Oden, *Rebirth*, 162.

¹⁷¹ J. W. C. Wand, *Great Heresies*.

3. It must be held to stubbornly and in disobedience. This means that when respected Christian leaders explain the nature of the error, the false teachers refuse to acknowledge their error or fail to see the truth presented.

The Vineyard church believes in the notion of the “reformed church always reforming.” An illustration of this would be the theology of the kingdom, that has emerged in recent time, and that informs Vineyard theology and practice. However, we also believe that such theological innovation takes place in communion with the “Great Tradition” of the ecumenical church throughout the ages.

The point here is not to define affirming theology as a heresy. The debate is still too recent, and research is ongoing, to reach such hasty conclusions. However, it must be said that it does not look good for affirming theology. It is certainly novel, having only arisen in the last few decades of church history. It is certainly partial. The majority of Christians, in the great majority of Christian movements worldwide, do not accept it. Rather, it exists in certain Western societies where great pressure has developed to succumb to a shift in views about sexuality. It would be unfair to say that affirming authors are stubborn or disobedient in attitude. The sincerity of so many works is plain to see. However, what is troubling is the subtext that appears now and then claiming a higher level of revelation from the Spirit. Personal stories about being led by the Spirit and conclusions drawn from certain spiritual disciplines appear to those who do not agree as more manipulative than helpful.

This paper has not addressed, in detail, the subjects that are normally bracketed with biblical authority as criteria for theological construction, namely tradition, experience and reason. We do make use of tradition when dealing with orthodoxy, and we do comment on the priority of revelation over reason in a few places. Here some brief comments can be made on the role of experience:

1. The problem with using experience as an argument is that it begs the question: whose experience? Are we going to draw on the experience of Christians who witness to being healed from homosexual orientation, or those who witness to its immutability? Are we going to draw on the experience of Christians who have chosen to remain celibate, despite their orientation not changing, or those who decide to affirm their orientation? Are we going to draw on the experience of writers who claim to be led by the Spirit to adopt an affirming position, or those who claim to be led by the Spirit to adopt a not-affirming position? When it comes to this subject, the argument from experience simply re-states an already adopted position.
2. In the history of theology, where tradition, experience and reason have been used, the assumption has always been that biblical authority trumps reason and experience. This differs from theologies that are consciously derived from a particular social context.¹⁷²

On balance, the affirming position does not fare well in terms of criteria for orthodoxy.¹⁷³

¹⁷² For instance, liberation theology and feminist theology. For an analysis of how feminist (as in radical feminist, not evangelical feminist) theology differs from historic theology, see Morpheus, *Different But Equal*, the chapter on “The Divine Being And Gender.”

¹⁷³ For Oden, the rebirth of orthodoxy is reflected in movements that are pushing back against the general drift towards non-orthodox faith in the historical churches. Included in this push-back is resistance to the acceptance of homosexuality, *Rebirth*, 146-148.

Chapter 5: Pastoring LGBT People

We are now in a position to address the key pastoral questions.

Let's take the case of someone who is practicing gay sex and now comes to church. We have many gay people and many gay couples who attend Vineyard churches all across America. How should they be pastored? *What level of participation should we offer in Vineyard churches to those who are sinning sexually, whether through heterosexual sin or homosexual sin?*

Let's consider a variety of activities that Vineyard churches participate in: Communion, Baptism, Membership and Leadership.

Communion

Much debate has occurred in church history around the material substance of the elements and whether they actually become the body and blood of Christ.¹⁷⁴ For Vineyard churches these issues have not historically been the subject of much debate. The more relevant issues for us surround the function of the Lord's Supper rather than the precise nature of the elements. What is communion for? What does it do? Is it primarily a tradition of remembering Christ's sacrifice? Is there a mysterious, divine interaction that occurs? Is it primarily an oath of fidelity?¹⁷⁵ Is there grace imparted? Is faith required? These questions inform how we practice the Lord's Supper and determine who has a seat at the table. A few principles inform the way the vast majority of Vineyard churches practice communion:

- In Vineyard churches, we remember Christ's sacrifice for us, *so it doesn't matter what merit we bring to the table.*
- We recognize there is a mystery to the table, *so we approach it with humility and reverence rather than know-it-all arrogance.*
- We also are declaring our fidelity to Jesus, whose supper it is, *so we point our lives toward him no matter how close or far we are from him.*
- Because there is grace imparted, *we believe that those who recognize their need of God's grace the most are the most welcomed at the table.*
- Because grace is only accessed by faith, *empty religion finds no place at this table.*

Faith in *Christ* is crucial to any understanding of an "open table."

Who Has A Seat At The Communion Table?

With this understanding of the function of the Lord's Supper, we now come to the question, "Who has a seat at the table?" Throughout church history and in our present time, many churches have practiced a closed communion table.¹⁷⁶ This means that communion is reserved for those who have made some sort of public commitment to Christ and who are in good standing with the local church or denomination. This likely comes from the precedent of Paul's exercise of excommunication (1 Corinthians 5). The Lord's Supper thus becomes a marker for who is "in" the community of faith and who is not. Additionally, the Lord's Supper carries the promise of dispensing the great benefit of grace. So eligibility for receiving grace turns out to be a powerful

¹⁷⁴ For a short overview of the historical views of communion, see Robert Webber, *Worship Old And New*, 239-47.

¹⁷⁵ For a broader discussion of communion as an "oath of fidelity," see Stanley Grenz's discussion on sacraments, Stanley J. Grenz, *Community Of God*, 512-15. Grenz is helpful in thinking about baptism and communion from an evangelical perspective.

¹⁷⁶ For a good overview of closed and open communion, see Kevin R. Seasoltz, 2005, "One House," 405-419.

motivator to keep people in line. Yet was it meant to function this way? Most Vineyard churches have not thought so.

At the original Last Supper of Jesus, it is striking that Judas was present for the supper meal, even though Jesus knew that Judas would betray him.

In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. *But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table.* The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed. But woe to that man who betrays him!” They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this (Luke 22:20-23).

The betrayer was still welcome at the table to participate in the last supper with Christ.

Furthermore, when the meal was over the text says that they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives where Jesus tells the whole group: “You will all fall away” (Mark 14:27). Again, it is striking that everyone who ate the original Lord’s Supper turned away from Jesus after the supper – and Jesus *knew they would*. So for Jesus, the Last Supper was decidedly not a marker for who was in and who was out.

Consider also Paul’s major issue with the Corinthian practice of the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 11. The problem was not that they were *including* people they should *exclude*; the problem was that they were *excluding* people that they should *include*.¹⁷⁷ The wealthy were eating lavish meals and getting drunk while the poor went hungry with nothing to eat or drink. While this was a socio-economic issue of exclusion, Paul’s general exhortation (applicable to a wide variety of situations) was to “discern the body”:

For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves (1 Corinthians 11:29).

What Does It Mean To Discern The Body?

Paul’s exhortation to the Vineyard today would be to *discern the body*, and to make sure to include everyone Christ includes.¹⁷⁸ This means that drug addicts and alcoholics that haven’t kicked the habit, gays and lesbians that haven’t left the lifestyle, and divorced adulterers that are still with their mistresses are all welcome at the table if they sincerely desire to turn toward Jesus and place their lives under the faucet of God’s grace. What better place is there to go for someone trapped in sin and deceived by its sickness than the table of our Lord?

John Wesley, the great 18th century evangelist, pastor, and theologian, put it well when he said this:

I showed at large: 1) That the Lord’s Supper was ordained by God to be a means of conveying to men either preventing, or justifying, or sanctifying grace, according to their several necessities. 2) That the persons for whom it was ordained are all those who know and feel that they want the grace of God, either to restrain them from sin, or to show their sins forgiven, or to renew their souls in the image of God. 3) That inasmuch as we come to His table, not to give Him anything, but to receive whatsoever He sees best for us, there is no previous preparation indispensably necessary, but a desire to receive whatsoever He pleases to give. And 4) That no fitness is required at the time of communicating, but a sense of our state, of our utter sinfulness and helplessness; every

¹⁷⁷ See Gordon Fee’s discussion on 1 Corinthians 11:27-32, *Corinthians*, 558-69.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 566-567.

one who knows he is fit for hell being just fit to come to Christ in this as well as all other ways of His appointment.¹⁷⁹

The only fitness required is "...a sense of our utter sinfulness." No other moral qualification is demanded before receiving communion.¹⁸⁰

Baby Dedication: Whose Babies Should Be Dedicated?

Baby Dedication is one of the times of life when individuals are open to consider the place of church and the place of Christ in their lives. We must admit that there is very slim evidence for baby dedication in the Bible. There may be a hint of it in the example of Hannah in the Old Testament, and another hint regarding the presentation of Jesus in the New Testament. But by and large, Baby Dedication is a church rite; it is not an ordinance like baptism or the Lord's Table, which has clear scriptural foundations. Baby Dedication arose, in large part, to fill the gap from churches in the Baptist and Anabaptist traditions, which rejected infant baptism.

Vineyard churches may thus be flexible and open to all who seek to dedicate their children. Baby Dedications are often used as a pathway for a couple to find Christ. We recommend a class, or a private meeting with parents about their own relationship with Christ and the significance of raising a child for Christ. Our movement leaves the issue of Baby Dedication up to the pastoral discernment of our member churches.

Baptism

There has been an historic debate in the church regarding who is eligible to be baptized. Is baptism an initiatory rite, which immediately follows conversion so that anyone who confesses Christ as their Lord and Savior is entitled to receive baptism, or must someone go through a lengthy catechism in which they demonstrate the fruits of conversion before getting baptized?

For most Vineyard churches, our understanding is that from a New Testament perspective, Baptism was and is an initiatory rite, which immediately follows conversion.¹⁸¹ People in the New Testament did not go through a catechism process that allowed for a demonstration of their commitment to Christ in order to receive Baptism as many would several centuries later.¹⁸² Rather, people confessed Christ as Lord and Savior and then were immediately baptized.¹⁸³

The approach we recommend is to try to fully explain to every baptismal candidate in a robust way what it means to have Jesus as Lord of their lives. *My Heart Christ's Home*¹⁸⁴ is a booklet that has proved helpful to thousands of Christians for half a century regarding the Lordship of Christ. It compares inviting Christ into one's life to inviting Christ into one's home. To have Christ as Lord of our lives is to allow Christ to rule over every room of our lives – our bedroom (what you do sexually); our dining room (our appetites); our study (what you read and think

¹⁷⁹ "Saturday, June 28, 1945," in *Wesley Letters*, 2:360-62.

¹⁸⁰ The exception to this would be withholding communion from the person who is under church discipline. An individual under church discipline is normally someone who is a member of the church (or for those churches who do not have formal membership, someone who has professed Christ and is committed to the local church) that has repeatedly been approached about his or her sin and who has not repented nor shown a desire to change. Each local congregation has the liberty to exercise church discipline as they see fits the biblical pattern.

¹⁸¹ Webber, *Worship*, 230.

¹⁸² For a summary of the early catechism process, see Laurence Stookey, *Baptism*, 101-15.

¹⁸³ See examples of baptism taking place immediately after conversion e.g. Acts 2:41; 8:38; 10:48; Acts 16:15; 16:33; 18:8.

¹⁸⁴ Robert Munger, *My Heart*. It can be found in several places online in a free PDF version.

about); our desk (our finances and checkbook) and even the locked closet upstairs where we have our deep dark secrets. Baptismal candidates should understand that the essential baptismal confession is “Jesus is Lord!”

Therefore, one approach for Vineyard churches would be to offer baptism to anyone – even folks who are currently wrestling with various addictions and ongoing practices of sin – so long as they say that they are willing to invite the Lordship of Christ into every area of life.

However, if a candidate says, “We understand what Vineyard’s position is on sexuality, on living together, on racism, on getting drunk – we just don’t agree. We are simply unwilling to ever give this up.” We’re putting up a “No Trespassing” sign regarding a particular room of our house (at least regarding Vineyard’s view of what is sin in this particular room; a view which we do not share). In such a case, we are recommending not baptizing such an individual because they are rejecting the local church’s understanding of what Scripture calls sin. As in most of these practical matters, we permit a wide range of opinion among Vineyard churches regarding the proper candidates for baptism. Some of our churches may choose to have a lengthy catechism and a track record of repentance before offering baptism. Others may choose to baptize even if a candidate disagrees about whether a particular practice is sin, so long as they confess Christ as their Lord and Savior. Many will choose to follow a process like the one outlined in this paper.

Leadership In A Vineyard Church

Moral qualifications are attached to leading in the Body of Christ. Therefore, someone who is practicing sexual sin of any kind, or is addicted and is not having significant victory over his or her addiction, would not qualify to be a leader in most Vineyard churches. Leadership in the Bible is primarily an issue of modeling. The question of leadership in the New Testament appears to be “imitate me as I imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

According to Shmuel Safrai, the late Professor Emeritus of the History of the Jewish People at Hebrew University in Jerusalem,

Students [in New Testament times] were called *talmidim* (*talmid*, *s.*) in Hebrew, which is translated *disciple* [*ital. added*]. There is much more to a *talmid* than what we call student. A student wants to know what the teacher knows for the grade, to complete the class or the degree, or even out of respect for the teacher. A *talmid* wants to be like the teacher, that is to become what the teacher is. That means that students were passionately devoted to their rabbi and noted everything he did or said. ...As the rabbi lived and taught his understanding of the Scripture his students (*talmidim*) listened and watched and imitated so as to become like him. Eventually they would become teachers passing on a lifestyle to their *talmidim*.¹⁸⁵

In sum, leadership according to the New Testament is a very significant and influential thing. We reproduce what we are. Thus Vineyard churches are encouraged to not promote into leadership those whose lifestyles we would not want to have replicated throughout their sphere of influence.

While the Vineyard movement permits a diversity of opinion regarding who would be appointed to leadership in the church, we do not permit a diversity of practice regarding who should be licensed or ordained as a Vineyard pastor in a Vineyard church. For the Vineyard USA, we insist that Vineyard should not ordain someone who is having sex outside of heterosexual marriage (in other words, we do not permit the ordination or licensing of a person who is involved in an extra-marital, pre-marital, or same-sex relationship and we must discipline those leaders who violate Scripture in this way).

In addition, because of our stated view of what various biblical texts demand (in particular the creation texts of Genesis 1 and 2 and Jesus’ and Paul’s citation of these

¹⁸⁵ Shmuel Safrai, *Rabbi and Talmidim*, Follow the Rabbi at <http://www.Rabbi.com>, November 30, 2001. 3.

texts when discussing marriage and sex), we insist that Vineyard churches not perform same-sex marriages.

To use a baseball analogy, Vineyard USA has two clear foul lines regarding our corporate life together: one foul line concerns marriage and the other foul line concerns licensing and ordination. The baseball field that we play on is huge. We permit Vineyard churches to be positioned on the field in different places. We will not all agree on where those positions are, but we are committed to practice generosity toward one another, so long as we are on the field of play.

Conclusion

The Vineyard movement is a movement that has always refused to cut the tensions that we find in Scripture. From our beginning, we have defined ourselves as evangelical *and* charismatic. We believe in a kingdom that is already *and* not yet. We have practiced evangelism that involves proclamation *and* demonstration. John Stott in *The Cross of Christ*, wrote this:

Emil Brunner in *The Mediator* did not hesitate to write of God's "dual nature" as "the central mystery of the Christian revelation." For "God is not simply Love. The nature of God cannot be exhaustively stated in one single word." Indeed, modern opposition to forensic language in relation to the cross is mainly "due to the fact that the idea of the Divine Holiness has been swallowed up in that of the Divine Love; this means that the biblical idea of God, in which the decisive element in this twofold nature of holiness and love, is being replaced by the modern, unilateral, monistic idea of God."¹⁸⁶

In the Vineyard, we worship a God who is both completely Holy and completely Love. We follow a Savior who is radically inclusive, welcoming everyone with wide open arms, and One who is also radically demanding, calling all who come to him to "pick up their cross and follow him." Attempts to welcome people without the demand for repentance and self-denial and to reduce the church's distinctiveness from the world almost always end up shrinking the church instead.

We live in a deeply divided, partisan nation. But we need not be a deeply divided, partisan church. The Body of Christ must embrace life in tension – regarding the LGBT community, welcoming all people but not affirming all behaviors.

May God assist Vineyard to continue to live in the tension which missional orthodoxy demands – to persist in being, at one and the same time, biblically orthodox and missionally relevant!

¹⁸⁶ John Stott, *The Cross*, 130-31.

Appendix 1: The Basic Principles

“Dear Leaders of the Vineyard,

I’ve spent nearly a year now traveling here in the states and abroad, attending national, regional and local gatherings, visiting churches, meeting new and old friends, and hearing the stories of what God is doing in our congregations. And I can tell you from first hand experience – the Vineyard movement is flourishing all over the world. I have seen physical healing, salvation, justice work, church planting, deliverances, innovative outreaches, and more in state after state and country after country. I’ve seen a deepening emphasis on soul care in many places, resulting in healthier pastors and increased stability in our churches. I’ve seen new leaders emerging, including many younger leaders, women, and people of color. I believe that our future is bright with possibility.

Last year at our leadership gathering in Maine, Mark Fields and Michael Gatlin articulated aggressive, faith-filled goals for church planting in the United States and globally. These goals are not empty numbers; they are backed up by the development of systems and processes that give new churches the best chance to thrive and established churches the best tools for multiplication. I believe that we can move into the future with the wisdom that comes with maturity, without sacrificing the youthful zeal that is part of our birthright as a movement.

A movement, like a person, matures with time. And with maturity comes increased responsibilities and challenges. Over time, engaging in the mission of the Kingdom means addressing pastoral and leadership issues that arise, whether from inside churches or from the surrounding culture. We’ve worked through issues like this in the past, and as we move into the future, we will want to continue to grow in thoughtfulness and wisdom in approaching the challenges of our time.

One of the most common questions I get asked in gathering after gathering is how the Vineyard will address the many questions surrounding the issue of homosexuality. What is our stance on gay marriage? Can a Vineyard church ordain gay clergy? Can gay people lead in our churches? Because of the level of cultural intensity surrounding this subject, there is often quite a bit of emotion and anxiety related to these issues. The Vineyard is a movement of compassion, and a movement committed to the Scriptures. We are a movement of radical welcome and radical discipleship. We always want to live in these tensions, doing our best to find the radical middle.

While there are no simple answers, the Executive Team has agreed on four central points that anchor our response to these questions. Each could be expanded significantly, but for the sake of brevity, I’ve included a paragraph on each as follows:

- First, we must be committed to both mission and holiness. The message of the kingdom is a message of welcome. Anyone can come to the feast – Jesus himself was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard. And at the same time, the message of the kingdom is repent, believe, and follow Jesus in every area of life. At times, it can feel as if these two principles are mutually exclusive. But we are convinced they are not. It is possible to offer the radical welcome of Jesus while calling people to high standards of discipleship.
- Second, the Bible promotes, celebrates and affirms marriage as a covenantal union between a man and a woman. Marriage is not the highest purpose of humanity. The apostle Paul himself was single, as was Jesus. At the same time, it must be honored as a sign and gift from God.
- Third, we believe that all humans are to be treated with kindness and compassion, as the image-bearers of God on earth. We are all sinful, and it is profoundly unbiblical to pick out one sin that is stigmatized above others. In the history of the church, homosexual persons experienced such sinful stigmatization. We repent and renounce this sort of sinful treatment.

- Fourth, we believe that outside of the boundaries of marriage, the Bible calls for abstinence. We know that in our culture, premarital sex, along with many other forms of non-marital sex, has become normative. We want to lovingly help people of any sexual orientation to live up to this standard. We recognize that it can be a difficult journey, and there must be grace along the way. The powerful, beautiful gift of human sexuality must be stewarded with seriousness and compassion within our movement.

Homosexuality is a red-hot issue in our culture. While we focus on mission, church planting, evangelism, discipleship and justice, we do not minister in a vacuum. The church must respond to the culture it finds itself in with resolve yet humbly, gracefully, and with a charitable posture. I hope this letter offers some direction of where I believe we are headed as a movement in this regard. It is our intention to produce some helpful material and dialogue to assist our leaders in this journey.

I am honored and humbled to serve alongside all of you in the Vineyard. We would all be in trouble if we didn't have a good and mighty King who is the head of his church, and whose kingdom will have no end.

For the greater glory of God and the well-being of people,

Phil Strout, National Director"

Appendix 2: Ken Wilson's Use Of Romans 14

His Argument

Here is a summary of his argument:¹⁸⁷

1. He gives a good introduction to the place Romans 14-15 has in the larger scheme of the letter, and describes the social dynamics of Jewish and Gentile Christians as the church demographics changed.
2. He accurately names the issues that divided them as issues over eating or not eating meat (and wine), and the observance of special "holy" days.
3. He is also correct to point out that Paul describes the two groups as the "strong" and the "weak" meaning that the strong are those with less scruples on these matters, those whose consciences allowed them to partake rather than abstain.
4. He then cites James Dunn (Word Commentary) to the effect that the equivalents in today's society are conservatives and liberals. However, Dunn's actual words do not convey what is made of them by Ken Wilson.¹⁸⁸
5. He then further cites Dunn to the effect that the issues dividing these Christians were by no means frivolous. Eating meat previously sacrificed to idols related to participation in idolatry. The weak would be of the opinion that eating non-kosher food was just as evil as sexual immorality. Equally, beliefs about holy days, namely Sabbath-keeping, were deeply held convictions at the time.
6. He then takes this one step further: "So what do we have in Romans 14-15: a robust category that can help us maintain unity in the face of serious moral and doctrinal differences, or one that simply helps us maintain perspective when facing matters of relative indifference?" He concludes that it is the former. For Paul, "first order moral concerns" are "in his disputable issues category."¹⁸⁹

Ken then makes use of Roger Olson's work, *Mosaic of Christian Belief*, which distinguishes between

- Dogma – truths essential to Christianity itself (the Jesus of the canonical Gospels and the orthodox creeds),
- Doctrine – a secondary category of teachings central to a particular tradition, like the Reformed doctrine of predestination, and
- Opinion – issues about which there is no broad consensus, like the mode of baptism, or criteria for ordination.

Clearly, "opinion" for Olson is similar to Paul's "disputable matters."

He goes on to note that Richard Hays, in his *Moral Vision*, describes the church's response to homosexuality as a "debatable issue," but does not explicitly cite Romans 14-15. His conclusion:

¹⁸⁷ Wilson, *Letter*, 94-110.

¹⁸⁸ Dunn does not actually apply Paul's teaching to "modern day" people at all. This phrase never appears on page 803, which is cited. Dunn's statement is a general remark about how liberals and conservatives generally tend to behave: "Paul catches well the different vices to which more scrupulous and more liberal temperaments are liable in their attitudes to each other: the liberal who regards the scruples of the traditionalist as tolerable but worthy only of contempt; the conservative who regards the free-er practice of the liberal as intolerable and as putting him beyond the bounds of acceptable conduct," Dunn, *Romans*, 803.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

the various opinions on homosexuality are clearly not a matter of dogma, but are on a par with different opinions about the legitimacy of remarriage after divorce.

The two final steps in his logic go like this:

7. Paul's exhortation in Romans 14-15 is about acceptance (or embracing people). Christians who hold different views should accept one another. Therefore our churches should accept/embrace Christians who hold both positions, affirming and not-affirming.
8. To be consistent, this must therefore include allowing practicing homosexuals in stable marriages to participate in leadership at all levels.

He identifies those who do not believe in homosexual marriage as the "weak," while those who have an affirming view are the "strong."

A Review Of His Argument

A major weakness of this argument is that it does not deal with the total witness of Paul on this subject. Paul deals with very similar issues at length in 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1.¹⁹⁰ Further, the Corinthian passage was written before Romans, so that one needs to follow the development of Paul's thought from Corinthians to Romans. Although Ken cites Mark Reasoner's work as "the most careful and exhaustive scholarship on this question" he does not draw on the fact that Reasoner writes a whole chapter analyzing the relationship between the two Pauline passages.¹⁹¹ If one does read the total Pauline witness, the overall impression is not the same as one obtains from reading only Romans.¹⁹² This, then, is yet another case where intertextuality has not been utilized.

The reason it is important to deal with everything Paul writes on this subject, both 1 Corinthians and Romans, is that he comes down somewhat on a different side with each church. In 1 Corinthians he does not support the idea of Christians eating at temple restaurants where meat had been sacrificed to idols, because that would draw Christians into fellowship with demons. He does support eating meat bought at butcheries associated with idol temples, in your own home. Here the libertines do not enjoy Paul's support. In Romans Paul comes down more on the side of the libertines than the legalists, the "strong" rather than the "weak."

Further, Paul's criticism of the libertines in Corinth is that they suffer from a Gnostic kind of pride. They view themselves as more enlightened than their fellow Christians, and as a result do not treat them with love and respect (1 Corinthians 8:1-13). Further, their so-called superior knowledge has led them into deception, because it has caused them to justify practices that are, in effect, to fellowship with demons (10:18-22).

An important part of Paul's answer to the Corinthians is to define the nature of Christian freedom, which is both a liberty to partake of things that previous legalistic systems have prohibited, and the ability to forego one's freedom for the sake of the Gospel and the sake of others (1 Corinthians 9:1-9:27). This is relevant to the LGBT debate. The pressure to conform to secular humanist culture, as found in the contemporary West, is all about "freedom" as the supreme value of this society, freedom from God's moral standards, and freedom from the way God created our bodies. Here the Pauline witness runs counter to affirmative theology.

¹⁹⁰ For a more detailed treatment of both texts (Romans and 1 Corinthians), see Morphew, *Law And Grace, Part Two*.

¹⁹¹ Mark Reasoner, *Strong And Weak*, 24-44.

¹⁹² That is why N.T. Wright discusses both the Corinthian and Roman texts, and a broader list of Pauline texts, in "Communion and Koinonia." He says: "1 Corinthians 8-10 and Romans 14 stand out here; though, from a somewhat different angle, Galatians 2 is also extremely relevant, and as we shall see Colossians 2 and 3 need to be factored into the picture as well."

A vital point that emerges from the Corinthian passage is how Paul draws a line between legitimate freedom of conscience and a fundamental compromise of faith and practice, or the difference between moral absolutes and issues of conscience. Getting involved in pagan restaurants was a total boundary issue, not an issue of conscience. He did not view this as a “disputable matter” at Corinth.

We do have a very clear idea of what Paul understood to be issues of absolute morality on the LGBT issue, because of his statements in Romans 1 and 1 Corinthians 6. Only by first concluding that what Paul is saying in these texts is uncertain, can one conclude that the issue is now a “disputable matter.” The result is that Ken has a circular argument. First we must accept an affirmative reading of Romans 1 and 1 Corinthians 6, only then can we view his use of Romans 14 as legitimate, and once we view his use of Romans 14 as legitimate, then it becomes the peace keeper between two “disputable” viable positions on Romans 1 and 1 Corinthians 6, or actually, between one more enlightened position (more gnosis) and the unfortunate views of “weak” traditional Christians. Remove his assumption, and these texts do not apply at all. They are not appropriate to the discussion.

Appendix 3: Affirmative Interpretations Of Romans 1

As noted in the main body of the paper, there are at least seven affirmation arguments. This appendix deals with the first four:

1. *The heterosexual orientation argument*: Paul describes people with heterosexual orientation who engage in homosexual acts, not people with inborn homosexual orientation.
2. *The impure versus sinful argument*: Paul describes same-sex activity as impure (24) or indecent (27). He does not view it as sinful in itself.
3. *The not-lesbian argument*: Paul is not describing same-sex relations between women, but unnatural forms of heterosexual sex with women.
4. *The misogyny argument*: Paul's context assumed a hierarchical society where the passive partner was necessarily humiliated (made like a woman). This is part of a by-gone world of male dominance, so the text is not relevant today.

The Heterosexual Orientation Argument

While some biblical scholars have made this argument,¹⁹³ few have followed them.¹⁹⁴ Hays describes it as “untenable.”¹⁹⁵ Despite its lack of support, this is the view Peter Fitch opts for.¹⁹⁶ Its main weakness is the parallel based on the repeated use of the word “exchanged.” Just as worship of the living God has been “exchanged” for the worship of idols (23), so male to female sex has been “exchanged” for same-sex intercourse. Paul is describing more than a person who remains heterosexual but might add homosexual activity. Also problematic for this view is the language that describes the total person being engaged in the exchange (point 3 in the main text).

The Impure Versus Sinful Argument

This view, generally attributed to Countryman, has similarly not been followed by many.¹⁹⁷ It is not difficult to refute. Among the many reasons,¹⁹⁸ is the fact that the full list of vices in 28-31, which is the context of 26-27, is clearly a description of sin (“what ought not to be done”), and that later in Romans uncleanness and sinfulness are equated (6:16-17, 20).¹⁹⁹ Further to this, impurity appears in the context of sin in 1 Thessalonians 4:5.²⁰⁰ Finally, Paul is likely alluding to Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 in his reference to those who deserve death.²⁰¹

¹⁹³ Bosworth, *Homosexuality*, 109, James E. Miller, “Practices.”

¹⁹⁴ Loader, *Sexuality*, 321-322.

¹⁹⁵ Hays, *Moral Vision*, 388-389, who argues that it anachronistically reads back the modern idea of orientation into Paul's context.

¹⁹⁶ Fitch, *Toward Love*, 63, following Smedes.

¹⁹⁷ Countryman, *Dirt*, 104-123.

¹⁹⁸ For others, Gagnon, *Practice*, 297-299.

¹⁹⁹ Countryman is most adequately dealt with by Gagnon, *Practice*, 273-277.

²⁰⁰ Noted by Loader, *Sexuality*, 297.

²⁰¹ Loader, *Sexuality*, 297.

The Not-Lesbian Argument

This view is generally attributed to Nissinen.²⁰² He is followed by Rogers, who explains that the text could be referring to women taking the man's role in sex, or engaging in intercourse that was not for procreation.²⁰³ Ken Wilson does not rely on any specific scholar, but speculates that this might be an option.²⁰⁴ He then suggests that the unnatural activities of women might be a reference to bestiality, thereby removing the only apparent reference to lesbian sex in Scripture.²⁰⁵ This is possibly one of the most implausible arguments among the many. Loader notes a number of suggestions along this line, but concludes,

Those, then, who see "natural" here as having the same sense as in the following verse and see both verses addressing same-sex sexual relations, are almost certainly hearing Paul aright. The exchange which belongs to the matching punishment makes best sense if it entails not a reference to the manner of women's engaging in intercourse with men beside men's exchanging men for women as partners, but both as engaging in exchanging natural partners.²⁰⁶

The Misogyny Argument

This argument, with an earlier history, has been given fresh impetus by Brooten, namely that female homoeroticism threatened to undermine male dominance.²⁰⁷ Because Paul shows that he subscribed to this general cultural prejudice, she concludes, "I hope that churches today ... will no longer teach Romans 1:26 as authoritative."²⁰⁸ Nissinen holds similar views.²⁰⁹ The answer to this idea is the same as for the pederasty argument, namely the obvious intertextuality with the Genesis creation narrative.²¹⁰ Paul's focus is not on what motives may be involved in same-sex activities as much as the fact that whatever form they take, for whatever reason, they transgress what God intended by creation. Further, if one looks at Paul's statements about gender roles in his other letters, it is clear that he did not subscribe to the general cultural prejudice. His statements about mutual conjugal rights in 1 Corinthians 7:3-4, the role leading women played in his apostolic ministry, and his pivotal statement in Galatians 3:28 all speak of a view that was radically egalitarian in comparison with the general culture, Jewish or Greco-Roman.

The idea that Paul's "natural relations" (1:26-27) means male dominance collapses if one simply traces all the uses of this phrase in his writings. Despite the one instance where his meaning

²⁰² Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, 293, 235-42.

²⁰³ Rogers, *Homosexuality*, 75.

²⁰⁴ Wilson, *Letter*, 68-69.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

²⁰⁶ Loader, *Sexuality*, 311.

²⁰⁷ Brooten, *Love*, 94-97. Gagnon cites various other scholars who follow this view: Martin, Edwards, Stegemann and Byrne, *Practice*, 361, note 19.

²⁰⁸ Brooten, *Love*, 302.

²⁰⁹ Nissinen, *Homoeroticism*, 105-108.

²¹⁰ Anderson, *Flame*, 636-637.

borders on referring to a cultural custom (1 Corinthians 11:14-15), and even there this is not clear,²¹¹ the overall meaning refers to the way God created and intended things to be.²¹²

²¹¹ Ulrich Mauser argues that the cultural issue of length of hair is not really what is at stake, but “the claim of an enthusiastic group that the distinction between men and women had to be abrogated, that the natural polarity of human existence in the differentiation of the sexes was inferior to life in the spirit, and that the arrival of the new age canceled out the reality of nature,” “Creation,” 8, 8-10.

²¹² For details of every use in Paul, see Gagnon, *Practice*, 369-378.

Appendix 4: Gnosticism: Deity, Humanity, Sexuality

Just because Paul uses the language of “mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles” as a description of idolatry does not mean his understanding of idolatry was simplistic and one-dimensional.²¹³ In Colossians he can describe the “deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles (*stochiea*) of this world” (Colossians 2:8).²¹⁴ The relationship between Gnostic-like ideas that appear in apologetic statements made by New Testament writers and the full-blown Gnostic system that appeared in the Second century is a larger subject.²¹⁵ The nearest formal link we can make is between the First Letter of John and Cerinthus, an early Gnostic teacher. Second Century Gnosticism was an eclectic system of various ideas, all of which pre-existed it and were combined with biblical teaching into a new synthesis. However, the threads that pre-existed it were part of the New Testament apologetic against Gnosticism, “before the time.”²¹⁶

Gnosticism has a long history of conflict with the Gospel, prior to the revival of Gnosticism in our contemporary society.²¹⁷ A number of writers have made connections between the recent resurgence of Gnosticism in the West and the rise of same-sex behavior and the affirmative

²¹³ Such language was standard “mockery” language by the Hebrew prophets.

²¹⁴ *Stochiea* was a term popular with the Gnostics. There is an assumption here that Paul wrote Colossians, one widely held by evangelical biblical scholars. Tom Wright suggests the “dogma” that Paul did not write Ephesians and Colossians should be reevaluated in the light of more recent research on Paul (“new perspective”), *Creation*, 26.

²¹⁵ There is considerable debate in biblical scholarship about how to characterize these pre-existing threads: “incipient Gnosticism,” “proto-Gnosticism,” or simply ideas that were later synthesized into Gnosticism.

²¹⁶ Tom Wright reflects the state of scholarship. He notes that the “battle over the possible relationship between Paul and Gnosticism” was based on the idea of Paul *deriving* ideas from Gnosticism. Rather he suggests, Paul’s relationship with these ideas was to *confront* them (following his italics), *Creation*, 24. He finds a clear link with what developed into later Gnosticism in 1 Corinthians, particularly 8:1-2 and chapter 15, *Creation*, 24-25. He thinks the heresy at Colosse had more to do with some form of Judaism, but concludes: “the letter as a whole, with its strongly creational basis, rules out any form of Gnosticism in any case,” *Creation*, 27. He retains “an open mind as to whether John’s Gospel was written to address incipient Gnosticism” and notes that “John’s Gospel clearly ... rules out the main elements of Gnosticism,” *Creation*, 23.

²¹⁷ A representative list includes:

- Pre-Gnostic threads in the New Testament era
- Second Century Gnosticism, particularly Valentinian
- Manicheanism, in the time of Augustine
- The Cathars, brutally put down by the Inquisition
- The revival of Valentinian Gnosticism in the philosophy of Jacob Boehme (1575-1624)
- Free-Masonry
- The Theosophy/Metaphysics of Madame Helena Blavatsky (1831-1890),
- German idealist philosophy, leading to Fascism ideology
- The psychological theories of Carl Jung (1865-1961). Jung’s pivotal influence in the revival of Gnosticism is a feature noted by both Satinover and Tom Wright.
- The revival of Gnosticism in the New Age movement.

For a fuller description, Morpheus, *Spider Web*, “Gnostic Teachings – Deity As Narrative, ” and *Different But Equal*, “The Being Of God And Gender,” 48-107.

theology that supports it. We will draw on N.T. Wright, who needs no introduction, and Peter Jones, a New Testament scholar from Westminster Seminary in California.²¹⁸

In analyzing contemporary Western society, Tom Wright suggests that “we live in a world characterized by certain types of Gnosticism.”²¹⁹ In fact, Gnosticism is the “default mode of modern Western religion in general.”²²⁰ This worldview was reintroduced through the elitist thinking of the Enlightenment, when the “grand narratives of world history lead up to the eschatological moment when humankind ‘came of age’, leaving behind the ancient and medieval infancy.”²²¹ While this had implications at a larger level (for instance, the ‘white man’s burden’ to civilize the rest of the planet), Gnostic thought worked its way out at the individual level as well.

At the individual level, the great controlling myth of our time has been the belief that within each of us there is a real, inner, private “self”, long buried beneath layers of socialization and attempted cultural and religious control, and needing to be rediscovered if we are to live authentic lives.²²²

Notice here that the Gnostic worldview, or metaphysic (view of deity and creation) translates into a view of the self, where the “outer world,” of society, the church and the body, are “irrelevant and misleading, and that I must find within myself the spark of life and truth and by that reorder my whole existence.”²²³ For Wright, the results of the reemergence of the Gnostic worldview have been obvious, namely “confusion of sexual identity and behaviour.”

If the outside world, including my own body in its male or female particularity, are not the good creation of a good and wise God, but rather the inessentials made by a blind and stupid creator, and if instead my inner “experience” is what really counts, then I not only can but must be true to the spark of light, and indeed of desire, which I find most deeply within myself, even if it goes contrary to the apparent order of creation, the norms of traditional society, and the teaching of the bible and the church.²²⁴

²¹⁸ Three other writers one can also cite are Jeffrey Satinover, Leanne Paine and Derek Morphew. Satinover might be viewed as controversial by some, and Leanne Paine’s comments are actually about Baal worship, related tangentially to Gnosticism (Leanne Payne, *Healing Presence*, 195-219). Jeffrey Satinover notes that the whole subject has its context in the massive change in attitude that “appears to have occurred within the space of a mere twenty years” (Satinover, *Politics*, 229). He then explains this shift as reflecting “the tenets of a newly emerging religion”, which contains “the reemergence of paganism, and its beliefs are gnosticism” (230). Key to the change is the rejection of monotheism, which stood from the beginning against pagan culture of the ANE. His concluding remark on the subject is as follows:

The modern change in opinion concerning homosexuality, though presented as a scientific advance, is contradicted rather than supported by science. It is a transformation in public morals consistent with widespread abandonment of the Judea-Christian ethic upon which our civilization is based. Though hailed as “progress,” it is really a reversion to ancient pagan practices supported by a modern restatement of gnostic moral relativism (246).

For Morphew’s approach to the subject, refer to *Different But Equal*, the chapter on “The Divine Being And Gender” and *The Spiritual Spider Web*.

²¹⁹ Tom Wright, *Creation*, 4.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

²²² *Ibid.*, 9.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 10.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

At issue, he says, is not simply whether behavior is right or wrong, but belief in the controlling narrative of our culture, and ultimately, what ‘god’ we are talking about.²²⁵ He then argues at length for the belief in the creationist monotheism of Scripture, which means that we will “reaffirm the goodness of our embodied selves, including the male-plus-female ordering of creation.”²²⁶

Peter Jones is attentive to recent changes, particularly in American culture. He shows that the revival of Gnosticism has not only leavened society in general, but entered into the theology of the main line churches.²²⁷ This is evident in a number of different ways: the new interest in ancient Gnostic writings by participants in the Jesus Seminar, the rise of radical feminist theology, the growth of sophia worship with the monist (all is one) aspect of Gnosticism, and the resulting change in sexual ethics. The monist Gnostic worldview translates into a view of humanity where heterosexuality, the creation of an “inferior” deity, is supplanted by androgyny or bisexuality. The “new man” of this Gnostic worldview “is no longer limited by the hard and fast separation of reality into right and wrong, true and false, male and female. His ultimate goal is union with all, and on the sexual plane, androgyny.”²²⁸ Put simply, creation monotheism (Yahweh as creator) leads to a heterosexual view of humanity, while the Gnostic monist worldview leads to the blurring of the male-female distinction. Jones notes how Jung suggested that “homosexuality preserved an archetype of the androgynous original person.”²²⁹ He paints an alarming picture of where this is going in Western society:

In this ultimate struggle for mastery, the pagan goddess Sophia seeks to usurp the place of God the Creator and Redeemer. This is not colorful hyperbole. The conflict is real, the protagonists irreconcilable, Sophia is the very opposite of the God of the Bible. She represents monism as God represents theism. Her all-encompassing, encircling womb gives expression to the pagan notion of the divinity of all things.²³⁰

²²⁵ Ibid., 12-13.

²²⁶ Ibid., 32.

²²⁷ Peter Jones, *Wars*, 43-49.

²²⁸ Ibid., 188.

²²⁹ Ibid., 190.

²³⁰ Ibid., 255.

Appendix 5: Ancient Knowledge Of Consenting Adult Homoeroticism

Loader

As stated in the main body of the paper, Loader is highly specialized in the field of ancient sources, particularly Jewish sources. His *The New Testament On Sexuality* is comprehensive in itself, and a very recent publication (2014). It has the merit of not simply focusing on the issues of homosexuality, but on the New Testament witness to sexuality in general. Further, this work draws on five previous works that deal with the entire spectrum of ancient Jewish sources:

1. *The Septuagint, Sexuality, and the New Testament: Case Studies on the Impact of the LXX in Philo and the New Testament* (2004)
2. *Enoch, Levi, And Jubilees On Sexuality: Attitudes Towards Sexuality In The Early Enoch Literature, The Aramaic Levi Document, And The Book Of Jubilees* (2007)
3. *The Dead Sea Scrolls On Sexuality: Attitudes Towards Sexuality In Sectarian And Related Literature At Qumran* (2009)
4. *The Pseudepigrapha On Sexuality* (2011)
5. *Making Sense of Sex: Attitudes Towards Sexuality In Early Jewish And Christian Literature* (2013)

As a result, it is fair to say that there is probably no other scholar who is more specialized in this field, or more recent in his research. Further, it is noteworthy that Loader does not believe we should follow Paul in our sexual ethics today. He cannot therefore be viewed as an author who is biased towards a not-affirming position.²³¹ We will first note how he makes use of both Brooten and Mark Smith, and then cite Brooten directly.

Brooten ... demonstrates the presence of same-sex relations between women not only in Greek and Latin literature but also in special sources. "Astrological literature contains more references to female homoeroticism than any other type of literature in the Roman world."²³²

He then cites Mark Smith, "who observes that among the 'four sources that appear to imply that a person's attraction to persons of the same sex may be a life-long condition determined before birth [are] ... Aristophanes (in Plato's *Symposium* 189c-193d) and Phaedrus (in his *Liber Fabularum* 4 16) to which he adds two cited by Brooten, namely Vettius Valens, *Anthologiai* 1 1 §13, 2 17 §66 and Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* 3 13§ 16.

According to Smith,

None of these sources can be considered representative of a general attitude in the Greco-Roman world, and none adequately parallels the modern concept of sexual orientation.²³³

This raises the question of whether it is anachronistic to cite such Greco-Roman texts. Loader addresses this later again citing Brooten.

The argument about anachronism is, however, not as strong as supposed. Brooten has shown that people in Paul's time did make observations about different sexual orientation, including lifelong orientation. She points to discussions in medicine

²³¹ Loader, *Sexuality*, 321, 337 note 200, 499-500.

²³² *Ibid.*, note 62, 85.

²³³ *Ibid.*, note 62,85.

astrology, magical practices and some philosophical discussion. While they are far from the complex theories of modern times and are at best rudimentary, it is not unlikely that Paul will have had some awareness of them.²³⁴

Brooten

Like Loader, Brooten does not believe that we should be bound by what Paul says in our sexual ethics today, and so cannot be regarded as adopting a not-affirming position. What is unique to her contribution is the use of astrological literature and texts about spells. Here is a series of comments she makes:

These spells document that when early Christian authors condemned sexual relations between women, they were responding to a social reality of the Roman world. Strikingly, some of the details of these spells correspond to details of Paul's description of the humans upon whom the wrath of God has been revealed.²³⁵

Even though these spells probably all postdate Paul, they seem to represent what he would have viewed as the very worst of pagan idolatry, ungodliness, and wickedness.²³⁶ These spells provide an invaluable witness to the phenomenon against which early Christian and other ancient writers so vehemently polemicized.²³⁷

Astrological literature contains more references to female homoeroticism than any other type of literature in the Roman world ²³⁸... they deemed female homoeroticism a plausible category for describing a woman's sexual behavior ... The widespread popularity of astrology within both elite and non elite populations in antiquity makes it a valuable source for determining widely held cultural values in the Roman period. ²³⁹

When the astrologers mention female homoeroticism, they always assess it negatively, although the contexts for the references differ.²⁴⁰

And yet, unlike the twentieth-century binary notion of homosexuality versus heterosexuality, ancient astrologers conceived of erotic propensities in a far more complex fashion. Ptolemy, for example, distinguished between active and passive orientations, and he also took account of such factors as age, wealth, and whether the person to whom one is attracted is a foreigner.²⁴¹

In other words, astrologers in the Roman world knew of what we might call sexual orientation, but they did not limit it to two orientations, homosexual and heterosexual. Instead, these ancient writers believed that configurations of the stars created a broad range of sexual inclinations and orientations ... they regularly employed terminology that indicated strong disapproval and even disgust at women becoming masculine and men

²³⁴ Ibid., 322.

²³⁵ Brooten, *Homoeroticism*, 112.

²³⁶ Ibid., 112-113.

²³⁷ Ibid., 113.

²³⁸ Ibid., 115.

²³⁹ Ibid., 116.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 119.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 140.

becoming effeminate, terms such as “impure,” “licentious,” and “lustful.”²⁴²

Paul’s depiction of sexual love between women as a result of idolatry resembles the Roman representation of such love as foreign. While Roman authors present it as Greek, Paul connects it with paganism generally ...The use of “females” and “males,” rather than the more common “women” and “men,” suggests that both Paul and Pseudo-Phokylides were extending the Levitical prohibition of male-male coupling (18:22; see also 20:13) to include women.²⁴³

We do know that Rom 1:18-32 sounds very much like other ancient Jewish anti-idolatry polemics, as exemplified in the Wisdom of Solomon. And we can recognize “natural” and “unnatural” as categories born of controversy, as the result of disputes about social order and as attempts to create clarity in a world in which women and men, by their behavior, were blunting societally ordained gender roles. We can see Paul’s condemnation of homoeroticism as part of an unfolding legal discussion of the meaning of Levitical concepts in the Roman world. Further, we can discern significant overlap between Paul’s condemnation of homoeroticism and that of Philo of Alexandria, for whom males in same-sex relationships either lose their masculinity or teach others effeminacy.²⁴⁴

²⁴² Ibid., 140.

²⁴³ Ibid., 299.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 301.

Appendix 6: Modernism And Postmodernism

The progression of thought from Romans 1 to the Gnostic links between “then” and “now” has already introduced the subject of modernism (Wright’s analysis). In his interview on the subject in Rome, N.T. Wright comments on the so-called recent discovery of sexual orientation: “I think we have been conned by Michel Foucault into thinking that this is all a new phenomena.”²⁴⁵ As noted from Wright’s thoughts on Gnosticism, this goes along with the idea that only those who live in the contemporary moment of higher gnosis have this “revelation.” A subtext to the idea of a new phenomena is the idea that simply because the ancients, or, in fact, writers in the more recent past, did not often *refer* to adult homoerotic love, they did not *know* about it. Bromley exposes this assumption.

So it is not strange that we find little open discussion of adult men in sexual relationships [in the ancient past], just like we don’t find a lot of discussion of gay relationships in our country just a century ago. Gay couples were not adopting kids and living openly in our country 100 years ago, but that surely doesn’t mean that people were unaware that consenting men were having sex with one another in secret. In fact, there is an abundance of evidence that people were very aware of it.²⁴⁶

Yet at other times the subject finds its place in the context of postmodernism. The Yale scholar Dale Martin’s whole book is based upon a postmodernist critique of modernist approaches to the LGBT texts. On the second page he speaks of the “sin of textual foundationalism.”²⁴⁷ To deal with our subject adequately therefore, we cannot ignore both modernism and the shift to postmodernism. There are a number of helpful works by competent writers on how this shift influences theological thinking.²⁴⁸ The terminology used by these writers is the shift from foundationalism to postfoundationalism, different terms for the same thing. The whole way we read the Bible, interpret it, and construct theology, has been permanently affected by this shift.²⁴⁹

As noted in the main text, the idea of Paul’s so-called ignorance is *typically modernist*. We will now examine how this modernist assumption has been seriously undermined by the shift from modernism to postmodernism.

Implications Of The Shift: Ancient/Modern Reset

The critique of modernism has led to a different view of ancient versus modern truth. Instead of modern Western thought being viewed as able to interpret all of reality in some “total” explanation, the modern era is now looked back on as a particular time, among a particular

²⁴⁵ Interview with Anglican Bishop N.T. Wright of Durham, England May 21, 2004 by John L. Allen, Jr. *Rome*.

²⁴⁶ Bromley, “Prohibitive Texts,” 9. He goes on to make another valid point. “I think that many of us might consider normal, heterosexual marriages in the ancient world (including the Hebrew/Jewish) as exploitative of women, right? With middle-aged men marrying teenage girls, and treating them essentially as property? Was this not a form of ‘exploitation’? If we’re going to say that the Bible does not talk about modern-day homosexuality, we might as well also say that it does not talk about modern-day heterosexuality, because they are likewise *very* different,” 9.

²⁴⁷ Martin, *Sex*, 2.

²⁴⁸ Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, Webber, *Younger Evangelicals*, Vanhoozer, *Meaning*.

²⁴⁹ Postmodernism has not entirely replaced modernism in contemporary Western society. What we have today is a mixture of modernist and post-modernist worldviews, with different parts of Western culture spread across a continuum from totally modernist to totally postmodernist. To confuse matters further, the same individual may unconsciously think in both ways at different times, depending on what idea or issue he or she is working with. In the case of LGBT affirmative thinking, both typically modernist and postmodernist arguments are apparent.

people, who thought in a particular way, which is now seen to be rather arrogant and naïve. All truth claims and worldviews are “situated.” Further, the wisdom of ancient writers is by no means inferior. Modernity is no guarantee for better thinking.

The modern notion that meaning and morality can be ascertained through reason apart from God has become increasingly empty. The concept of progress and the notion that history is moving civilization to higher levels of consciousness is no longer valid...

During the Enlightenment, thinkers used their enlightened notions to critique medievalism. Now we return to the medieval era as a postmodern method of critiquing modernity. What goes around, comes around.²⁵⁰

The shift from modernism to postmodernism has resulted in a review of how scientific inquiry takes place. Since Popper and Kuhn, it is now evident that the individualistic, sovereign thinker of the Enlightenment, objectively interrogating the object of study, is a fiction. Individuals and communities are socially determined, including our own Vineyard community.²⁵¹ All thinking takes place in conceptual frameworks, or paradigms, or what Lakatos and Laudan define as “research programs” or “research traditions.”²⁵² Changes from one paradigm to another do not take place purely on the basis of the evidence, but from a complex set of factors. There is no such thing as the thinking subject in direct relationship with the facts or data. Between the thinking subject and the facts are paradigms that are constructed by communities.

In the case of the LGBT debate in the world today, there are basically two research traditions: one that holds to the historic view of the church and which takes the biblical statements at face value and another that interprets the biblical texts in the light of a “higher” knowledge derived from the prevailing worldview of Western liberal societies. Both read the facts through their paradigm.

The Affirming Paradigm

Viewed from the “welcoming but not-affirming” research tradition, the affirming viewpoint looks like this:

1. There is a general assumption that modern science has proved that some people are born with an inherent same-sex orientation.²⁵³ Therefore they have no choice in the matter.
2. Following this, the assumption is made that such orientation is immutable. Trying to “heal” such orientation is doomed to fail, and can only create harm to the individual’s sense of personal worth.
3. This assumption is then linked to a novel use of creation. If certain people are born with a certain orientation, then it follows that God made them that way. This means that such a sense of orientation is part of God’s good creation.
4. Following this is the conclusion that orientation determines a person’s identity, rather like being of a particular race defines identity. Sexual orientation is a fundamental part of one’s humanity.
5. Therefore the identity built around such an orientation demands the application of fundamental human rights: the right to marry, raise a family, and within the church, the

²⁵⁰ Webber, *Younger Evangelicals*, 80.

²⁵¹ We would distinguish between the ecumenical community of the “Great Tradition,” and “situated” communities at particular places and particular times. The Vineyard believes that our approach of missional orthodoxy, which we are describing as “welcoming but not affirming” is in accordance with the “Great Tradition.”

²⁵² These thinkers work in the philosophy of science, van Huyssteen, *Essays*, 30, *Rationality*, 125, 257.

²⁵³ Glenn Wilson and Qazi Rahman, *Born Gay*.

- right to be treated on an equal basis with everyone else, including all forms of leadership and ordination.
6. Therefore the real issue is one of social justice, human dignity and equality.
 7. Because of the above, Scripture must be interpreted accordingly. Therefore either biblical texts that teach otherwise are simply wrong, or a hermeneutic must be found to circumvent the biblical texts. The weaker hermeneutic attempts to re-interpret the biblical texts. The more articulate hermeneutic (as in Via and Johnson) admits that the biblical texts are prohibitive, but claims that other themes within Scripture, which are of greater weight, like the love commandment, linked to the “higher gnosis” of the above points, enables one to construct a theology that transcends the biblical texts.

This is a particular narrative, arising out of a particular Western society, “situated” in a particular time (a very recent and novel narrative), reflecting a mixture of modernist and postmodernist worldviews. Christians in the majority world, who now make up the clear majority of Christians worldwide, do not accept this narrative. Further, a significant number of Christians in the West do not accept it either. Given the nature of the postmodern critique, its modernist claim to be a metanarrative is false.

This narrative is contested by a totally different narrative.

The Not-Affirming Paradigm

1. There is no scientific evidence, to date, to support the idea of a “gay gene.” As already noted in the main text, the causes of same-sex orientation are complex. They may possibly include the influence of intrauterine factors,²⁵⁴ the influence of early childhood, experiences during adolescence, the influence of older people, traumatic experiences of abuse, and adult choice. Further, the brain is not static but “plastic.” Just as the brain influences behavior, so repetitive behavior can “re-wire” the brain.²⁵⁵
2. The evidence provided by both psychological and faith-based methods of recovery does not support the idea of immutability. On a scale from total reorientation to no reorientation, longitudinal studies indicate a significant degree of movement towards reorientation among some people.²⁵⁶ More significantly, Paul’s classic “such were some of you” is a clear biblical statement that the redemptive work of Christ can transform a person from same-sex behavior. To deny this is to deny the power of the Gospel. The fact that a percentage of those who enter life with a homoerotic orientation do not get helped by Christian healing ministries is not framed in the context of immutability or mutability, but in the context of the “already” and “not yet” of the kingdom, exactly the same context as applies to heterosexual Christians who struggle with inappropriate desires.

²⁵⁴ Contrary to this possibility is the recent finding of Professor Gina Rippon, a neuroscientist at Aston University in Birmingham, UK. At a recent women’s day event, Rippon said any differences in brain circuitry only came about through the “drip, drip, drip” of gender stereotyping. “The bottom line is that saying there are differences in male and female brains is just not true. You can’t pick up a brain and say, ‘That’s a girl’s brain’ or ‘that’s a boy’s brain’ in the same way that you can with a skeleton. They look the same.” She said gender differences appeared early in Western societies and were based on traditional stereotyping. “The bottom line is that saying there are differences in male and female brains is just not true. There is pretty compelling evidence that any differences are tiny and are the result of environment, not biology,” London: *The Telegraph*, 20 March 2014.

²⁵⁵ Satinover, *Politics*, 31-145, Gagnon, *Practice*, 395-419, Stanton Jones & Mark Yarhouse, *Homosexuality*, Stanton L. Jones, “Sexual Orientation.”

²⁵⁶ For a recent review (2014) of all the research literature on successful change therapies, see James E. Phelan, *Successful Outcomes*, also Satinover, *Politics*, 168-209, Gagnon, 420-429, Stanton Jones & Mark Yarhouse, *Homosexuality*.

3. Jesus and Paul both exemplify the way we should make use of the creation narrative: Jesus in his affirmation that marriage is between a man and a woman, and Paul in that same-sex activities distort the intention of creation. Further, given the small percentage of same-sex orientation in societies where figures are available, if evidence were to come to light of genetic factors, one would have to regard this in the same way as other kinds of human disabilities that constitute a small percentage of the population, namely as evidence of a fallen world, not of the original intention of creation.²⁵⁷
4. Sexual orientation is not what determines someone's identity. Rather, our identity as Christians is "in Christ." The modern deterministic idea of sexual orientation is socially constructed.²⁵⁸ The idea that in the last few decades, Western societies have suddenly discovered sexual orientation in a totally new way, and that either earlier societies in recent history, or in the ancient world, had no idea of how human sexuality works, is a typical case of modernist naiveté.
5. As Christians, we do not submit ourselves to the modernist worldview. Therefore human reason is not to be elevated over biblical revelation, but rather biblical revelation should judge all worldviews and cultures. Just because a narrative is popular in a certain society does not mean that we should succumb to it. Neither can we adopt theologies that elevate certain biblical themes and denigrate others,²⁵⁹ or select certain attributes of God while suppressing other attributes.²⁶⁰ We cannot elevate the love of God over the kingship of God.

This too is a narrative, "situated," but in the "Great Tradition" of the ecumenical community of faith, which is either historic orthodox (Catholic, Anglo-Catholic, Eastern and Russian Orthodox), or historic Protestant evangelical. While it is "situated" in this context, this position does not suffer from the problem of novelty or limitation to a particular kind of society. It passes the test of the criteria listed by Vincent or Lerins, as something believed "everywhere, always, and by all," particularly the third principle: Orthodox faith must "Survive testing by cross-cultural generations of general lay consent through a trustworthy process of conciliar agreement." If one inquires into the conduct and decision making of main line churches that have broad-based international membership, those in the West who would like to adopt an affirming position are constrained by the fact that were that to occur, they would immediately lose their membership from the majority world, or cause a schism. The position of the Episcopal Church in the USA versus the position of the world wide Anglican Communion is a case in point, where effectively some sort of schism has taken place.

In contrast to the claim the not-affirming position can make to fulfill criteria of orthodoxy, the prevailing consensus for LGBT affirmation shows all the marks of a socially determined paradigm shift, where conclusions are not drawn directly from evidence, but from social pressure to conform to a particular Western liberal worldview.²⁶¹

There is a careful tension that one has to hold in balance, another "both-and." On the one hand, there is the claim of the not-affirming position to historic criteria of orthodoxy. Balancing this is the realization that even such an ecumenical and historic claim to orthodoxy is nevertheless, one paradigm among many, just as the Christian faith is one paradigm among many. In a postmodern

²⁵⁷ For the notion of disability, John Colwell, "Human Sexuality", 86-97. A parallel statistic would be the percentage of the population that is ADHD.

²⁵⁸ David Greenberg, *Construction*.

²⁵⁹ Via and Gagnon, *Two Views*, 38-39.

²⁶⁰ Fitch, *Toward Love*.

²⁶¹ This is the basic argument Santinover's work, note his title: *Homosexuality And The Politics Of Truth*.

context, one cannot select one narrative over another without admitting that the narrative is the result of a particular paradigm, or research tradition. Our constructions of reality take place within interpretive communities. Both of these narratives operate with presuppositions and worldview assumptions. We are not sovereign individuals with a direct relationship with the facts. We view the facts through lenses determined by our “language game.”

This, then, is the significant lesson from postmodernism: It is essential that we adopt a position that is both self-conscious of our paradigm, and also conscious of our historic and ecumenical family of faith. We cannot “go it alone,” and we should not pretend that we have no existing paradigm within which we interpret reality.²⁶² We cannot approach the subject in a naïve positivist or foundationalist manner.

Modernist Theology – Liberalism

Modernism produced an era in theology called liberalism, particularly in European Protestantism. There are a number of ways in which one can describe this development:

1. The confidence in human reason led to a devaluation of confidence in divine revelation. A spate of books were written about the “reasonableness of Christianity” showing that the Christian faith, including biblical revelation, must now be subject to the critique of reason. All belief in church dogma had to be evaluated and all pre-modern “magical” thinking had to be reviewed. The authority of Scripture is now to be subjected to human reason.
2. Using the method of historical criticism, the Bible, as with all ancient historical documents, must be rigorously interrogated. Generally ancient authors must be read with historical skepticism (methodological doubt). Further, the historical principles of analogy and correlation meant that the experience of modern man and what he conceives of as possible becomes the criterion for judging historical claims from the past. It was “evident” to such modern historians, influenced by Hume among others, that miracles do not happen because they do not fit into the “laws” of nature or the experience and worldview of modernity.
3. Using these lenses of reason and historical criticism, key biblical doctrines now came under review. The belief in original sin did not sit well with the idea of moral progress. Man is not inherently evil, only harmful social structures are evil. Since miracles do not happen, the biblical picture of Jesus is not credible. A whole spate of books on the life of Jesus showed him to be merely the highest example of human goodness, rather than God incarnate. It followed that man does not need redemption through atonement, but rather should emulate the good example of Jesus. Theology became largely moralistic. The idea of salvation by grace and justification through faith became highly problematic.²⁶³
4. The mood of confidence in man “come of age” then took a step further. If man is the high point of a process of providence, or moral progress, then it follows that human history, including religious history, is one and the same as the progress of the divine being. Here, once the authority of biblical revelation had been removed, modernity did not leave an empty space for humanistic materialism to last long. It soon filled that space with the ideas of Jacob Boehme, who had recycled Valentinian Gnosticism, where the divine being evolves through the history of nations. His ideas flowed into both Romanticism and

²⁶² There are a number of respected and competent scholars that are affirming, but the weight of biblical scholarship continues to be not-affirming. A short list of well known names that are, or were, not affirming includes N.T. Wright, J. G. Dunn, F. F. Bruce, George Ladd, John Stott, C.S. Lewis, Richard Hays, Raymond Brown, C.H. Dodd, Craig Blomberg, Craig Keener, Darrell Bock, Douglas Moo, Gordon Fee, Ben Witherington III, Anthony Thiselton, Gordon Wenham.

²⁶³ For a description of the theological trends of the time, Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology*.

the Idealist philosophers, particularly Hegel. From there one can join the dots to Fichte, Feurbach and the emergence of German National Socialism.²⁶⁴ The end result of “enlightened reason” was the holocaust.

The collapse of modernism in theology included a particular milestone. After roughly a century of books on the life of Jesus, Albert Schweitzer wrote a book that shattered the entire enterprise. He showed that the Jesus of 19th century liberal Protestantism looked remarkably like a 19th century European Gentleman, and not at all like the radical eschatological prophet of the New Testament. These authors had looked down a well, seen their own reflection, and created a Jesus in their own image. As time would tell, the Enlightenment definition of historical method would never be able to come to terms with the historical figure of Jesus, not because of problems with the Gospels, but because of the presuppositions of the Enlightenment. This is the subject matter of the third quest for the Historical Jesus, led by N.T. Wright and others, the third because the first (liberalism) and the second clearly failed to explain the evidence.

A further element of modernism was its social manifestation. It was in all respects an entirely European and Western bourgeois exercise. The collapse of the ancient regime of nobles and peasants had been replaced with a new emerging middle class. This society of “absolute” man assumed that its so-called moral superiority gave it the right to colonize the remainder of the globe and forcibly “civilize” less developed nations. The history of colonialism was the first sign of what modernist arrogance could do. The Nazi and Stalinist era was its later “crowning” achievement.

The Modernist Idea Of Moral Progress Towards Justice

One aspect of the naiveté of affirmative thinking is to view its cause in the context of human liberty, justice and moral progress, *because our modern world is progressing morally*.

Peter Fitch believes that contemporary Western societies are morally progressive. Changes in theological understanding and changes in generally politically correct views form part of the same general sense of moral progress.

He writes:

I believe that God has been leading our understanding toward justice and goodness, but it can be a fairly hard sell. We can be very slow to follow. What evidence is there that things are getting better? ... there is some clear evidence of growing goodness in the way we have begun to believe that women and minorities must be protected and treated with equality.

Then, to illustrate this, he cites a 19th century Unitarian minister named Theodore Parker:

Look at the facts of the world. You see a continual and progressive triumph of the right. I do not pretend to understand the moral universe, the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways. I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. But from what I see I am sure it bends toward justice.

Peter then quotes figures about the significant drop in the death toll for the 21st century compared to the 20th century.²⁶⁵ Basically, significant wars are a thing of the past. He continues:

²⁶⁴ One can follow this trajectory in Morphew, *Powers*.

²⁶⁵ “We live in an era where, for the first time in history, no great power genuinely fears attack by any other, and where the number of actual wars can be counted on the fingers of one badly mutilated hand. Almost 90 million people died in the world wars and other big wars (including the Russian, Chinese, and Spanish civil wars) of the first half of the 20th century, out of a world population that was one-third of what it is now. In the second half of the century the death toll dropped steeply to 25 million or so, most of whom died in colonial independence wars and civil wars... And so far, in the 21st century, the total is less than one million people killed in war,” Peter Fitch, *Toward Love*, 116-117.

What we have on our hands here is a miraculous and mostly unsung success story. There will doubtless be more wars, but they may be small and infrequent. We are obviously doing something right. We should figure out what it is, and do more of it.²⁶⁶

He then lists a number of progressive moves in theology, which few would want to question. There have indeed been real improvements in many respects. However, in his list is this statement:

God is being seen less as an abstract Judge and more as a Loving Participant who chooses to flow through life in a helpful way with people.²⁶⁷

The last statement chimes with a frequent refrain in his book, that we need to move away from a legalistic view of God and embrace a loving view of God.

There are a number of typically modernist features here:

1. Despite his great moral courage, Theodore Parker was a Universalist Transcendentalist.²⁶⁸ His worldview was basically monistic. He was influenced by Hindu texts and German Idealism. This is a strange source for an evangelical Christian, but clearly there is a congruence of these views with the optimism of the 18th and 19th centuries.
2. There is no differentiation between contemporary liberal Western society and a Christian worldview. “We” means “us all,” just as 19th century theologians fused the consciousness of modern European man in general with the growth of the kingdom of God.
3. One can detect a subtle yet significant change in the view of the divine being suggested by the phrase “a Loving Participant who chooses to flow through life in a helpful way.” Is this “flowing through life” similar to the kind of immanence found in monist and panentheist theologies? And is the living God always “helpful” to people? Clearly he is by his grace, but from a biblical perspective God is not “helpful” to sinful humanity. This entry in the list creates concern about the domestication of God, again a typical feature of post-Enlightenment liberal theology.
4. One can, of course, readily understand that the world may look a particular way to the author, but one should consider what the world might look like from a different vantage point. Certainly those who live in the majority world do not see moral progress in quite the same way, or the total virtues of Western society. One could enumerate quite a few things about global contemporary society that do not seem to indicate moral progress at all, for instance the fact that there are some 21 million slaves in the world today, most of whom are women and children, and that many of the “owners” or “users” are found in the same “progressive” Western societies.

²⁶⁶ Fitch, *Toward Love*, 117.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

²⁶⁸ Theodore Parker was a brilliant and insightful man with a stunningly acute moral compass. At great personal cost, he was an outspoken abolitionist for religious reasons in the days when most evangelicals were sitting on their hands. Theodore Parker was also a Unitarian Transcendentalist. Transcendentalism developed as a reaction against 18th century rationalism, John Locke's philosophy of Sensualism, and the predestinationism of New England Calvinism. It is fundamentally composed of a variety of diverse sources, including Hindu texts like the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, various religions, and German idealism. Among the transcendentalists' core beliefs was the inherent goodness of both people and nature. Transcendentalists believe that society and its institutions – particularly organized religion and political parties – ultimately corrupt the purity of the individual. They have faith that people are at their best when truly “self-reliant” and independent. It is only from such real individuals that true community could be formed.

5. A more incisive reading of the moral state of Western societies would be that moral depravity has simply migrated to different fields, perhaps away from war, because of the ghastly prospects of nuclear war, to other outlets, in particular, those of a sexual nature. A recent article describes the findings of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights regarding the “scale of violence and abuse against women in advanced societies in Europe.” It reports that “one woman in 20 has been raped and that a third have suffered physical or sexual violence at some point since the age of 15. Such insights indicate a depressing state of affairs in a continent that regards itself as civilized. And as technology has advanced, so, unfortunately, has abuse.”²⁶⁹

The Use Of Postmodernism

So far, the use of modernism in affirmative theology has been noted. However, postmodernism is also used to defend the narrative, particularly in the case of Dale Martin.

The shape of Martin’s argument is broadly as follows:

1. Contemporary conservative evangelical authors make use of historical criticism, as though it can deliver an objective reading of the text, but historical criticism itself is just one modernist approach among many.²⁷⁰ The modernist idea that texts have a stable meaning is naïve. “Texts don’t say anything, they must be read.”²⁷¹ The idea of authorial intention is equally problematic.²⁷²
2. This fluidity of meaning is revealed by the fact that biblical texts and key ideas in them, on Jesus,²⁷³ gender equality,²⁷⁴ marriage,²⁷⁵ divorce,²⁷⁶ and homosexuality, meant one thing to Paul, something else to the Church Fathers, something else to the Reformers, underwent further change as a result of the Enlightenment (modernism), and mean something else today.²⁷⁷
3. The meaning of biblical texts is actually the reflection of interpretive communities. But merely being in Christian community does not guarantee a preferred reading either, as some communities might read texts to draw ethical conclusions that are prejudicial or damaging to others.²⁷⁸

²⁶⁹ Durban: *The Mercury*, March 6, 2014.

²⁷⁰ Martin, *Sex*, 1-16, 17-35.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 8-10.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 91-102.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 77-90.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 103-124.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 125-147.

²⁷⁷ “As I demonstrated in the chapters herein, the church’s stand on sex, marriage, celibacy, effeminacy, divorce, and many other issues has changed over the past two thousand years in fundamental ways,” Martin, *Sex*, 181.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 167, 181.

4. Love is the one criterion that should be used to interpret biblical texts and derive ethical conclusions.²⁷⁹ An affirmative reading of Scripture, using this criterion, is just as legitimate, or more legitimate, than a traditionalist reading of Scripture.

In Martin's logic, the old positivism of the Enlightenment, where author, text and reader can confidently communicate, has been replaced by the postmodern deconstruction of author, text and reader. This is generally what the shift is all about. In the deconstruction of the reader, most "dangerous" of all is the reader who assumes to really know what the text means. In Derrida's terms, this will normally reveal the will to power, where some readers in some community wish to impose their will on others.

As a scholar of his ability, who is aware of all the literature on postfoundationalism, Martin will be aware that the swing of the pendulum to the deconstructionist extreme, where there are no "facts" (or texts) but only interpretations, has been met with a pendulum motion back to a more balanced approach, for instance the use of "common language" philosophy and communication theory that concludes that society can and does communicate successfully.

He cites Vanhoozer and van Huyssteen, two prominent specialists in this field.²⁸⁰ Yet both of them argue for "splitting the difference" between modernism and postmodernism through a *critical realist* epistemology.²⁸¹ There is in fact a wide-based consensus, in many disciplines today, in favor of critical realism.²⁸² Yet Martin never refers to it in his work. Read through the lens of a critical realist perspective, textual meanings and authorial intent do not "float on a sea of faith"²⁸³ quite as much as he suggests.

To use the hermeneutic of suspicion for a moment, the motive for pushing the postmodernist pendulum all the way towards textual uncertainty is evident in Martin's treatment of *arsenokoitai* in 1 Corinthians 6. This text is most unhelpful for an affirming position. How then to remove this unhelpful text? Show that no one knows what the word means.

We should not succumb to the modernist narrative. Neither should we be led into the extreme of a postmodernist deconstruction of all stable meaning. As a consequence, despite the many issues that surround the interpretation of Scripture on same-sex relationships and the way the church's opposition to such relationships has been framed in different ways through the centuries, the not-affirming position can claim to be a faithful interpretation of Scripture in a way that the affirming position cannot. The strength of the postmodern critique is that we can no longer do theology as individuals. We must do theology as a gathered community. But the weakness of postmodernism is that its critique can be turned on itself. Martin's reading of the shift from modernism to postmodernism is not the only reading. There is postfoundationalism, and qualified postfoundationalism. The latter is preferable.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 165-171.

²⁸⁰ For an analysis of critical realism as articulated by Pannenberg, Meyer, Vanhoozer, and van Huyssteen, and as it applies to Jesus Research by Dunn, Twelftree, Meier, N.T. Wright and Dunn, see Morphew, *Jesus Research*.

²⁸¹ Vanhoozer, *Meaning*, van Huyssteen, four publications on the subject: *Justification*, *Duet Or Duel*, *Postfoundationalism*, *Rationality*.

²⁸² Dunn, *Christianity*, and *Missed*, Pannenberg, *Philosophy*, Ben Meyer, *Aims and Reality*, Thiselton, *Two Horizons*.

²⁸³ Martin, *Sex*, 181-185.

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